



Article

# Staging St George after the Reformation

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**Abstract:** This essay considers various ways in which St George, an important figure in mummers' plays before the Protestant Reformation, remained a presence in drama and popular entertainment long after one would have expected him to have disappeared. It notes his importance in the agricultural calendar, his strong association with fireworks, his popular designation as a specifically English saint, and some of the customs traditionally observed on his feast day of 23 April. It then moves on to consider some of the plays in which he is mentioned or alluded to, including works by Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Francis Beaumont, and John Fletcher, as well as a romance by Richard Johnson that was later dramatized, and culminates with references in three plays produced by members of the Cavendish family of Bolsover and Welbeck. It argues that referring to St George offered a way of talking about Englishness even when (perhaps especially when) that concept was contested, and also suggests that the legendary folk hero Guy of Warwick, presented in some texts as the son of St George, could sometimes act as a dramatic proxy for the saint.

**Keywords:** agricultural calendar; fireworks; Englishness; Guy of Warwick; mummers' plays



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## 1. Introduction

Shakespeare may or may not have been born and died on 23 April, which may or may not have been the day on which St George was martyred (traditionally but by no means certainly in AD 303 in the Roman province of Palestine). By the ninth century, there was a cult of St George in England. By the sixteenth century, this association had developed to such an extent that St George might at least sometimes have been understood as English himself, and after starting life as an important figure in medieval romance (Fellows 1993), he had also become increasingly connected to drama: Tracey Hill notes, for instance, that 'Child actors performed an interlude about St George, the company's patron saint, for the Armourers and Brasiers' Company in 1589' in which 'a boye Armid with a virgin following Hime leading a Lamb came in with a drome and flute before them/ and after marching thrise about the hall their tables all sett they marched to the high tabill with a speache' (Hill 2022, p. 150). This may seem to show us a St George who had already attained the iconic status he now occupies as de facto patron saint of England, whose flag is waved at football matches and whose supposed supernatural assistance of English soldiers in World War I gave rise to the legend of the Angels of Mons. This influential but potentially controversial aspect of St George as emblem of Englishness, ostensibly a cheerfully patriotic figure but with a disturbing propensity to be suborned by ultra-nationalists and hooligans, has been brilliantly explored by Samantha Riches in two books about the image of the saint (Riches 2000, 2015), while his important role in medieval and Renaissance literature has been carefully examined by, amongst others, Fellows (1993), Lamb (2003), and Groves (2010).

There was, however, some uneasiness about the use of St George in the wake of the English Reformation. In 1581, for instance, William Fulke penned a polemic in which he challenged his opponent, 'If I shoulde object vnto you, the worshipping of the images of saint Soday, saint Hardhuffe, saint Vncomber, yea saint Christopher, and saint George on horseback, which al were meere Idolls after your owne diffinition of Idols, I wote not howe you coulde quite your selfe, from the case of the Samaritanes' (Fulke 1581, p. 18), and Peter Heylyn laments in the preface of his 1631 life of St George that for some Protestants,

'GEORGE the *Martyr*, so much honoured in the *Christian world*, is but a *Counterfeit*, a *Larva*; onely some strange *Chimaera*, the issue of an idle braine; one that had never any being on the Earth', while 'others, as unquestionably, have made him in his life, a dangerous and bloody *Hereticke*: and since his death, a wretched Soule amongst the damned' (Heylyn 1631). In this new climate, the use of St George in plays became more problematic: Ton Hoenselaars observes, for instance, that 'On 23 April 1586 a company of actors visited the garrison town of Utrecht, and treated the authorities to what has become known as *The Forces of Hercules*, a more or less acrobatic show of strength involving the construction of a human pyramid . . . Leicester must have realized that on the day which until the Reformation had been commemorated as St. George's Day, it was more appropriate in the Protestant Low Countries to celebrate England's military strength by way of the achievements of a classical hero like Hercules than a challenged Catholic saint' (Hoenselaars 2022, p. 98). Although Utrecht is in the Netherlands, it was under English control, and this dramatic entertainment was, as Hoenselaars notes, under the auspices of the English governor, the Earl of Leicester, who would have been well aware of the traditions associated with St George but clearly decided that on this occasion they would be more honoured in the breach than the observance. In Norwich, too, St George was banned from appearing in his traditional pageant (Lamb 2003, p. 190).

## 2. St George in Popular Culture

Despite official Protestant disapproval, St George proved hard to dislodge from his place in popular culture. He had a particularly long lifespan in Chester, where Jill P. Ingram observes that 'On the St. George's Day procession in Chester in 1568–1569, companies such as Fletchers and Coopers distributed coins to prisoners at Northgate as they rode past the prisons' (Ingram 2021, p. 12). The city of Chester's entertainment for Prince Henry, performed on St George's Day in 1610, featured

A Man by strange deuises clyming to the toppe of a very high spire Steeple (standing at the Market Crosse, called S. *Peters* Steeple) carying an Auncient of our Colours of S. George, displaying the same vpon the said Steeple, and fixing the same to the barre of Iron, that the Vane hangeth vpon: Likewise, sounding a Drumme, shooting off a Peece, and flourishing a Sword, and standing vpon the Crosse of the said barre of Iron, stood vpon his hands with his feete into the Ayre, very dangerously and wonderfully to the view of the beholders, with casting Fire-workes very delightfull. (Davies 1610)

A similar firework formed a centrepiece of one of the entertainments associated with the marriage of Prince Henry's sister Elizabeth to Frederick, the Elector Palatine:

an artificiall fireworke with great wonder was séene flying in the ayre, like vnto a dragon, against which an other fierie vision appeared flaming like to Saint *George* on Horsebacke, brought in by a burning Inchanter, betwéene which was then fought a most strange battell continuing a quarter of an hower or more: the dragon being vanquished, séemed to rore like thunder, and withall burst in pièces and so vanished, but the champion with his flaming horse for a litle time made a shew of a triumphant conquest, and so ceased. (Anonymous 1613)

We get some sense of what such fireworks might have looked like from a 1635 text called *Pyrotechnia or, A Discourse of Artificiall Fire-Works* written by John Babington, who describes himself as 'gunner, and student in the mathematicks' and offers instructions on 'How to represent S. *George* fighting with a Dragon in fire' in such a way that when you turn a wheel 'the George and dragon will runne furiously at each other; and when you please you may cause them to make a retreat and come on againe divers times' (Babington 1635, chp. xxxiii). (St George is the only saint for whom Babington offers a specific representation in firework form, presumably because the dragon made him an obvious candidate.) There seem also to have been written texts about the saint's fight with the dragon still in circulation: Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, first acted in 1614, has someone

offering for sale a ballad of “Saint George, that O! did break the dragon’s heart!” (Jonson 1995, 2.4.19).

One reason for St George’s longevity is that St George’s Day was regularly observed. In the first place, it was an important point in the agricultural calendar, fittingly enough since the name ‘George’ derives from the word for farmer, as the title of Virgil’s *Georgics* reminds us; Samantha Riches notes that “The “Green George” festival, which is mainly celebrated in Greece and other Balkan states, . . . and the feast of St George are celebrated on the same day, with the two figures effectively merging into one’ (Riches 2015, p. 24). Richard Surflet’s 1616 translation of *Maison Rustique, or The Countrey Farme* instructs that ‘In Aprill, about S. George his day, you shall set abroad your Citron and Orenge Trees, as also all such other Trees as you had kept within house from S. Martins day’ (Estienne 1616, p. 36) and Gervase Markham in the same volume further adds that ‘in this countrey after the fifteenth day of Aprill, according to the common prouerbe (at S. Georges day you must sow your Barley, and lay your Oats away)’ (Estienne 1616, p. 554). (St George’s day still marks the traditional start of the English asparagus season, although climate change has meant that asparagus is often available earlier nowadays.)

St George’s day was also important for other reasons; a 1631 prophecy spoke in passing of a date as ‘about sheep-shering time or S. Georges feast’ (Anonymous 1644a, p. 9), and as this suggests, it was indeed a day not only for farming but also for feasting. The anonymous 1572 “An Admonition to the Parliament” refers to ‘a Prelate of the garter, who hath much to do at S. Georges feast, when the Bible is caryed before the procession in the crosses place’ (Anonymous 1572). In the anonymous 1640 “A Pleasant New Ballad of the Miller of Mansfield, in Sherwood and of King Henry the Second”, the king announces that

I am determined  
 Against Saint *Geoges* next sumptuous feast,  
 That this old Miller our last confirmed knight,  
 With his sonne *Richard* shall both be my guest.  
 (Anonymous 1640)

Both these texts take it for granted that St George’s Day will be marked by a feast, and although ‘feast’ was the generic term for the celebration of saints’ days and need not necessarily imply food and drink, the “Miller of Mansfield” ballad’s use of the term ‘sumptuous’ and the reference to a guest make it plain that an actual feast is indeed envisaged here.

Other writing of the period makes it clear that the St George’s Day celebrations called for new clothes and appropriate jewellery. Robert Greene’s “*A quip for an upstart courtier*” speaks of how ‘when lowliness neighbourhood and hospitality liued in *England*, Westminster hall was a dining chamber, not a den of controuersies, when the king himselfe was content to keepe his S. *Georges* day in a plain pair of Kersie hose, when the duke, earle, lord, knight, gentleman and esquire, aimed at vertue not at pride, and wore such breches as was spun in his house’ (Greene 1592). Anthony Copley’s *Wits Fittes and Fancies* has a story about how ‘A Noble-mans man on S. *Georges* day, for lacke of a goldechaine, wore a Copper one gilt, and fearing least it might bee perceiued, button’d it close vp to his neck within his doublet’ (Copley 1595, p. 176).

Sometimes such feasts are informed by the martial nature of the saint. Thomas Deloney’s *The Gentle Craft*, part 2, speaks of how ‘upon S. *Georges* day . . . this iolly Shoemaker (being servant to the Duke of Suffolk) went to the Court with all his men after him, to give attendance upon his noble Master, which some yong Gentlemen more wanton than wise, beholding & envying his gallant mind, devised how they might picke some quarrell, thereby to have occasion to try his manhood’, the significance of the date being underlined when the aggressors declare that the shoemaker and his men ‘look as if they would fight with Gargantua, and make a fray with the great Turk’ (Deloney 1639). There is an element of play-fighting here, but sometimes matters might become more serious. In his *The Life*,

and *Raigne of King Edward the Sixt*, John Hayward alleges that the Duke of Somerset planned to use the St George's day festivities as cover for an act of treachery:

vpon S<sup>t</sup> *George* day last before, the *Duke of Somerset* being vpon a iourney towards the *North*, in case S<sup>r</sup> *William Herbert* M<sup>r</sup> of the horse had not assured him that he should receiue no harme, would haue raised the people, and that he had sent the *Lord Gray* before to know who would be his friends, also that the *Duke of Northumberland*,

the *Marques of Northampton*, the *Earle of Pembroke*, and other *Lords* should be inuited to a banquet, and if they came with a bare company to be set vpon by the way, if strongly, their heads should haue beene cut off at the place of their feasting. (Hayward 1630, p. 130)

Had it come off, this would have been a pure cold-blooded massacre, and Somerset's alleged planning of it implicitly brands him as both unchivalric and un-English.

As well as the feasts associated with him, another reason for Saint George's continued prominence in popular culture was the fact that he cut an easily identifiable figure. We have already seen both William Fulke and the entertainment for Princess Elizabeth's marriage refer to him as 'saint George on horseback', and this was clearly a stock phrase. Another aspect of St George's appearance was also proverbial. In the anonymous 1630 text "A Helpe to Memory and Discourse with Table- Talke as Musicke to a Banquet of Wine", the author declares that 'Good Lawes without execution, stand like the picture of St. *George*, with his hand alwayes vp, but neuer striking' (Anonymous 1630), and in a 1645 sermon entitled "Reall Thankfulnesse", Simeon Ashe declared that 'I once heard a plain dealing Preacher, compare a remisse Magistrate unto the sign *George on Horse-back*, who standeth all the year with his hand on the Sword, but never strikes' (Ashe 1645) (though this is an accusation that could presumably be levelled at any statue).

In fact, we know from Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, among other texts, that there was a well-established iconography of St George. In chapter xvii, entitled "Of the Picture of S. *George*", Browne observes that "The Picture of St. *George* killing the Dragon, and, as most ancient draughts doe run, with the daughter of a King standing by, is famous amongst Christians; and upon this description dependeth a solemne story, how by this atchieveme[nt] he redeemed a Kings daughter, which is more especially beleevd by the English, whose Protector he is, and in which forme and history, according to his description in the English Colledge at Rome, he is set forth in the Icons or Cuts of Martyrs by Cevallerius' (Browne 1646, p. 258). There is, for instance a surviving wall painting from Nether Wallop in Hampshire of Saint George and a female figure; there are also other such paintings surviving, such as that in St Gregory's Norwich, and it seems a safe assumption that there were still more that are now lost. In 1612, Captain John Smith's "Map of Virginia" noted that 'the most strange fish is a smal one so like the picture of S. *George* his Dragon, as possible can be, except his legs and wings' (Smith 1612, p. 15), and there is also a clear sense that everyone knows what St George looks like in the Beaumont and Fletcher play *Wit Without Money*, in the following exchange between Valentine and his father's former servant Lance:

*Lance.*

I scorne meate, I come for compering, I come to waite upon my charge discretely, for looke you if you will not take your Morgage againe, here doe I lie Saint *George*, and so forth.

*Valentine.*

And here doe I St. *George*, bestride the Dragon, thus with my Lance.

*Lance.*

I sting, I sting with my taile.

*Valentine.*

Doe you so, doe you so Sir, I shall taile you presently.

*Francis.*

By no meanes doe not hurt him.

**Valentine.**

Take his Nellson, and now rise, thou maiden Knight of Malligo, lace on thy helmet of enchanted sacke, and charge againe.

**Lance.**

I play no more, you abuse me, will you goe.

(Beaumont and Fletcher 1640)

This is, in effect, a mini-playlet of St George and the dragon and is clearly predicated on the assumption that everyone involved knows what happens and what it should look like.

### 3. St George and Christopher Marlowe

Perhaps the most celebrated painting of St George today is by Pisanello, who in 1438 painted a two-part fresco in the church of Sant'Anastasia in Verona that is now generally known as "St George and the Princess of Trebizond". Although the princess whom St George saves is by no means always associated with Trebizond, I think it is suggestive that Trebizond is an important location in a play, which on the face of it is not remotely like the usual story of St George because no one in it is even faintly chivalric: Marlowe's two-part barnstormer *Tamburlaine the Great* includes the King of Trebizond among the *dramatis personae*. Orcanes figures Trebizond as crucial to the two-way traffic between Europe and Asia, in which Part 2 in particular is interested:

Danubius' stream, that runs to Trebizond,  
Shall carry, wrapped within his scarlet waves,  
As martial presents to our friends at home,  
The slaughtered bodies of these Christians.

(Marlowe 1981, Part Two, I.i.33–36)

For Orcanes, Trebizond is geographically liminal, and it was also temporally liminal, for though it is clearly here still part of Christendom, the empire of Trebizond fell in 1461, eight years after Constantinople; its last emperor, David Comnenos, was initially pensioned off to honourable exile in Adrianople, but he and six of his seven sons were executed by the Sultan in 1463, with only the youngest, who was named George after the saint, being spared. But even if *Tamburlaine* the play is interested in a location that could be connected with St George, surely *Tamburlaine* the character is no St George himself? He may marry a foreign princess, but Zenocrate is not from Trebizond, and he does not rescue her from a dragon. Yet perhaps a century or so after Marlowe wrote his play, another text, the anonymous "An Excellent Ballad of St George for England", does connect *Tamburlaine* to St George when it lists him amongst a number of figures whose achievements supposedly did not equal those of St George:

*Tamerlane* the Emperor,  
In Iron Cage did Crown,  
With all his bloody Flags  
Displayd before the Town

The ballad seems to have been first published in 1693, and since it refers to Gustavus Adolphus, it cannot be earlier than the 1630s, but it might help us to notice that *Tamburlaine the Great* does borrow from Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (which Marlowe must have seen in manuscript). The first book of *The Faerie Queene* is centred on the Redcrosse Knight, a version of St George that Beatrice Groves suggests may borrow from the iconography of inn signs representing the saint, another significant aspect of his continuing cultural prominence in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and may capitalise on the saint's association with unfinished action to highlight its portrayal of the Knight's quest as unfocused (Groves 2010, p. 372). Moreover, St George was also a figure of interest to the other author whose still-unpublished writing is quoted in the play, Paul Ive (Marlowe 1981, p. 19). In 1589, two years after the composition of Marlowe's play but a year before its publication, Ive

translated Guillaume du Bellay's *Instructions sur le Faict de la Guerre* as *Practise of Fortification*, and wrote of how

in the time of King Lewes the 11. . . . the horssemen of Fraunce caryed the name about all other, as well for their readinesse, as for their furniture . . . they were wiser then to destroy the selues with apparrell, as Gentlemen do at this day, but they were armed lyke S. George.

(Du Bellay 1589, p. 64)

It may not mean very much, but it is a rather eye-catching coincidence that the two authors whose work Marlowe is known to have consulted in manuscript should both have been interested in St George. It may also be suggestive that the real name of the Albanian national hero Scanderbeg, 'the man whose name is most often evoked by early modern commentators in the context of Tamburlaine' (McInnis 2012, p. 71), was George Castriot, and that he claimed to have been inspired by a vision of St George (Hodgkinson 2004, p. 95).

In fact, Süheyla Artemel considers that 'Tamburlaine himself bears a striking resemblance to St. George, and the Turkish Sultan . . . harks back to the Turkish Knight of the mummings' plays' (Artemel 1995, p. 198), in which St George marries the daughter of the king of Egypt just as Tamburlaine marries Zenocrate, whose father is the Soldan of Egypt, and fights a Turkish knight just as Tamburlaine fights Bajazeth. Marlowe, whose parish church was St George the Martyr in Canterbury, later uses the saint to reveal the contested nature of patriotism in *Edward II* when both sides claim to be authorised by him:

*Warwick* Saint George for England and the barons' right!  
*Edward* Saint George for England and King Edward's right!  
(III.ii.35–36)

Insofar as *Tamburlaine* too evokes St George, it is in a similarly divided and divisive way. St George's colours are red and white; Tamburlaine adds black, and thus converts chivalry to massacre and romance to *realpolitik*, while the doctor who attends Tamburlaine in his final illness cannot perform any feats of resurrection. The play's faint invocation of the St George story thus tinges it with a typically Marlovian scepticism and cynicism.

*Tamburlaine's* interest in Trebizond is picked up in Richard Johnson's prose romance *The Most Famous History of the Seaven Champions of Christendome*, first published in 1596 and much influenced by Marlowe. When St George's wife Sabra, daughter of King Ptolemy of Egypt, gives birth to triplet sons called Guy, Alexander, and David (Johnson 1596, p. 191), David, who is to be a scholar, is sent 'to the Uniuersity of Wittenberg, beeing thought at that time to bee the excellentst place of learning, that remayned throughout the whole world' (Johnson 1596, p. 212). Though Wittenberg was later to feature in *Hamlet* and *Hoffman*, in 1596, Johnson could have found it in drama only in *Doctor Faustus*, and Marlowe is echoed again when St George declares that 'for seauen yeares I dranke the Channell water' (Johnson 1596, pp. 137–38), a direct echo of Edward II in his prison cell, when the inhabitants of Tripoli turned on St George and 'made a massaker of his seruants' (Johnson 1596, p. 142), and when one of Sabra's babies 'lay in his cradle smiling like Cupid vpon the happe of Dido, whome Venus changed into the liknes of Ascanius' (Johnson 1596, p. 196); 'massaker' looks like a glance at *The Massacre at Paris*, and the story of Venus swapping Cupid and Ascanius is central to *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. Johnson, it seems, directly connects the story of St George with Marlowe.

#### 4. St George in Other Plays

There is also a later dramatization of the story told by Johnson's romance, in the shape of a play called *The Seven Champions of Christendom*; this was traditionally attributed to John Kirke, but Paul Merchant notes that 'John Freehafer has . . . collected a number of topical allusions in the play which would date it around 1613–1614, a little early for Kirke' and argues instead for Heywood (Merchant 1978, p. 227). Act Two of the play

opens in Trebizond, which is suffering from an infestation of monsters (a dragon and a lion), which the unnamed emperor attributes to the wrath of the gods. The monsters are dispatched not by St George but by two others of the seven champions, SS Andrew and Anthony, but although St Andrew was traditionally the apostle of Trebizond, it remains unconverted even after his departure, as if it is still waiting for the intervention of St George. One possible reason for this slightly awkward relationship between Andrew and George may be suggested by Thomas Dekker's 1603 pageant entitled *The magnificent entertainment giuen to King Iames, Queene Anne his wife, and Henry Frederick the Prince, vpon the day of his Maiesties tryumphant passage (from the Tower) through his honourable citie (and chamber) of London*, which opens with the description of how 'Saint George, Saint Andrew, (the Patrons of both Kingdomes) hauing along time lookt vpon each other, with countenances rather of meere strangers, then of such neare Neighbours, vpon the present aspect of his Maiesties approach toward *I ondon*, were (in his sight) to issue from two seuerall places on horsebacke, and in compleate Armour, their Brestes and Caparisons suited with the Armes of *England* and *Scotland*, (as they are now quartered) to testifie their leagued Combination, and newe sworne Brother-hood. These two armed Knights, encountering one another on the way, were to ride hand in hand, till they met his Maiestie' (Dekker 1604). Given the advent of the Scottish king, it might well seem tactful for St George to step aside and leave the starring role to St Andrew, and yet the play does not quite seem to want to fully commit to that when St Andrew fails to achieve the conversion of Trebizond.

*The Seven Champions of Christendom* was not the only text in which St George had a son; he was also often declared to be the father of the folk-hero Guy of Warwick (Cooper 2006, p. 121), whom a line in Shakespeare's and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* instantiates as an important figure: 'I am not Samson, nor Sir Guy, nor Colbrand' (Shakespeare and Fletcher 1971, V.4.22). It may conceivably be this alleged connection between George and Guy which prompted the mention of 'poor Sir Guy' in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, whose pseudo-chivalric episodes include several references to St George (Beaumont [1915] 1971, II.viii.96, III.ii.143, III.iv.33, V.i.93, and V.ii.86–87). The anonymous play *Guy of Warwick*, which is difficult to date but may possibly belong to the 1590s, is set in the reign of King Athelstan, and seventeenth century writers might just conceivably have been aware that Athelstan plays an extremely important part in the legends of the Freemasons; the Masonic Order of Athelstan believes itself to date from 926 and to have been founded by Athelstan in York, after he had become the first southern English king to reclaim it from the Vikings, and in *Guy of Warwick*, King Athelstone mentions 'King Solomon's Temple' (III.81). Perhaps this apparent hint of the esoteric was a way of deflecting the dangerous overtones of Catholicism clinging to the story of someone who was traditionally the son of a saint, but if so it was not wholly successful: the play is clearly nervous about Guy's sudden vow of 27 years of chastity, for which no reason is ever given, and the best it can think of seems to be to parody it in the subplot of the clown Philip Sparrow. Nevertheless, the Guy story was popular: Helen Cooper observes that 'Although there is only one surviving text of a Guy play, it seems likely that one dramatic version or another could have been seen in every decade from the 1580s to the closing of the theatres in 1642' (Cooper 2007, p. 188), and notes, for instance, that *A Play of the Life and Death of Guy of Warwicke* by Dekker and Day was licensed on 15 January 1620 (Cooper 2007, p. 189). If St George was being downplayed because of Protestant unease about saints, perhaps his 'son' Sir Guy was substituting for him.

## 5. St George and Shakespeare and Fletcher

I have already mentioned the reference to Guy in a play cowritten by Shakespeare, who would have had particularly good reason to be aware of him both on the south bank of the Thames where he worked and in Stratford where he had grown up: Samantha Riches notes that 'it would have been difficult to avoid St George in Southwark, for there are nine sites in the borough . . . that are specifically linked through either name or imagery with either the saint or dragons' (Riches 2015, p. 127), and she also draws attention to the fact that one of the wall paintings in the Guild Chapel at Stratford, which Shakespeare's father

was responsible for painting over, was of St George (Riches 2000, p. 119). St George is most famously remembered in Shakespeare in *Henry V*, but Sujata Iyengar suggests that the saint may also be glanced at in another play Shakespeare cowrote with John Fletcher. She observes that the Morris dance in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* ‘recalls the Mummer plays of St. George, who fights not only a dragon but also, as in Richard Johnson’s sixteenth-century chapbook, “the black king of Morocco”: in a reenactment of the Crusades, the patron saint of England achieves sainthood in opposition to a pagan king’, and she argues that ‘the Shakespearean morris uses the dance’s foreign origins to assert a national English identity in the process of formation’ (Iyengar 2007, p. 88). Certainly *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* seems to connect the morris to St George when it both evokes the saint and has Ralph coming in as a May lord with talk of him dancing a morris (Beaumont [1915] 1971, IV. v.76–78), and the fact that Jasper is believed dead but is ‘resurrected’ might also recall the doctor element of mumming plays.

Iyengar also notes a reference to St George in a play sole-authored by Fletcher (though heavily engaged with Shakespeare), *The Woman’s Prize*:

Instead of rescuing a woman from a dragon, Petruchio may be made to run like “Saint George at Kingston” from the “furious dragon” that Maria’s father identifies as his daughter . . . The woman who threatens Petruchio is the only one who can save him; Maria becomes both Saint George *and* the dragon, Petruchio, the damsel in distress. (Iyengar 2007, p. 90)

The passage Iyengar refers to here is Petronius’ warning to Petruchio that

Tomorrow morning we shall have you look,  
For all your great words, like St George at Kingston,  
Running a-footback from the furious dragon  
That with her angry tail belabours him  
For being lazy. (Fletcher 2010, i.iii.18–22)

Lucy Munro’s note for her New Mermaids edition suggests that this refers ‘either to an inn sign at Kingston upon Thames . . . or to a routine in a morris dance’ (Fletcher 2010), but it is surely equally possible (and perhaps more likely) that it remembers a time when a performance went wrong rather than something that was routine, while ‘a-footback’ is an obvious parody of the proverbial St George on horseback. Here the familiar iconography of Saint George is comically inverted in ways that show it was still current and readily available, and the passage also seems to suggest that some kind of performance about St George had occurred within recent memory.

## 6. St George and the Cavendish Family

I want to close by considering one final, brief appearance by St George. In the 1640s play *The Concealed Fancies*—written by Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, the two eldest daughters of the royalist commander, the Earl of Newcastle, while their family home at Welbeck Abbey was under siege by the parliamentarians—it is as if the world of *The Faerie Queene* has come hideously alive. The only way to counter the nightmare is to fall back on the discourse and conventions of romance in the hope that they will afford a structure that may contain the chaos of the conflict; thus, when Courtley says that Presumption must be the first to divulge the name of his mistress, Presumption exclaims ‘What! Must I be St George?’ (Cavendish and Brackley 2015, I.i.37), equating himself with the hero whose story opens *The Faerie Queene*. St George was an implicitly royalist figure—in 1629–1630 Rubens painted St George with the features of Charles I (Riches 2015, p. 109), and Peter Heylyn’s 1631 *The Historie of that Most Famous Saint and Souldier of Christ Iesus; St. George of Cappadocia* was dedicated to Charles I—and also one who might have appealed to Cavendish and Brackley, because their father Newcastle was famous for his horsemanship, and Samantha Riches posits that there may have been a ‘general association between St George and the welfare of horses’ in England (Riches 2015, p. 73). Moreover, an allusion to



the saint might have seemed particularly pointed in 1644–1645, when the play was probably being written. Peter Heylyn's 1645 *Parliaments Power in Lawes for Religion* notes that while St George's day survived the initial 1536 cull of saints' days, it is no longer observed:

For whereas it was found in the former times that the number of the holy daies was grown so great, that they became a burden to the common people, and a great hindrance to the thrift and manufactures of the kingdome; there was a *Canon* made in the *Convocation. An. 1536*, for cutting off of many superstitious and superfluous holy daies, and the reducing them unto the number in which now they stand (save that *St. Georges day*, and *Mary Magdalens day*, and all the Festivals of the blessed Virgin had their place amongst them). (Heylyn 1645, pp. 24–25)

St George's day, which had survived the Protestant reformation, thus finally fell foul of the Puritan commonwealth.

Royalists, however, continued to observe the date, as is clear from the 1644 *Holls Managing of the Kingdoms Cause*: 'Not many daies after came the *Duke of Yorke*, the *Prince Elector*, the *Earl of Newport*, the *Lord Willoughby*, and some other persons of Honour: with their Attendants to see the Town, who were respectively entertained by the Major and the Governour, who spending that day in viewing the beauty and strength of the Town, were invited to a banquet by the Major, and to dinner by the Governour the next day, being *St. George his day*' (Anonymous 1644b). In *The Country Captain*, a play written by Cavendish and Brackley's father, the Earl of Newcastle, and published in 1649, the heir is assured that once his father is dead, he will be able to 'come to the Assises with a band of Ianisaries to equall the grand Signior, all thy tennants shall at their owne charge make them selves fine & march, like Cavaliers with tyltinge feathers gaudy as *Agamemmons* in the playe after whom thou like a *St George* on horse back, or the high Sheriffe, shalt make the Country people fall downe in Adoration of thy crupper & silver sturrupe' (Cavendish 1649, p. 22); in another of Newcastle's plays, *The Variety*, Manly, a character defined by his nostalgia for the Elizabethan age, thinks wistfully of what it must have been like 'To have seene but a *St. Georges feast* then' (Cavendish 1649, p. 39). When Newcastle's daughters Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley wrote *The Concealed Fancies*, they reach for St George as an icon of Englishness, but like the king and the nobles in *Edward II*, they would have been aware that definitions of Englishness were contested, and that St George stood for what had been lost, as much as, if not more, than for what had survived.

## 7. Conclusions

St George, then, offers various possibilities to Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline dramatists. For Marlowe, Tamburlaine can parody the St George story in something of the same way as *The Jew of Malta* parodies the Bible. For whichever playwright adapted Richard Johnson's romance *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, pairing St George with St Andrew became a way of acknowledging the accession of a Scottish king. For Beaumont, Fletcher, and Shakespeare, St George offers a way of talking both about romance and about Englishness and of selling foreign travel as adventurous and exciting. For Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, St George remains an icon of English identity and also of romance, but chivalric romance has turned into civil war, and to these royalist sisters, the very idea of Englishness seems imperilled. He is, however, still a resonant and appealing figure for them.

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