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'Nations Make Their Own Gods and Heroes': Robin Hood, King Arthur and the development of racialism in nineteenth-century Britain

Stephanie Barczewski

Nations make their own gods and heroes, and ... they attribute to them the perfection of those good qualities which are more or less conspicuous in themselves.

Sharpe's London Journal (1849).¹

Nations come into being through narratives that erase contradictions, defuse paradoxes and fill in discursive gaps, as the halting, stumbling steps through which a national identity is formed are transformed into a logical, linear, seemingly inevitable progression.² As a crucial element of this process, every nation requires a 'national history' in which the community's evolution and existence is explained and validated.³ This history consists not only of – or not even primarily of – actual historical events. Instead, it is 'made' or 'forged' from an admixture of various elements, some taken from past or present reality and others purely from the imagination. In other words, history not only creates nations, but nations also create their own versions of history.⁴

In the nineteenth century, the first great era of nationalism, many European nation-states combined mythical and historical material to enhance their sense of distinctness, as they sought to celebrate and clarify their national identity. In Germany, patriotic scholars, prompted by the efforts of Johann Gottfried Herder, eagerly searched the past in order to discover models from which to reshape the present and build the future, while in France the nation's Gaulish origins were repeatedly invoked during the Revolutionary, Napoleonic and Restoration periods in order to underwrite current political aspirations. Britain, however, has traditionally been viewed as an exception to this trend.⁵ Neither an emerging nation like Germany nor one struggling to redefine itself like France, Britain was blessed with the early development of a strong central government, a non-localised economy and relatively high literacy rates – all key factors, according to recent studies, in the transition from

the feudal or dynastic unit to the nation-state, and it thus had no need of such 'artificial' supports. Britain, so says the conventional wisdom, stood apart from – and ahead of – the rest of Europe in terms of the growth of its nationhood and nationalism.

But perhaps we should not be so quick to accept this argument. To use Benedict Anderson's oft-invoked phrase, Britain was and is in many ways an 'imagined community', albeit in a different way from most of its European neighbours. One potentially useful way of looking at nationhood might be to examine efforts to reconcile borders with self-perceptions. In the case of a nation like Germany, the self-perception came first, followed only after a protracted and arduous struggle by the establishment of what were deemed appropriate borders. But for Britain, the borders came first, and the struggle occurred over the self-perception. It is a nation created not from romantic dreams of the fatherland, but from the pragmatic goals of its legislators, who amalgamated first Wales, then Scotland and finally Ireland in a ruthless quest to preserve national security. And because Britain is (and always has been) a multinational construct, a particularly British form of nationalism had to be built up which was capable of both domestic discipline and external mobilisation.⁶ Britain thus shares certain characteristics with countries such as the former Yugoslavia or the former Soviet Union, countries in which a number of different peoples were forced to live together for purposes of administrative convenience. These nations ultimately failed to overcome the tensions created when several different communities are suddenly thrust together. But although Britain has experienced some of the same sorts of problems, for the most part the vision of a 'United Kingdom' has held together. How has it managed to succeed?

Part of the answer lies in Britain's success in creating a 'history' for itself over the course of the nineteenth century, a period in which the selective mobilisation of the past acted to overcome the tensions created in the present by the often tempestuous relationship among the nation's constituent communities. This period of material progress was also an age dominated by a fascination with the past, and with the medieval past in particular. Rapid technological change was as frightening as it was exhilarating, and as it threatened to sweep away everything familiar, Britons turned to the medieval past, which seemed to possess the comforting security their own world lacked.⁷ They also turned to it, however, because it provided them with a rich source of patriotic pride and national unity. The Middle Ages could, if manipulated carefully, provide a portrait of a single nation with all its inhabitants marching forward together towards glory and greatness, rather

than a precarious amalgam of constituent parts constantly warring against one another. At a time when external conflict and internal tensions placed a premium upon national unity, the creation of this new, uniquely 'British', national history glossed over the conflicts of the past and supplanted them with tales of a glorious, *unified* nation.⁸

In this cultural context, a number of medieval heroes became the focus of considerable patriotic attention and celebration. 'The seeds of our national character are to be sought in the lives of the heroes of early England, from whom we trace the beginnings of our best habits and institutions', declared Lady Katie Magnus in her *First Makers of England* (1901).⁹ Two of the most important of these 'heroes of early England' were King Arthur and Robin Hood, who in the nineteenth century were a pervasive presence in contemporary culture. Ships and racehorses were named after them.¹⁰ Guests attended fancy-dress balls dressed in costumes of Arthurian armour or Lincoln green.¹¹ Children played with toy theatres featuring the outlaws of Sherwood or the knights of Camelot.¹² Public houses featured them on their signboards.¹³ Contemporary interior and exterior decorating featured motifs from the two legends in stained glass, tapestries, statuary, paintings and other household objects, many of which were created by the leading artists and designers of the day for some of Britain's wealthiest and most prominent citizens.¹⁴ And for the less wealthy, there were prints, engravings and even Staffordshire pottery figurines depicting episodes from the two legends.¹⁵

King Arthur and Robin Hood thus appeared in a variety of places and guises in nineteenth-century Britain. Nowhere, however, were they more prevalent than in contemporary literature. Between 1800 and 1849 there were no less than 86 literary works concerned directly with the Arthurian legend and a further 141 which contained minor allusions.¹⁶ And Robin Hood saw a literary resurgence on much the same scale, although the amount of printed matter related to his legend is more difficult to assess in quantitative terms, for it made most of its appearances in extremely ephemeral forms such as broadsheets, chapbooks and pantomimes which were cheaply printed and rarely preserved. Nevertheless, it remains undeniable that the nineteenth century saw a reawakening of literary interest in Robin Hood, as authors as notable as Sir Walter Scott, Thomas Love Peacock, Alfred Tennyson, John Keats and Robert Southey featured him in their works.

The prevalence of King Arthur and Robin Hood in print is significant because, before the invention of modern forms of electronic media, printed matter was the most crucial source in the creation of national heroes and nationalism. It laid the basis for national con-

sciousness by creating what Anderson terms 'unified fields of exchange and communication', in which speakers of the same language but different dialects who cannot understand each other in conversation suddenly became capable of mutual comprehension in print. In the process, they become aware of thousands, even millions, of people who share their language-field, and simultaneously that only those thousands or millions do so. These fellow-readers, visible and connected to each other by print, form 'the embryo of the nationally imagined community'.¹⁷

In the British case, technological advancements and social changes led to a mass dissemination of print on an unprecedented scale in the nineteenth century, when a number of factors contributed to the growth of reading at all social levels.¹⁸ Of course, it is not just reading but what is written that counts.¹⁹ As imaginary constructs that depend for their existence upon an apparatus of cultural fictions, nations rely heavily upon imaginative literature.²⁰ In particular, it is literature which is primarily responsible for preserving and developing the stories of a nation's origins, and for tracing a nation's subsequent evolution through glorious tales of its greatest heroes. Hence the importance of the numerous texts concerned with the legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood for the construction of British national identity in the nineteenth century. But how, more precisely, did they influence this construction?

In her recent study of the development of British patriotism and nationalism in the period between the Act of Union joining Scotland to England and Wales in 1707 and the formal beginning of the Victorian age in 1837, Linda Colley argues that Great Britain was (and is) 'an invented nation superimposed ... onto much older alignments and loyalties'.²¹ Colley's work is an important and revealing one, but even if, as she argues, by the beginning of the nineteenth century some form of national consensus had been achieved, there still remained a plethora of problems to be solved. For 'the invention of Britishness' was, according to Colley, a direct consequence of a century-and-a-half of successive wars between Britain and France, and its development occurred along lines determined by the nature of this conflict.²² But what happened when France ceased to be a major military threat after its defeat at Waterloo in 1815? If, as Colley claims, the British 'came to define themselves as a single people not because of any political or cultural consensus at home, but rather in reaction to the Other beyond their shores', the removal of that original 'Other' must have affected the trajectory of British nationalism.²³ Britons had to turn to another method of defining their enemy, and thereby themselves, and one method they

selected was to construct that definition along racial lines. Over the course of the nineteenth century, increasing in intensity with each passing decade, an elaborate racial hierarchy was erected which placed the Anglo-Saxon peoples at the top as a group destined to dominate all others, a crude biological determinism seemingly confirmed by Britain's pre-eminent political, economic and military position in the world.²⁴

The construction of British national identity upon this new racial basis would not prove so simple, however. It was far easier to point to an obvious enemy like France and utilise its most despised characteristics to establish the nation's positive virtues than to establish those positive virtues and use them to define the enemy. The emphasis upon exclusivity characteristic of nineteenth-century racialism fractured the 'Britishness' which had been so painstakingly built up in the second half of the eighteenth century and replaced it with a far less inclusive 'Saxon-ness' – or its modern equivalent 'Englishness' – which demanded the presence of pure 'Saxon' blood, and the eradication of other strains. This change was obviously and inevitably to prove problematic for Britain, whose population was far too heterogeneous to claim any sort of common ethnicity. In the pages below, I will explore the role played by the legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood, and, in particular, the effort to locate them in a specific historical context, in not only displaying but also in increasing the difficulties which the emergence of Anglo-Saxonist racialism created for the construction of British national identity in the nineteenth century.

I

'Who was Robin Hood?' asked W.F. Prideaux in *Notes and Queries* in 1886. 'Few questions in literary history have given rise to greater diversity of opinion'.²⁵ The intense debate this question aroused in nineteenth-century Britain represented more than simply one antiquarian criticizing another. A challenge to the reality of a 'great national hero' like Robin Hood was also a challenge to the nation's history and thus, in a certain sense, to the nation itself. Joseph Hunter, an assistant keeper at the Public Record Office, had strong words for those unpatriotic scholars who would deny Robin Hood's reality:

Trusting to the plain sense of my countrymen, I dismiss these theorists to that limbo of vanity, there to live with all those who would make all remote history fable, who would make us believe that everything which is good in England is a mere copy of something originated in countries eastward to our own, and who would deny to the English nation in past

ages all skill and all advancement in literature or in the arts of sculpture and architecture.²⁶

In 1850, Hunter identified the most intellectually plausible of all nineteenth-century candidates for the 'real' Robin Hood, a fourteenth-century man whose biography dovetailed neatly with many of the legend's details.²⁷ But despite its archival authority, his argument never really seized the imagination of the Victorian public. Instead, it was a very different vision of the historical Robin Hood which won the day, a vision which saw him as a heroic Saxon freedom fighter struggling against Norman oppression in the century after the Conquest. In distinct contrast to Hunter's, this hypothesis was supported by no real evidence, but nonetheless it became widely popular because it appealed to the patriotism of contemporary Britons, who saw their Saxon blood as the source of many of the nation's finest qualities.

The earliest references to Robin Hood as a specifically Saxon figure date to the final decades of the eighteenth century. In his famous *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765), Thomas Percy declared that 'the severity of those tyrannical forest-laws, that were introduced by our Norman kings, and the great temptation of breaking them by such as lived near the royal forests, at a time when the yeomanry of this kingdom were every where trained up to the long-bow, and excelled all other nations in the art of shooting, must constantly have occasioned great numbers of outlaws', among whom he included Robin Hood.²⁸ Joseph Ritson, the editor of the most popular and influential late-eighteenth-century collection of Robin Hood ballads, also linked the legend to Saxon resistance to the Norman conquest.²⁹ By the end of the eighteenth century, the first steps in reconstructing Robin Hood as a Saxon hero had thus already been taken.

Scholars such as Percy and Ritson, however, emphasised the continuity of Saxon political and social institutions rather than the innate superiority of Saxon blood. Not until the beginning of the nineteenth century did Robin Hood's Saxon origins begin to possess racist overtones. In 1820, Sir Walter Scott's immensely popular novel *Ivanhoe* focused upon a still-pervasive conflict between the Saxons and the Normans over a century after William the Conqueror landed on English shores. In the first chapter, Scott wrote that 'four generations had not sufficed to blend the hostile blood of the Normans and Anglo-Saxons, or to unite, by common language and mutual interests, two hostile races'.³⁰ Robin Hood, who functioned in the novel as symbol of patriotic Saxon resistance to Norman oppression, played a key role in this conflict

An author as well-versed in medieval history as Scott was certainly aware of the fact that by the twelfth century the Saxons and Normans had become almost entirely assimilated. He also, however, believed that ethnic differences were innate and natural, and could be identified throughout history even when apparently hidden. 'The degree of national diversity between different countries', he declared in his *Letters of Malachi Malagrowther* (1826), 'is but an instance of that general variety which nature seems to have adopted as a principle through all her work'.³¹ His Saxons are Saxons and his Normans are Normans not because of the unique nature of their political and social institutions, which he all but ignores in *Ivanhoe*, but because of an inherent racial distinction between them and all other peoples.

Scott's influence upon subsequent treatments of the legend of Robin Hood can scarcely be exaggerated. Virtually every major text written after 1820 features the conflict between Saxon and Norman as a prominent motif. In Pierce Egan's widely popular *Robin Hood and Little John* (1840), for example, the outlaw proclaims, 'I love my country and my countrymen, and hate the Norman race, for they are usurpers here, and oppressors with their usurpation'.³² Even moreso than Scott, Egan focused upon the illumination of certain traits which he regarded as inherent racial characteristics. 'It is a Norman's nature', declares Little John, 'to deal in deceit and trickery'. The Saxons, in sharp contrast, are 'free, gentle and simple'.³³

Post-*Ivanhoe* literary treatments of the legend of Robin Hood also emphasised 'racial' distinctions as manifested in physical form. In his novel *Forest Days* (1843), G.P.R. James described the Merry Men as 'strong and tall, with the Anglo-Saxon blood shining out in the complexion'. Similarly, in her children's story *The Boy Foresters* (1868), Anne Bowman described Robin as 'tall and well-formed, with a bright and cheerful Saxon face'.³⁴ According to these authors and numerous others, Robin Hood's size, strength and dexterity were all directly attributable to his Saxon-ness, and this physical prowess would ultimately allow him, and his race, to triumph over their enemies.

The frequency with which the term and the concept 'race' appeared in these treatments of the legend of Robin Hood reflects the context in which these works were written. By the mid-nineteenth century, Saxonism had grown into a national myth. It seemed increasingly obvious to contemporary Britons that the growing power of their nation stemmed from an inherent racial advantage conferred by the superiority of their Saxon blood. This arrogance was the result of a newly brash cultural aggression which sought to improve other peoples through the presumably beneficial influence of British institutions and values.³⁵ The

nature of imperialism, which depended upon the conquest or at least subordination of foreign cultures by white societies, encouraged and reinforced the development of concepts of racial superiority.³⁶

Before the very end of the nineteenth century, however, few of the numerous authors who presented Robin Hood as a Saxon hero completely adhered to a strict dichotomy between Norman and Saxon which depicted the former as entirely bad and the latter as entirely good. Scott, for example, pointed to the social and cultural improvements brought about by the Norman invasion and criticises the crude Saxons for their simplicity and lack of refinement. He argued that the best hope for the nation's future lay in the assimilation of the two races. In the final scene, the marriage of Ivanhoe and Rowena, which is attended by both Normans and Saxons, represents

a pledge of future peace and betwixt two races which, since that period, have been so completely mingled, that the distinction has become wholly invisible ... As the two nations mixed in society and formed inter-marriages with each other, the Normans abated their scorn, and the Saxons were refined from their rusticity.³⁷

Other contemporary literary treatments of Robin Hood also look towards the ultimate assimilation of the Saxons and the Normans. Bowman's *The Boy Foresters*, which tells the story of three orphans who are taken in by Robin Hood and his men, is on the surface a conventional tale of racial animosity. 'The Saxon thanes still hated the Norman nobles who had dispossessed them of many of their lands', Bowman wrote at the outset, 'and the Normans, in their turn, despised and trampled on the old possessors of the soil'. But, in truth, the view of racial relations which Bowman adopted was far more subtle and complex. The children are the product of an interracial marriage, twelfth-century style: their father Rollo was a Norman and their mother Ulrica was a Saxon. These heterogeneous origins are a source of pride rather than embarrassment. Hubert, the eldest, tells his sister Rica that 'we ... who are both Norman and Saxon, must look with love and charity on the people of both races'.³⁸

By taking the best attributes from both the Norman and Saxon races, Scott and Bowman both argued, nineteenth-century Britons had reaped the benefits of the infusion of new blood into the old stock, a stock which otherwise might have gone into an irreversible decline. In the final decades of the nineteenth century, however, racial distinctions came to be much more sharply delineated, as Herbert Spencer warned of the dangers of racial miscegenation and Francis Galton introduced the phrase 'racial hygiene' into the public vocabulary. What was the cause of this intensification of racial attitudes? We have already seen

how significant an impact increased contact with outsiders had upon the development of Anglo-Saxonism in the first half of the nineteenth century. Because the majority of this contact took place outside of Britain itself, however, its impact was by necessity limited to those who ventured forth into the empire, always destined to be a tiny portion of the British population as a whole. But as the century wore on, an increasing influx of immigrants made their way to British shores, where they sought greater economic opportunity and freedom from religious or ethnic persecution.

What they often found upon their arrival, however, was hostility from the host population. Although the British response to these newcomers was always complex and at least somewhat tempered by pro-immigration voices, it cannot be denied that the late nineteenth century saw increased xenophobic opposition to the continued entry of foreigners. There was much concern in this period that the nation was already burdened with an overlarge population drawing upon a fixed amount of resources. Newcomers were hardly likely to be welcomed with open arms in this climate, and, indeed, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century there was scant evidence of the much-vaunted tradition of tolerance upon which the British had long prided themselves.³⁹

In this context, the idea of racial assimilation became far less attractive, and this change was reflected in contemporary treatments of the legend of Robin Hood, which employ far more strident language to describe the 'racial' conflict between Saxon and Norman than their predecessors earlier in the century had done. In the 'Forest Ranger's' *Little John and Will Scarlett* (1865), a recruit for Robin Hood's band of outlaws must 'abjure all fealty and allegiance to any of the Norman race' and promise to 'aid and protect ... all poor people of your own blood and race'.⁴⁰ Published four years later, George Emmett's *Robin Hood and the Outlaws of Sherwood Forest* also emphasised 'the undying enmity between the Norman and the Saxon race'. Nowhere are the inherent differences between Norman and Saxon more clearly expressed than in this song performed by Friar Tuck:

Findest thou aught foul or bad,
Be assured 'tis Norman.
Rogues, liars, cheats, and knaves are they,
To see such churls makes one quite sad.
Then to my toast, let none say nay –
Confusion to the Norman.
Findest thou aught fair or just,
Rest quite sure 'tis Saxon.
Good men, and true, and loyal too,

Stephanie Barczewski

Base Normans they can never trust.
In wine quite old and goblets new,
Drink honour to the Saxon.⁴¹

The increasing inflexibility of racist attitudes is further demonstrated by the changing nature of the representation of Jewish characters in literary treatments of the legend of Robin Hood. While anti-semitism had long existed in British society, in the first half of the nineteenth century Jews were regarded with a grudging tolerance, at least relative to the hostility they encountered in other European nations, and Britain earned an at least somewhat deserved reputation as a haven where those persecuted on the basis of their religion could find a refuge. This fairly liberal attitude is reflected in *Ivanhoe*, which depicts Jewish characters in a generally positive manner.⁴² To be sure, Isaac, the moneylender of York, is extremely avaricious, but he is also loyal to his friends, passionately devoted to his daughter Rebecca, brave, resilient and determined. And for her part Rebecca is a beautiful, enchanting and noble heroine.⁴³

Scott's portraits of Jewish virtue spawned a number of imitations in the numerous adaptations of *Ivanhoe* which appeared on the contemporary stage. In the prologue to George Soane's *The Hebrew*, performed at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane in 1820, one 'R. Barlow, Esq.' issues a strong statement in favour of tolerance towards Jews:

No longer scoff in peaceful compact blend
Christian and Jew, by turns each other's friend.

Similarly, *The Last Edition of Ivanhoe* (1850) by the Brough brothers concludes with a declaration from Ivanhoe himself for 'old grudges [to] cease – each prejudice unbend'. A chorus is sung to the tune of 'Rule Britannia' espousing the advantages to be gained from a spirit of tolerance and harmony:

But Britain first with ev'ry land,
In friendship just to see remain,
In friendship, friendship, just to see remain
And just to start her – to start her as we stand,
Our places keep to sing this strain.
Rule Britannia, Britannia thus behaves,
Britons send ill feelings ever – ever to their graves!

In a final 'grand allegorical tableau', emblematical groups representing all the peoples of the world parade across the stage. Even the Jews are included, as Rebecca looks forward to a day when

Heigho! pr'aps England will some day or other
Think e'en an Israelite a man and brother.⁴⁴

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, such open-mindedness was supplanted by increasing anti-semitism. Beginning in the 1880s, a steady flow of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the overwhelming majority of whom were Jewish, poured into Britain. By 1901, over 80,000 Jews had made their way to British shores, where they quickly became concentrated in working-class areas of the larger cities and London in particular. There, they met with a hostility out of all proportion to demographic reality. Histrionic articles in the press proclaimed the dangers of the 'foreign flood' and argued that the newcomers were undercutting wages and engaging in unfair trading practices. In truth, however, what lay at the heart of this antipathy was a deep-rooted anti-semitism and more general hostility towards all other races besides the Saxon.⁴⁵

These sentiments made their presence felt in treatments of the legend of Robin Hood from the final decades of the nineteenth century, many of which feature unabashedly negative depictions of Jewish characters. In J.E. Muddock's, *Maid Marian and Robin Hood* (1892), Maid Marian flees from her father, who is attempting to force her to marry against her will, and seeks refuge with 'a rich Jew in Leeds'. His daughter, however, is no gentle Rebecca. On the contrary, she is jealous of Marian's beauty and cruel to her, ultimately locking her in a dungeon and vowing to keep her there until she agrees to renounce the Christian faith and convert to Judaism. Equally anti-semitic in tone is Edward Gilliat's novel *Wolf's Head: A Story of the Prince of Outlaws* (1899), which repeatedly shows Jews to be greedy and excessively money-loving, and thus appropriate targets for the outlaws' depredations. When Robin Hood hears that a wealthy merchant is riding through Sherwood Forest carrying 1500 gold marks, he tells his men that 'he is a stingy, grasping Jew [and] we must make an example of him'.⁴⁶ Gone is the more tolerant attitude displayed towards Jews in *Ivanhoe* and its adaptations, supplanted by an ugly, unmitigated anti-semitism.

Indeed, the final years of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth would see a strict dichotomy established between not only the Saxons and the Jews but between the Saxons and Normans. Virtually every literary treatment of the legend of Robin Hood from this period argues in favour, either explicitly or implicitly, of Saxon blood uncontaminated by its inferior Norman counterpart. In his children's story *Edwin the Boy Outlaw* (1887), J. Frederick Hodgetts described Robin Hood as a 'thorough Englishman' with 'no taint of Norman blood' in his veins. Hodgetts took a disdainful view of arguments claiming that the two races had eventually united and that it was the blood of both which flowed through modern Britons:

The general theory of amalgamation of jarring nations and their fusion into one has been accepted as the truth, in spite of the facts related in the chronicles, sagas, and lays of our race, and I have endeavoured ... to show that Normans and English did not mix, but that the few Normans that were left were either blotted out and lost in the surging wave of English that rolled over and swamped them or became approximately English.⁴⁷

In creating an image of a national hero whose essential components included untainted Saxon blood, late-nineteenth-century authors thus reinforced contemporary arguments proclaiming that racial purity must be maintained if Britain's predominant position in the world was to continue. The heterogeneity of nineteenth-century Britain, however, made this sort of simplistic Saxon racialism difficult if not impossible to maintain. Even a staunch defender of the superiority of Saxon blood such as J.E. Muddock, who elsewhere wrote of the 'ineradicable hatred' of the Saxons for the Normans, conceded that the conquerors did bring some benefits to their new country. Muddock admitted that 'oppressive as the rule of the Normans was, there is no doubt that they introduced a much higher civilization into the country than the Saxons had hitherto known, and they hedged human life round with better safeguards ... Hitherto might had really been the law of the land, but under the Normans justice began to take its place'.⁴⁸ Until the very end of the century, an intense debate thus continued to rage over the place of other bloodlines in the nation's lineage, for if 'pure Saxon blood' had been made a criterion for citizenship, then very few modern Britons would have qualified. And the legend of another medieval hero – King Arthur – came to play a prominent role in this debate.

II

'The question naturally arises – Was there ever a real King Arthur?' asked Frederick Ryland in the *English Illustrated Magazine* in the late 1880s.⁴⁹ In order to answer this question, many nineteenth-century scholars turned to the ancient Welsh chronicles known as the *Historia Brittonum* (c.800) and the *Annales Cambriae* (c.960), both of which refer to Arthur as the victor of the battle of Badon Hill, an encounter between the Celts and Saxons which probably took place about 520 AD.⁵⁰ This view of King Arthur as a Celtic hero who had fought against the Saxons gradually made its way from the scholarly community into writings intended for a far broader audience, including articles in contemporary periodicals and readers for schoolchildren.⁵¹ This scenario gave rise to a problem, however. The enemies of a national

hero like Arthur were necessarily enemies of the nation. But, according to the best evidence, his enemies were the Saxons, those selfsame Saxons whose blood was a source of considerable pride to many contemporary Britons. How, then, was Arthur's role as a national hero to be reconciled with contemporary racist thinking?

In order to understand how this reconciliation took place, it is important to notice that, for much of the nineteenth century, there were other possible racial ideals which existed alongside the exclusively Anglo-Saxon model. To be sure, there was the growing pride of the Victorians in their Saxon racial origins which we have examined above, but it was also widely accepted that the Saxons were not the only race that had made a positive contribution to the nation's bloodline. As we have seen, for much of the nineteenth century, the Normans were not regarded in an entirely negative sense. And during this same period, the Celts, the race of King Arthur, occupied a similarly ambivalent position.⁵²

To be sure, anti-Celtic prejudice had been a part of British culture for centuries, fostering a stereotype of a primitive, poverty-stricken, potentially unruly and generally inferior society. The rise of primitivism in the final decades of the eighteenth century, however, considerably altered this perception. Appearing first in the writings of Rousseau, the celebration of autochthonous cultures which were perceived as free from the oversophisticated artificiality of the modern world gradually broadened into a flood of interest and enthusiasm for the innocent, uncorrupted and uncivilised. In this context, the ancient Celtic inhabitants of the British Isles became a subject worthy of consideration and even admiration.⁵³ What had previously been a source of embarrassment was thus now a source of patriotic pride, as contemporary Britons boasted of – rather than apologised for – the primitive simplicity of their ancestors. In his fragmentary poem 'Morte d'Arthur', written sometime between 1810 and 1820, the poet and clergyman Reginald Heber, who later became the first Anglican Bishop of Calcutta, all but regretted the day the Saxons first set foot on British shores:

When I rehearse each gorgeous festival,
And knightly pomp of Arthur's elder day,
And muse upon these Celtic glories all,
Which, save some remnant of the minstrel's lay,
Are melted in oblivious stream away,
(So deadly bit the Saxon's blade and sore)
Perforce I rue such perilous decay,
And, reckless of my race, almost deplore
That ever northern keel deflower'd the Logrian shore.⁵⁴

In the first half of the nineteenth century, positive depictions of ancient Celtic culture thus often supplanted the strong anti-Celtic prejudice which had prevailed previously. This ambivalence is reflected in contemporary literary treatments of the Arthurian legend, many of which allot the Celts as well as the Saxons a contribution to the nation's bloodline.⁵⁵ J.F. Pennie's drama *The Dragon King* (1832), for example, views Britain as the product of the union of two great races, and celebrates the Celts for their Christian religious beliefs, superior laws and political institutions. 'Let us ... hear no more of the ... shallow cant which ignorantly pretends to cast the disgrace of savage barbarity on the ancient Britons ...', Pennie writes in the preface, 'and proclaim them to have been a noble and a mighty people'.⁵⁶

Other authors concurred, arguing in favour of racial unity rather than the superiority of one people over the other. In the verse drama *The Fairy of the Lake* (1801), by the erstwhile radical leader John Thelwall, the Saxon queen Rowenna pleads for peace between the warring Celts and Saxons:

But, in our hearts,
The touch humane of cordial sympathy
Is now more vital than revengeful wrath
And national aversions; which too long
Have thin'd our rival tribes. Therefore we arm
Our tongues with gentle courtesies, not hands
With weapons of destruction; and invite
To equal brotherhood your warrior Knights –
Yourself, to equal empire.⁵⁷

The Reverend Henry Hart Milman presented a similar vision of the British future in *Samor, Lord of the Bright City*, an Arthurian heroic poem in twelve books published in 1817. Milman looked forward to the day when unity would elevate Britain to greatness, when 'all feud, all hate, all discord' between Saxon and Briton will be 'melted off', and 'their strength and valour' will be blended in order to defend 'one sword, one name, one glory, and one God'. At the poem's conclusion, the Saxon leader Argatyr predicts to Samor that the animosity between them will ultimately give way to peace, a peace which will benefit the British nation:

I tell thee, Briton, that thy sons and mine
Shall be two meeting and conflicting tides,
Whose fierce relentless enmity shall lash
This land into a whirlpool deep and wide,
To swallow in its vast insatiate gulph
Her peace and smooth felicity, till flow

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Their waters reconcil'd in one broad bed,
Briton and Anglian one in race and name.⁵⁸

Despite the steady growth of Anglo-Saxonist racialism detailed previously, authors of Arthurian literature continued to present similarly ambivalent interpretations of the historical conflict between Saxon and Celt until well into the nineteenth century. In the preface to his epic poem *King Arthur* (1849), Edward Bulwer Lytton, too, emphasised the future unity of the two races. The *Lords of Time* show Arthur a vision which culminates in the reign of Queen Victoria, when all racial conflict has ceased:

And round her group the Cymrian's changeless race
Blent with Saxon, brother-like; and both
Saxon and Cymrian from that sovereign trace
Their hero-line; – sweet flower of age-long growth;
The single blossom on the twofold stem ...

Inspired by this ideal of harmony between the two peoples, Arthur sets out to make it a reality. After winning a great victory over the Saxons on the battlefield, he accepts their leader Harold's offer of peace, and the two peoples agree to live in peace in the future. As the two kings clasp hands, Merlin prophesies the eventual unity of the Celts and Saxons:

Still the old brother-bond in these new homes,
After long woes, shall bind your kindred races;
Here, the same God shall find the sacred domes;
And the same land-marks bound your resting-places,
What time, o'er realms to Heus and Thor unknown,
Both Celt and Saxon rear their common throne.⁵⁹

Pennie, Thelwall, Milman and Bulwer Lytton thus all utilised the Arthurian legend to promote the idea of racial unity between the Celts and the Saxons. But although they each emphasised the importance of the Celtic role in Britain's history, none of the four was himself a Celt. How, then, did Celtic authors themselves employ the Arthurian legend, and how did they interpret the historical conflict between Saxon and Celt in light of the present state of relations between the two peoples? The answers to these questions are complex. On the one hand, a strong current of nationalism runs through many early nineteenth-century Celtic treatments, particularly those by Welsh authors, who frequently represent Arthur's struggle against the Saxons as a precursor to the long history of Welsh resistance to English rule. But on the other, these celebrations of the nation's heroic past rarely extend to demands for the restoration of Welsh sovereignty in the present. Instead, authors

emphasise the continuing advantages of the Union. This emphasis upon cooperation was particularly evident during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars with France, when the Welsh turned to the Arthurian legend as a means of declaring their patriotism and encouraging their countrymen on the field of battle. In 'The Bard of Snowden' (1804), Richard Llwyd offered a patriotic recitation of Welsh military history which extends into an attempt to urge modern Welshmen to emulate their heroic ancestors:

By genuine Freedom's holy flame,
By Dragon-crested Arthur's name;
By Deva's waves, when Saxons fled,
By Mona's sons, when Mervyn led ...

... Sons of Snowdon, yours the MEED,
Like Britons live, like Britons bleed;
Your Country, Parents, Children, save,
Or fill one great and glorious grave!

Llwyd's reference to the Saxons demonstrates that invoking the medieval past in order to foster present British unity could be problematic. For much of the Middle Ages, after all, the Welsh and the English had been bitter enemies, and the Welsh had suffered the ravages of repeated invasions and, ultimately, conquest. Here, however, the conflicts of previous centuries were glossed over in favour of an emphasis upon present unity, with the Welsh fighting alongside the English as part of a cohesive war effort, 'united now, to England's throne'.⁶⁰

Llwyd, of course, was responding to the immediate pressures imposed by the war with France. In this period, it seemed entirely possible that the price of disunity would be defeat; therefore the Welsh had a vested interest in remaining loyal. But even long after the war had ended, similar pronouncements invoking Arthur as a symbol of Wales' adherence to the Union continued to appear. In August 1832, the thirteen-year-old Princess Victoria, heiress presumptive to the British throne, visited the annual Eisteddfod held at Beaumaris.⁶¹ There, local poets competed to proclaim their loyalty to the young princess and the nation she was soon to rule, and they frequently employed the Arthurian legend in order to express their allegiance. George Haslehurst began his 'Song' with an account of the days of Arthur's great battles, taking care not to mention him in an explicitly anti-Saxon context, before turning to Welsh participation alongside the English in another, more recent war – that against the French:

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Is there a dastard boor
For his country would not stand? –
Nor blench at the sound of the cannon's roar, –
Or fight for his father-land?

Haslehurst, however, was outdone by Henry Davies, whose 'Ode' showered Victoria with effusive praise and emphasised the happiness which her visit had brought to the Welsh. As the culmination of his panegyric to Britain's future ruler, he refers to her as a descendent of Arthur:

When Wallia from her deepest dell,
To Snowdon's sun-lit peak,
Echoes exulting to the swell
Of joy and triumph, that bespeak,
The smile to Cambria long unknown,
The presence of the princely heir to British Arthur's crown.⁶²

In the first half of the nineteenth century, English and Welsh authors thus shared a common emphasis upon the assimilation of the Saxons and Celts as having been beneficial to both peoples and, more importantly, to the British nation as a whole. Slowly but inexorably, however, the dual role of the Saxons and Celts in the composition of the nation's bloodline came to be seen as an increasingly unequal partnership, as the Saxon origins of the British nation were increasingly emphasised over the Celtic. Before the mid-nineteenth century, even the most outspoken critics of the Celts rarely attributed their inferiority to any inherent racial defects, but rather had argued that their shortcomings could be overcome through the beneficial influence of long-term exposure to English culture and civilization. But as the nineteenth century wore on, the ostensibly more 'primitive' nature of Celtic culture and society came to be ascribed directly to certain immutable biological factors which condemned them to permanent degradation.

This increased antipathy to the Celtic peoples was fueled by the large migrations of Irish labourers into many areas of England and Lowland Scotland which were instigated by the Potato Famine of the mid-1840s and continued unabated for the next few decades.⁶³ These new arrivals, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, often encountered strong opposition from the host society in their efforts to assimilate and gain acceptance. To be sure, there were positive stereotypes of the Irish as well, which praised their diligence, perseverance and high-spiritedness, but many Englishmen and women made little attempt to attribute the degradation of the immigrants to the impoverished and disease-ridden conditions in which they were forced to live. Instead, contemporary

periodicals frequently featured images of the 'Paddy', who was intemperate, improvident, violent, unhygienic, mendacious and undependable, deficiencies caused by the ostensible inherent weakness of the Irish national character, and the Celtic race in general.⁶⁴

This situation presented a problem for authors who wished to promote King Arthur, a figure from Celtic history, as a national hero. For obvious reasons, it was extremely awkward for him to be regarded as a member of a race widely thought of as repugnant. The existence of ostensibly genuine references to Arthur in medieval sources, however, meant that his historical identity, unlike that of Robin Hood, could not be completely reinvented to conform more closely to contemporary racialist ideals. How was it, then, that, as the literary critic S. Humphreys Gurteen wrote in 1895, 'a native British king became the hero of the English national epic'?⁶⁵ In the second half of the nineteenth century, British authors developed a simple strategy for dealing with Arthur's problematic historical identity as a Celtic warrior king: they ignored it. By virtually divorcing him from history altogether, they were able to reinvent him in a more congenial form. This did not mean that they argued that Arthur had never existed. Rather, they claimed that the Arthur of history and the Arthur of fiction were two entirely different characters, and that it was the latter who was the true exemplar of what a national hero should be.

Nineteenth-century historians readily acknowledged that there were essentially two Arthurs, the Arthur of fact and the Arthur of fancy. 'It is ... necessary in writing of Arthur', declared T.W. Shore

to bear in mind the two-fold character in which he appears in English literature; first and very largely, as a hero whose career and adventures were the invention of the romancers of the Middle Ages, based partly on earlier traditions, and secondly as a real British king or chieftain, who lived in the early part of the 6th century, during the period of the struggle between the British people and the invading Saxons.⁶⁶

Britons were thus accustomed to separating the 'Arthur of romance' from the 'Arthur of sober history', and the majority preferred the former to the latter.⁶⁷ In the preface to *The Story of Arthur and Guinevere* (1879), 'G.R.E.' briefly sketched the scanty details known about Arthur's historical career before concluding with a dismissive 'that is nearly all that is known of the Arthur of History'. He was far more enthusiastic, however, about 'the Arthur of Legend', of whose 'greatness', he declared, 'there can be no doubt':

Thousands of readers who know little of the fierce struggles in western Britain thirteen hundred years ago are familiar with the brave king

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Arthur who established the order of the Knights of the Round Table, who were vowed to defend the poor against the weak, to be truthful, pure, and courteous, whose valour was the wonder of medieval Christendom.⁶⁸

Once Arthur had been divorced from the constraints of having to conform to medieval history, it was possible to transform him into a figure more compatible with contemporary racialist arguments. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the historical – that is, Celtic – Arthur was gradually supplanted by a figure better suited to the prevailing racialist climate. In a review of Bulwer Lytton's *King Arthur*, *Sharpe's London Journal* declared that, even if Arthur was of 'Celtic origin', he was also of 'Saxon character'. In contrast, the other characters of the legend, while 'brave and loyal, pious and enterprising, with no lack of steadfastness and energy upon occasions', were fatally flawed by their bloodline. 'They are all ... more or less mercurial and light-minded', the reviewer wrote, 'in accordance with their Celtic origin'. Thus, although 'they may be more amusing and agreeable companions than the most noble King Arthur; ... they are not so fit for love and reverence, – not so fit for worship as a demigod; at least in English eyes'.⁶⁹ That this argument – that Arthur had been a Saxon king of Celtic knights – was utterly ludicrous did not occur to this writer, nor probably to most of his readers. Its conformity with contemporary racialist arguments was sufficient to render it entirely plausible and far more preferable to a more historically accurate account.

By far the most influential promoter of King Arthur's 'Saxon' origins was Alfred Lord Tennyson, whose *Idylls of the King* had a profound impact upon the development of the Arthurian legend. When they appeared in 1859, the first four poems sold over 10,000 copies in their first weeks of publication, and future installments received an equally enthusiastic welcome from the British reading public. Contemporary critics noted the improbability of Tennyson's choice of subject, and the difficulty of transforming a Celtic legend into an English national epic. 'Strange to say, it does not seem to have occurred to him ... that it was Celtic and not Saxon', wrote the Reverend James A. Campbell in 1896.⁷⁰ In fact, however, Tennyson was aware of Arthur's Celtic origins. He utilised Welsh sources such as the *Mabinogion* in the composition of the *Idylls*, and he made several trips to Wales in order to explore the purported sites of the legend's major events. But his patriotism would not permit him to present Arthur as a Celt. In a letter of 1861, the social gadfly Caroline Fox described a conversational encounter with Tennyson at a dinner party: 'The Welsh claim Arthur as their own, but Tennyson gives all his votes to us'.⁷¹

In order to accomplish this reorientation of Arthur's historical identity, Tennyson deliberately presented the chronological aspects of the legend in as vague a manner as possible. In *The Coming of Arthur*, the first of the poems, he made no attempt to establish with any precision the names of the warring forces; Arthur is not referred to as a Celt, nor are his enemies specifically described as Saxons, but rather as the 'heathen host' (l. 8).⁷² Unlike most treatments of the Arthurian legend from the first half of the nineteenth century, the *Idylls* are set in a place and time which cannot be linked to any real geographical location or historical era. Instead, the events they describe occur in a dreamlike world where nothing seems quite 'real'. By removing Arthur from the realm of history in this manner, Tennyson was able to imply that he was a Saxon rather than a Celt. When King Leodogran wants to ascertain that Arthur is the true son of Uther Pendragon before permitting him to marry his daughter Guinevere, he asks Arthur's sister Bellicent, Queen of Orkney, to verify the circumstances of her brother's birth. While probably not of great comfort to a father anxious to secure a good match for his daughter, the answer he receives would have undoubtedly been popular with many mid-nineteenth-century Britons:

What know I?

For dark my mother was in eyes and hair,
And dark in hair and eyes am I; and dark
Was Gorlois, yea and dark was Uther too,
Wellnigh to blackness; but this king is fair
Beyond the race of Britons and of men.

(ll. 325-30)

Fair skin and hair, of course, are physical attributes traditionally associated with the Saxon race. Thus, while he cannot entirely overturn Arthur's Celtic identity, Tennyson did, through obscurity and implication, hint that Arthur had been a Saxon. In the first half of the nineteenth century, most British authors had attempted to present the Arthurian legend in a manner generally consistent with prevailing scholarly opinion, which held that he had been a sixth-century Celtic leader. *The Idylls of the King*, however, marked a new departure for literary treatments of the legend. Although he made no effort to challenge Arthur's historical identity, Tennyson also refused to acknowledge it.

Contemporary critics made frequent reference to the ahistorical nature of the *Idylls*. In 1870, the *Dublin Review* observed that 'to surround the wigwams of the only possible Camelot with accessories borrowed from feudal ages and chivalric associations, is nearly, if not quite, as absurd as if the body of Elaine were to be described as borne to its

rest by special train on the Astolat and Camelot Junction Railway'. This reviewer, however, was hardly complaining about the anachronism of Tennyson's treatment of the Arthurian legend. A greater emphasis upon 'correct historical and archaeological details', he claimed, would have 'produced a figure as stiff and ungraceful' as the representations of saints which adorned many medieval churches. It was far better 'to adopt the Arthur of romance, ... and make it act consistently in the manifold variety of circumstances in which it should be placed'.⁷³ In 1878, Henry Elsdale adopted a virtually identical line in his critique of the *Idylls*, in which 'instead of the mental sphere and horizon, the habits and modes of thought, the mind and spirit of the sixth ... century', he found 'those of the eighteenth or nineteenth'. But like the *Dublin Review*, Elsdale saw Tennyson's removal of the legend from its historical context as a virtue rather than a flaw: 'Mr. Tennyson has, no doubt, better consulted the taste of the large majority of his nineteenth century readers ... in engrafting nineteenth century notions upon the original stock supplied him by the legends'.⁷⁴ And some of these 'nineteenth century notions' were undeniably of a racialist nature. For most contemporary Britons, the ideal Arthur was a Saxon Arthur, and that was precisely what Tennyson had given them.

When combined with the influence of contemporary racialist theory, Tennyson's powerful voice was sufficient to inspire subsequent authors to follow suit. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Arthur was transformed from a Celt to a Saxon, and from a British chieftain to, as one children's book described him, 'King of all England'.⁷⁵ This shift in Arthur's historical and racial identity dovetailed with a more general transformation occurring in contemporary Britain involving the position of Celtic culture relative to its English counterpart, and the complex cultural motives underlying what has come to be termed the Celtic Revival. In the late 1860s, Matthew Arnold delivered a series of lectures at Oxford in which he aimed to establish the contribution of Celtic authors to English literature. On the surface, Arnold was complimentary towards the Celts, whose 'lively' nature he contrasted favourably with the 'impassive dullness' of the English. But he also argued that they paid a high price for their spirited nature, for they suffered grievously from a lack of 'steadiness, patience, sanity'. Thus, while Celtic contributions had a place in the culture of the British nation as a whole, that place was obviously subordinate to the efforts of English authors, whose superior personal qualities enabled them to produce superior works. Arnold proposed that Celtic cultural expressions should be swallowed up and viewed as contributions to English culture; the cultural life of Scotland, Wales and Ireland could thus have no existence outside

of a satellite relationship with England. Arnold's arguments were taken up by a bevy of imitators and diffused widely through late-nineteenth-century British culture. From the English perspective, the colonisation and subordination of Celtic literature came to be seen as inevitable and natural, as the centre sought to impose its identity upon the periphery.⁷⁶

In this context, the reformulation of Arthur's historical and racial identity represents one component of a more general and pervasive cultural process which sought to deny the achievements of Celtic literature and reassign them to its English counterpart. And where better to focus these efforts than upon the greatest Celtic literary hero of all, King Arthur? The crowning achievement of Arthur's transformation to an 'English' king was J. Comyns Carr's play *King Arthur*, which premiered at Henry Irving's Lyceum Theatre on the 12th of January, 1895. Best known as the director of the Grosvenor Gallery, Carr had been recruited to compose a drama that would serve as the basis for a lavish production employing the leading talents of the contemporary British stage.

Carr's play closely resembles *The Idylls of the King*, for he, like Tennyson, made no attempt to provide his play with a realistic historical setting, and Edward Burne-Jones's dark and mist-shrouded sets reinforced the dreamlike atmosphere of the production. 'There is no question of historical accuracy here', wrote Clement Scott in his review.⁷⁷ By disengaging Arthur from history, Carr did not have to allude to Arthur's Celtic origins. Instead, he was able to present him as an English hero. Indeed, Carr's Anglocentric patriotism was so pronounced that Burne-Jones was revolted at the first rehearsal by the 'jingo bits about the sea and England which Carr should be ashamed of'.⁷⁸ The play opens with a prologue in which Merlin brings the young Arthur to the shore of 'the magic Mere', where he informs him that he is the son of Uther Pendragon, 'England's chosen lord'. As proof of his royal lineage, Arthur receives the sword Excalibur from the Lake Spirits:

Sword, no mortal shall withstand,
Fashioned by no mortal hand,
Long we wait the hour shall bring
England's sword to England's King.

Arthur accepts his birthright eagerly, and vows to lead England towards the brilliant future for which the Spirits prophecy it is destined:

I see that throng of England's unborn sons,
Whose glory is her glory: prisoned souls

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With faces pressed against the bars of Time,
Waiting their destined hour. Give me my sword,
That I may loose Time's bonds, and set them free.

Carr continues to associate Arthur with a specifically English patriotism throughout the play. In the final scene, Arthur is killed in battle, but Merlin tells Guinevere not to lament, for he can never truly die:

... he doth but pass who cannot die,
The King that was, the King that yet shall be;
Whose spirit, borne along from age to age,
Is England's to the end.

The chorus's patriotic chant 'England's sword is in the sea' reinforces the nationalistic content of the play.⁷⁹

The reaction of the theatregoing public to *King Arthur* was extremely positive, suggesting that Carr's vision of the legend conformed to the desires of contemporary Britons. The play ran for a hundred nights at the Lyceum, toured America and Canada successfully in 1895-6 and might well have been revived had not a warehouse fire destroyed its scenery in 1898. This reception indicates that, by the end of the nineteenth century, it had become not only possible but expedient to present Arthur as an exclusively English hero. The majority of the English theatregoing public wanted not the real, Celtic, King Arthur but an ideal which conformed to contemporary racialist beliefs.

To be sure, there were some scholars who objected to such a blatantly ahistorical treatment of the legend in literary works such as Carr's. Their complaints, however, were quickly quashed by the force of Anglo-Saxonist opinion. 'Have we any right to look on King Arthur as a national hero?' the noted Arthurian scholar Jessie Weston asked in 1899. 'It has been objected that since Arthur was a British chieftain we are entirely wrong in treating him as an English hero. This is surely a pedantic accuracy which over-shoots its own mark; we might as reasonably contend that the French have no right to glory in the *Matire de France*, since Charlemagne was certainly no Frenchman!'⁸⁰ The Anglo-Saxonists had laid claim to the Arthurian legend, and it was accordingly transformed from a British to an English national epic.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, racial unity was often offered as the primary explanation for Britain's success. The British, it was conventionally argued, reigned supreme because they had assimilated the best qualities of a number of distinguished ancestors into a single bloodline. This perspective is reflected in contemporary literary treatments of the legends of Robin Hood and King Arthur, which emphasise racial unity and amalgamation. In the second half of the

century, however, political developments and racist theory reinforced each other and produced a more exclusively Anglo-Saxon point of view. In this context, Robin Hood and King Arthur were reconfigured to fit these new, less flexible racial ideals.

At the same time, however, the two legends also show how this shift towards greater exclusivity led to decreased tolerance and increased internal tensions. Before the mid-nineteenth-century, as Linda Colley tells us, a more inclusive 'Britishness' prevailed as the preferred means of defining a member of the nation, a definition which permitted new groups to be assimilated with relative ease. A cultural construct which could be altered and expanded to accommodate changes in the composition of British society, Britishness imposed few requirements upon its constituents. But by century's end, it had largely been supplanted by an Anglo-Saxonist 'Englishness' which demanded that its participants adhere to certain, purportedly objective racial standards. A Briton could be made, but an Englishman or woman could only be to the manor born. Such a limited definition of the national community inevitably created dissatisfaction among those excluded from it. It is no coincidence that many of the tensions which continue to plague Britain to this day, such as increased agitation for independence from the so-called 'Celtic fringe', date from the 1880s, the period in which this newly virulent racist Anglo-Saxonism reached its apex. The roots of those tensions can be identified in the manner in which the legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood evolved in order to conform to national aspirations.

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Endnotes

1. *Sharpe's London Journal* 9 (1849): 374. I would like to express my gratitude to Professors Linda Colley, David Bell and David Cannadine; Dr. Jonathan Parry; and my colleague Michael Silvestri for their generosity of time and knowledge in reading and commenting upon previous drafts of this essay. An earlier draft was presented to the Modern Social History Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, London, in March 1996, at which time I received much valuable criticism from the discussion.
2. According to Patrick Joyce, nations construct narratives which confer purpose by creating a sense of motion and direction. 'To tell, or be in, a story', Joyce writes, 'involved a sequence, a movement, from inaugural, to transitional, to terminal motifs'. Patrick Joyce, *Democratic Subjects: The Self and the Social in Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120. Similarly Homi K. Bhabha refers to the 'attempt by nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress'. Homi K. Bhabha, 'Introduction: Narrating the Nation', in Homi K. Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 1.
3. Ernest Gellner writes, 'Nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited pro-

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liferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically. Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious pristine purities restored ... The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions ... The cultures it claims to defend and revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition'. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 56. Similarly, E.J. Hobsbawm claims that 'the most decisive criterion of proto-nationalism' is 'the consciousness of belonging or having belonged to a lasting political entity. The strongest proto-national cement known is undoubtedly to be what nineteenth-century jargon called a "historical nation"', E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 73.

4. Benedict Anderson writes that 'if nation-states are widely conceded to be "new" and "historical", the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny'. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (revised ed., London and New York: Verso, 1991), 11-12.
5. Hobsbawm claims that 'the case of the British Isles shows [that] there is ... no necessary connection between cultural revival movements ... and subsequent national agitations or movements of political nationalism'. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 104.
6. Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and Its Monarchy* (new ed., London: Picador, 1990), 178.
7. The best study of the social aspects of the medieval, or 'Gothic' revival is Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982).
8. Anne Janowitz writes, 'The growth of "Britain" demanded the fashioning of a common history which would unite its regionally and economically diverse inhabitants into a single group, whose members would identify their interests with those of Britain as an entity ... The authority of antiquity was one thread in the fabric of a common nationality'. Anne Janowitz, *England's Ruins: Poetic Purpose and the National Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 3.
9. Lady Katie Magnus, *First Makers of England: Julius Caesar, King Arthur, Alfred the Great* (London: John Murray, 1901), vii.
10. The famous tea-clipper *Sir Lancelot* set a record for the fastest passage from China to London in 1869. There were also clippers named after King Arthur, Robin Hood and Friar Tuck. See Cyril L. Hume and Malcolm C. Armstrong, *The Cutty Sark and Thermopylae Era of Sail* (Glasgow: Brown, Son & Ferguson, 1987). Victorian racing calendars feature horses named King Arthur, Guinevere, Vivien, Vortigern, Robin Hood, Maid Marian, Will Scarlet, Friar Tuck and Allen-a-Dale. See, for example, the *Racing and Steeple Chase Calendar* in the *Sporting Magazine* for the 1860s.
11. In July 1897 Lord and Lady Rodney attended the Duchess of Devonshire's famous costume ball dressed as King Arthur and Queen Guinevere, surrounded by a retinue which included Sir Galahad, Sir Kaye, Sir Gareth, Sir Bedivere, Sir Perceval and Sir Tristram. See Sophia Murphy, *The Duchess of Devonshire's Ball* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984). Among the guests at the Grand Fancy Ball at Brecon on 1 March 1827 were 'Mr. Ross' and 'Mr. Powell', both of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, dressed as Robin Hood and Little John, *Carmarthen Journal* 9 March 1827, 3.
12. See Peter Baldwin, *Toy Theatres of the World* (London: Zwemmer, 1992); and George

- Speaight, *Juvenile Drama: The History of the English Toy Theatre* (London: MacDonald & Co., 1946).
13. In their famous survey of nineteenth-century tavern signboards, originally published in 1866, Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten concluded that 'the most frequent of ballad signs is unquestionably ROBIN HOOD AND LITTLE JOHN'. Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten, *The History of Signboards, from Earliest Times to the Present Day* (11th ed., London: Chatto & Windus, 1900), 75. Although King Arthur appeared less frequently than did Robin Hood, he, too, featured on pub signboards. A King Arthur tavern may be found in Belfast, and a King Arthur's Arms and a King Arthur's Castle exist in Tintagel, Cornwall.
 14. In 1862, Walter Dunlop of Bradford commissioned a series of stained-glass windows from William Morris and Company depicting the legend of Tristram and Isolde for the entrance hall of Harden Grange, near Bingley, Yorkshire. Morris also received a commission in 1890 to refurbish Stanmore Hall, Middlesex. In the dining room, Morris decided to hang a narrative series of tapestries depicting six scenes from the quest for the Holy Grail. In 1842, the 4th Duke of Portland built a lodge in Sherwood Forest near Clipstone which featured statues of Richard I, Allen-a-Dale and Friar Tuck on the north side and Robin Hood, Little John and Maid Marian on the south. And in the 1860s, the 6th Earl of Manvers erected a statue of Robin Hood in the courtyard of his newly refurbished house at Thoresby, which stands on the edge of Sherwood Forest near Ollerton. Inside, the library featured an elaborately carved chimneypiece featuring an oak tree flanked by near life-size statues of Robin Hood and Little John. See Herbert E. Wroot, 'Pre-Raphaelite Windows at Bradford', *Studio* 72 (1917): 69-73; 'The Arras Tapestries at Stanmore Hall', *Studio* 15 (1899): 98-104; Alexander Beattie, *Thoresby Hall: The Home of the Pierrepont Family* (Hanley: Wood, Mitchell & Co., 1964); and *Thoresby Hall* (Hanley: English Life Publications, 1978).
 15. See P.D. Gordon Pugh, *Staffordshire Portrait Figures and Allied Subjects of the Victorian Era* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club, 1970), 521-2 and Thomas Balston, *Staffordshire Portrait Figures of the Victorian Age* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 21.
 16. Roger Simpson, *Camelot Regained: The Arthurian Revival and Tennyson*, *Arthurian Studies* 21 (1990), 267-70.
 17. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 44.
 18. The most recent study of literacy in nineteenth-century England is David Vincent, *Literacy and Popular Culture: England 1750-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). There are no similar studies of Wales or Scotland, and information on literacy rates in these areas is virtually non-existent.
 19. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 31.
 20. Timothy Brennan, 'The National Longing for Form', in Bhaba, ed., *Nation and Narration*, 48-9.
 21. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging a Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), 5.
 22. Colley, *Britons*, 5.
 23. Colley, *Britons*, 6.
 24. It should be noted that the term 'race' did not possess the same meaning in Victorian Britain as it does today. For much of the nineteenth century, the Victorians believed race to be as much a product of historical circumstance as of biology, and most contemporary racial arguments were based upon subjective arguments rather than scientific data. Only at century's end was 'race' transformed from a term signifying a line of descent – a group defined by historical continuity – to its scientific

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- sense as a zoologically defined group. For that reason, the term 'racialism,' rather than 'racism' is most commonly used to describe nineteenth-century attitudes towards race.
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 27. For a discussion of Hunter's hypothesis and its critics, see Holt, *Robin Hood* 45-51; and Stephen Knight, *Robin Hood: A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 23-4.
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 29. See Joseph Ritson, *Robin Hood: A Collection of Poems, Songs, and Ballads Relative to that Celebrated English Outlaw* (London, 1795), 1, vi.
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 31. *The Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, Vol. 21. Letters of Malachi Malagrowth on the Currency* (Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1830-6), 373.
 32. Pierce Egan, *Robin Hood and Little John or the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest* (2nd ed., London, 1850), 198.
 33. Egan, *Robin Hood and Little John*, 126, 194.
 34. G.P.R. James, *Forest Days: A Romance of Old Times* (London, 1843), I, 107; Anne Bowman, *The Boy Foresters. A Tale of the Days of Robin Hood* (London: G. Routledge and Sons, [1868]), 236.
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 37. Scott, *Ivanhoe*, 515.
 38. Bowman, *The Boy Foresters*, 132-3.
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48. Muddock, *Maid Marian and Robin Hood*, 12, 17.
49. F. Ryland, 'The Morte D'Arthur', *English Illustrated Magazine* 6 (1888-9): 89.
50. For the modern historiographical perspective on King Arthur's reality, see Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor, 1985).
51. See, for example, Ellen J. Millington, 'King Arthur and His Knights', *The Monthly Packet of Evening Readings* 17 (1859): 597-8, William Francis Collier, *Pictures of English History for Junior Pupils* (London: Nelson's School Series, 1864), 17.
52. According to Roy Foster, Celticism was an extremely ambiguous concept in the nineteenth century, 'and many who, by a selective reading, appear intransigently anti-Celtic can be demonstrated from other evidence to have valued the Celtic input into what was conceived of as the British identity'. Roy Foster, *Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connexions in Irish and English History* (London: Penguin, 1993), 193.
53. Samuel Smiles, *The Image of Antiquity: Ancient Britain and the Romantic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 16.
54. *The Poetical Works of Reginald Heber* (new ed., London: John Murray, 1854), 177.
55. According to Roger Simpson, 'a celebration of this melding [between Briton and Saxon] is one of the most distinctive themes of Arthurian literature in the early nineteenth century'. Simpson, *Camelot Regained*, 40.
56. J.F. Pennie, *Britain's Historical Drama: A Series of National Tragedies* (London, 1832), xiii.
57. John Thelwall, *Poems, Chiefly Written in Retirement* (2nd ed., Hereford, 1801), 79.
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59. Edward Bulwer Lytton, *King Arthur* (London: Henry Colburn, 1849), I, 30, 299.
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63. For Irish immigration into nineteenth-century England and Scotland, see David Fitzpatrick, "'A peculiar tramping people": the Irish in Britain, 1801-70', in W.E. Vaughan, ed., *A New History of Ireland, Vol. V. Ireland under the Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 623-57; Lynn Hollen Lees, *Exiles of Erin: Irish Migrants in Victorian London* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979); Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, eds., *The Irish in Britain, 1815-1939* (London: Pinter, 1989); and Roger Swift and Sheridan Gilley, eds., *The Irish in the Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1985).
64. The perception of the Irish in Victorian Britain has long been a subject of interest to historians, and has aroused considerable controversy. See, in addition to the essay

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65. S. Humphreys Gurteen, *The Arthurian Epic: A Comparative Study of the Cambrian, Breton, and Anglo-Norman Versions of the Story and Tennyson's Idylls of the King* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1895), 41.
 66. T.W. Shore, *King Arthur and the Round Table at Winchester* (Hampshire: Hampshire Field Club Papers and Proceedings, 1900), 187-8.
 67. Jonathan Hughes, 'Celliwig', *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 7, Ser. 8 (1895): 90.
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