1993

Christianity and Social Power in the Works of John Arden, British Dramatist.

Donald Travis Sandley
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/5543

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
Christianity and social power in the works of John Arden, British dramatist

Sandley, Donald Travis, Ph.D.
The Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical Col., 1993
CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIAL POWER IN
THE WORKS OF JOHN ARDEN, BRITISH DRAMATIST

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by

Donald Travis Sandley
B.A., East Texas Baptist University, 1982
M.A., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986
May 1993
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author gratefully acknowledges the patience and teaching of Dr. Les Wade and the exceptional faculty of the Louisiana State University Department of Theatre. This work is dedicated to Lynette Moore Sandley whose faith and sacrifice made this project possible.
British dramatist John Arden evinces an enigmatic and distinctive voice in the ranks of twentieth century playwrights. Arden’s career as a writer spans thirty-five years and includes plays, essays, short fiction and novels. Arden has achieved wide critical acceptance, if not commercial reward. Arden was born and reared in Barnsley, West Yorkshire in 1930, the son of a factory manager. He studied architecture at King’s College, Cambridge and at Edinburgh University. While at Edinburgh Arden became interested in writing for the stage. In 1957 his unpublished radio play "The Life of Man" won a new plays award and attracted the attention of George Devine, the artistic director of the Royal Court Theatre. Over the next five years Arden wrote three plays that were performed at the Royal Court: The Waters of Babylon (1957), Live Like Pigs (1958), and Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance (1959). Following his association with the Royal Court Theatre, Arden became increasingly disinterested in the commercial theatre of London. In 1960 Arden married Irish actress Margaretta D’Arcy and the two began a writing partnership that produced plays for community theatre groups and plays for radio. Their collaborations presented strong political and social messages. In 1966 the Ardens moved to County Galway, Ireland
and have made this their permanent home.

John Arden's place in British dramatic history was described by theatre critic Martin Esslin as one of "a major poet" (Personal Interview, 19 July, 1990). But Arden’s turn to political and social activism alienated many critics. Today Arden works as a novelist, and though he writes about the theatre, his efforts are not intended for stage production.

In the years between his Royal Court association and his more recent work as a novelist, Arden and D’Arcy wrote plays that examined social structures and the distribution of power. This study will focus on the subject of Christianity as a political and social force in selected works from the years 1972 to 1990 (the political and socially conscious works co-authored by Arden and D’Arcy).

Arden examines Christianity as a tool of subjugation for the controlling powers, and as a source of spiritual comfort for the oppressed underclasses. For Arden, the doctrine of "humble service" juxtaposed with a tradition of subjugation makes the paradox of the Christian church one of the most significant shaping factors in Western history, art, and politics. The history of Christianity is, however, one fraught with division, disagreement, and fragmentation. The church in Arden’s work is exposed and revealed to be not divine, but human, fallible, and engaged as an organic
participant in history. Arden's observations on
Christianity are set forth in a descriptive not prescriptive
manner, with a prose laced more with poetry than philosophy.
Arden is not detached from his subject. His concern is
genuine and his mourning over humanity's failures heartfelt.
The examination of history in the works of John Arden is
presented through the eyes of a sympathetic pragmatist. His
position alternately assumes the vantage points of history's
winners and losers, yet finally aligns with the unwitting
victims lost in the fray.

John Arden has been the subject of numerous critical
studies and has been involved in the major surveys of modern
British playwrights. The works most germane to this study
include the following:

(1) John Russell Taylor's *Anger and After* (London:

(2) Simon Trussler's *John Arden* (New York: Columbia

(3) Glenda Leeming's *John Arden* (Harlow: Longman's for
British Council, 1974).


These four studies, focusing primarily on the three
plays written for the Royal Court, provide a concise
in 1985 by Shah Jaweedul Malick for McGill University

v
(Canada) entitled "The Dramaturgy of John Arden: Dialectical Vision and Popular Tradition," covers the work of Arden and D'Arcy from the Royal Court to The Island of the Mighty. It emphasizes the unique voice of Arden, his adherence to popular theatre conventions and his emphasis on non-commercial themes (grounded in a plebeian collectivist bias). Malick's study links Arden to a Brechtian tradition but does not explore the recurring theme of the Christian religion and the social power. Other studies have considered the Ardens' concern with community and power structures, with theatre and social organization. This study will be the first to look at the Ardens' use of Christianity in history as a theme for their works.

The essay collections of Arden and Arden/D'Arcy will provide primary evidence concerning the authors' intent and the authors' thematic influences. Two collections of essays are in print at the time of this writing: To Present the Pretence (London: Eyre Methuen, Ltd., 1977) and Awkward Corners (London: Methuen, Ltd., 1988).

This study will provide critical analyses of the six works that most clearly embrace the subject of Christianity authored by Arden or the partnership of Arden and D'Arcy. The study will focus upon the unique vision Arden has of the church/state relationship in Western society. The use of the term church is a generic usage. No specific denomination,
faction or movement is implied unless otherwise indicated. Church in this discussion will refer to the broad category of Western peoples who call themselves Christians--a major preoccupation of Arden's thought concerns how these peoples have fragmented and formed additional sets and sub-sets of orthodoxy.

An interview with John Arden will provide primary evidence of the author's intent. Much of the biographical information was provided by Arden in the personal interview as well. Interviews with theatre critic Martin Esslin and producer/artistic director Oscar Lewenstein will provide previously unrecorded views of the author's career from two important theatre figures of Great Britain (who are also contemporaries of Arden).

The six works to be examined include: a church drama, two essay collections, a nine-part radio drama, a stage play, and an historical novel. The works are The Business of Good Government, To Present the Pretence, Awkward Corners, Whose Is the Kingdom?, Island of the Mighty, and The Books of Bale. The discussion will trace the evolution of Arden's central themes in a chronological order. A complete Arden Bibliography is provided at the conclusion of this document.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I CHURCH AS A MORPHOTIC FORCE IN ARDEN’S</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EARLY WORK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II THE BUSINESS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT (PLAY):</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARDEN AND D’ARCY’S USE OF THE NATIVITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AS HISTORICAL MODEL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III ISLAND OF THE MIGHTY (PLAY BY ARDEN AND</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D’ARCY): CHRISTIANITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSORBED AND DEFENDED</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV DEFINING ORTHODOXY: POWER AND PERSPECTIVE</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN ARDEN AND D’ARCY’S RADIO PLAY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHOSE IS THE KINGDOM?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V THE SYSTEMS OF THEOLOGY AFFECTING THE</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERARY LANDSCAPE OF JOHN ARDEN’S NOVEL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE BOOKS OF BALE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI CONCLUSIONS: ARDEN AND THE DICHTOMY OF</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHRISTIANITY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CONSULTED</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

This dissertation examines the subject of political and social power in the plays and prose of John Arden and selected works co-authored by Arden and his wife, Margaretta D'Arcy. Particular focus is given to the institution of Christianity and how it may either be used as a tool for the maintenance of established authority or as a vehicle for rebellion. Arden's collected essays, along with a personal interview conducted in August of 1990, provide the starting point for a discussion of four specific works, pieces in which Arden most closely explores the political involvement of Christianity. These four works, The Business of Good Government (1963 by Arden and D'Arcy), The Island of the Mighty (1973 by Arden and D'Arcy), Whose is the Kingdom? (1973 by Arden and D'Arcy), and The Books of Bale (1988 by Arden), serve as the bases of this study's individual chapters and are examined chronologically to reveal how Arden's theory of history and social power has developed over the course of his literary career.

John Arden has used Christian communities and their myths to explain a three-sided power struggle which he believes reoccurs throughout the history of Western society. Arden identifies different forces vying for power: established authorities, rebellious anti-authoritarian forces, and the victimized, indigenous underclasses. This historical model first appears in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance (1960), develops
throughout Arden’s partnership with Margaretta D’Arcy, and finally receives its fullest and most detailed expression in the historical novel, The Books of Bale. Throughout his career, Arden has attempted to balance his urge to criticize and censure the social process with his genuine faith in mankind’s redemptive and creative potential—a paradox that has led many critics to find his work difficult to categorize. In sum, Arden’s artistic development is marked by a nagging social conscience, one that severely indicts the institution of Western civilization. Nonetheless, Arden stridency is ultimately checked by a deep-rooted optimism in the perseverance and indomitable nature of the common man.
Chapter I: Church as a Morphotic Force in Arden’s Early Work

Throughout the career of British playwright John Arden religion and its political uses have proven a preoccupying topic of interest; Arden’s diverse and prolific writings include works for the commercial theatre, church drama, radio drama, novels, short stories, and numerous essays and reviews, almost all of which have examined the issue of Christianity as a shaping force in Western society. This emphasis suggests that the influence of the Church and its history has been considerable on the political and social views of John Arden.

Over the course of his career, Arden’s work has expressed a trilateral view of history and politics, one in which Christianity has acted as a catalyst for much of the social, political, and economic conflict in the Western world. Arden’s historical framework distinguishes between three social groupings: established authorities; rebellious, anti-authoritative forces; and indigenous peoples whose primary aim is survival in their traditional lifestyles. Christianity, and the control over theological orthodoxy, is thus for Arden an outgrowth of the fight for political control.

Arden’s works are not, for the most part, autobiographical. Only The Bagman (1970 radio play) and The
True History of Squire Jonathan and his Unfortunate Treasure (1968 radio play) give the reader an insight into the author's personal political/religious stances and struggles. However, the volume of collected essays, Awkward Corners (co-authored by Arden and his wife, Margaretta D'Arcy) contains some brief statements by Arden on his formulative years and the role that Christianity and his Christian family played in shaping his authorial conscience. The essay "Autobiography 1930-?," for example, creates the impression that the Church and of Christendom appeared to young John Arden as institutions worth fighting for and defending. Importantly, Arden's loyalty derives from social and political concerns--spiritual implications appear minimal. Arden's description of his family, however, provides the strongest evidence available as to why the Church and its social involvement emerged as a principal motif in the playwright's work.

In his essay "Autobiography, 1930-?," Arden describes his maternal and paternal grandparents and their siblings. The descriptions are fond and good-humored; however, Arden's retrospective impressions alert the reader to the extent that Arden believes church and dogma shape one's world view. He describes his maternal grandmother and aunts as

... slightly scared of something. A feeling there of a hostile world full of danger and
and offence, which was precariously kept out of their house: but which at any time might come insidiously (or violently) in. Methodist preoccupation with Sin had much to do with this (Awkward Corners 73).

Arden’s maternal family, the Laylands, were strict Methodists who lived in the northern, coal mining town of Otley, England. Otley remains a poor, working-class area with predominantly liberal politics. According to Arden’s description, Otley was a cold and grim environment that instilled in its people a severe work ethic and an intolerance for "sin." Arden briefly describes the "lamentable" life of his Uncle George, whose mischief and early demise verified the Methodist fear that "the Lord pursues Sin (and Sin, alas pursues the Lord)" (Awkward Corners 74). For Arden, the Methodist dogma was responsible for the driven and prideful aspects of his mother’s personality. Arden’s mother eventually was confirmed in the Church of England, though she never relinquished the sense of responsibility and determination instilled in her by her Methodist upbringing.

As opposed to the Laylands, the paternal side of Arden’s family was upper-middle class Yorkshire, steeped in Tory and Anglican tradition. The playwright describes how the Ardens never fully accepted his mother (or maternal
relatives) due to her (their) politics, her birth place (Otley was not actually in York) and her Methodist faith. The Ardens trace their family roots to the Norman Conquest, a lineage Arden himself finds questionable:

In any event, my Mother was never to be persuaded that the Ardens were in any way a better class of family than the Laylands. Of course, they thought they were, they did have a family-tree, and it ran far back to the days of the Norman Conquest, to before the Norman Conquest, to before even the Anglo-Saxon invasions. They could not claim it ought to be believed: it has presumably been cooked up for some member of the Arden family in the eighteenth century by an officer of the notoriously venal College of Heralds (which is what happened with most Olde English genealogies) (Awkward Corners 78-9).

As Anglicans, the Ardens were keenly aware of class, societal, and political hierarchies. Though Arden is generous, even affable, in his remembrances, he does betray a sense of resentment when relating his paternal grandparents' class pretensions and the influence it brought to bear upon his mother. Arden acknowledges the Ardens' status as "provincial north-country wine merchants," but adds that "sometimes one would have thought they entertained
a secret claim to be kings of England" (79).

In reflecting upon his youth, Arden gives emphasis to his mother's struggle for class acceptance and her renunciation of her Methodist heritage. In northern England of the 1940s and 1950s, the Church of England was the orthodox, official faith of the landed gentry and one of the last vestiges of the feudal tradition. Though Arden's parents did not reject this orthodoxy, they lived and worked in a time of transition. The town of Barnsley, York, where John Arden was born and reared, was not a Tory community (as was the Beverly home of the Arden family). Barnsley was "run by a self-perpetuating mafia of Labour Party Demagogues" (Awkward Corners 80). Arden describes how the local milieu evinced a "socialist-jobs-for the socialist boys" mentality and how its Labour Government rejected any action of the Tory government. This obstinacy resulted in a reactionary politics fueled by suspicion and contempt. Arden's mother, liberal in her political leanings, worked tirelessly for the Citizen's Advice Bureau, an organization headed by the Church of England Rector. Non-aligned in orientation, this group worked to assist struggling families with the red tape of governmental bureaucracy during the war years (i.e., locating relatives, rebuilding damaged homes, etc). Arden observed how this potentially useful service, despite the dedicated volunteers who peopled it, was an
unqualified failure. This was due to the biases of Labour Party agitators and the involvement of the Church of England Rector (his mere association with the state authorized orthodoxy rendered him ineffectual).

In Arden’s description of the bureau we discover the playwright’s central perception concerning the history of church and state. Arden is sympathetic to the concepts of church and state as institutions idealistically aimed at bettering citizens' spiritual and social lives. Through the course of Arden’s work, however, we see his disappointment in the failure of the ideal. The failure, for Arden, is rooted in the pervasive human desire for power and man’s inability to grant liberty to another man. Political and religious movements emerge as efforts of the oppressed to regain a measure of liberty lost. Importantly, once their subjugation is overcome, those who were formerly oppressed create structures that indenture others. Arden indicates that parochialism and partisanship may thus prove the outgrowths of an initially thoughtful and beneficent agenda. For example, according to Arden, the Labour movement in Barnsley was born out of the Coal Mine Strike of 1926 and its failure to bring about substantive improvements in the Barnsley economy (80). However, once in power the Labour Party itself proved restrictive and domineering. For Arden, reactionary movements once entrenched, may thus create their
own hierarchy for the brokerage of power, one often more intrusive and intolerant than its predecessor. Carl G. Gustavson, in fact, describes the phenomenon in his work, A Preface to History, noting the ironies of revolution:

One must decide that a revolution usually replaces a decrepit authority with a vigorous one. The new administration will exercise more effective control than its predecessor, which is likely to result in a positive lessening of individual liberties. At the same time, the removal of the principal abuses existent before the resurrection will give a sense of added freedom (108).

The Labour Movement of Barnsley was an instance of revolutionary phenomenon, displacing Tory authority and its class stratification with an open-society system which based a leader’s right to govern on merit, zeal, and effectiveness rather than genetic inheritance (Brown 329). Arden’s "Autobiography, 1930-?" essay is neither critical of the Labour mafia nor the Tories they opposed. Rather, Arden is unexpectedly matter-of-fact and non-judgemental in tone; his emphasis is placed not so much upon politics but the individual caught in the snarl of demagoguery. The individual’s triumph, born of personal faith and stamina, is finally the keynote that emerges in Arden’s memory.
As a revealing example, Arden relates an anecdote concerning his mother's will and pride in the face of shifting hierarchical structures in the Church (the political implications of Church power-plays appear throughout Arden's biographical prose). After retirement, Arden's parents moved to the North Yorkshire countryside, and, never having owned a car, found themselves at the mercy of public services for transportation to town. Arden's mother had long served in a church ladies' group and enjoyed some degree of influence. In her seventies, however, she saw the coterie being taken over by younger, wealthier newcomers to the village. On one occasion the leader of the group called upon Mrs. Arden to prepare an elaborate and expensive trifle for a joint meeting with a neighboring group—the purpose of the meeting was administrative. Mrs. Arden carefully prepared the dish and awaited the arrival of the leader, expecting to be transported with the trifle to the event. When the woman's car arrived, Mrs. Arden discovered that the leader had arranged room only for the dessert; Mrs. Arden was left at home and out of the process. Arden's mother never attended another meeting, despite the pleas of the ladies and clergymen.

Though seemingly mundane in subject, this anecdote discloses a preoccupation one repeatedly observes in Arden's dramas. Ostensibly, the purpose of the ladies' organization
was to carry out "Christian" charities. No doubt this was the original intent of the group. Time and human foible conspired, however, to create a hierarchical system. Control over church bazaars and other such functions became an issue of contention. At stake was each woman's status in the group and her sense of self-worth, a situation which easily led to bruised feelings. Arden is careful not to assign culpability. The anecdote is related in a tongue-in-cheek fashion; Arden refers to the younger ladies as "intriguers" and describes his mother's response as "a unilateral declaration of hostilities" (Awkward Corners 81-2). The story, however, does indicate something quite important about Arden's perception of social interaction and the hierarchies at work in a communal unit. For Arden, the "issues" (whether they involve dessert, a church bazaar, or international peace) are forfeited by zealous leaders who are more concerned with maintenance of the status quo rather than any social or personal need.

As a dramatist, Arden first began to explore the conflict between the status quo authority and the zealous reformer with the 1959 play, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. Arden believes that the conflict between entrenched authorities and revolutionary forces is endemic to Western society, and with Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, he implies that little can be done to prevent the perineal struggle. In
Sirjeant Musgrave’s Dance is the presence of a third grouping, the non-aligned, indigenous peoples whose primary goal is subsistence and the preservation of an ancient way of life. In the residents of Barnsley and Otley, Arden saw the operations and interests of all three forces and in Sirjeant Musgrave’s Dance he gave this trilateral socio/politico/religious dynamic literary life.

Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance is not a didactic or judgmental play; like Arden’s anecdote about his mother, Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance isolates a hierarchy at work in a northern England town and accounts for the actions and behaviors of individuals attempting to guard and secure their status. The play also examines political leadership and blind allegiance. Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance embodies many of Arden’s most pressing concerns and thus well serves to begin a critical study of Arden’s career and his specific interest in the political and social uses of religion.

In his work John Arden, Frances Gray grants Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance an esteemed position in contemporary drama. Gray observes that "it is rare now to find a considered study of the play that does not start from the assumption that, despite flaws, it is one of the finest plays written in this country in the last three decades" (John Arden 108). Gray points out the diversity of critical opinion attending the play since its appearance on the Royal Court Theatre
stage in 1959; the drama has alternately been declared "absurdist," "wise," "humane," etc. In the preface to the play, Arden himself attempts to explain the nature of the work:

This is not a nihilistic play. This is not (except perhaps unconsciously) a symbolist play. Nor does it advocate bloody revolution. I have endeavored to write about the violence that is so evident in the world, and to do so through a story that is partly one of wish-fulfilment. I think that many of us must at some time have felt an overpowering urge to match some particularly outrageous piece of violence with an even greater and more outrageous retaliation. Musgrave tries to do this... (Plays: One 13).

Arden further suggests that the play focuses on general human traits and does not advocate or prescribe any ideology -- specifically pacifism:

Complete pacifism is a very hard doctrine: and if this play appears to advocate it with perhaps some timidity, it is probably because I am naturally a timid man - and also because I know that if I am hit I very easily hit back: and I do not care to preach too confidently what I am not sure I can practise (13).
Arden seems to stress that he does not want *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* to be read as a one note, political dictum. The play’s "voice" was necessarily non-prescriptive at a time when inflammatory and revolutionary statements were critically in vogue.¹

As with the family members and acquaintances found in his "autobiographical" essay, Arden presents characters who are prone to the failings of human nature, no more, no less. Arden is fond of the characters he creates, but he does not spare them the violence that erupts in the world. In the particular case of *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*, violence results from a charismatic leader’s attempt to impose his messianic vision on those too ill-equipped, or too alienated, to receive it. A focus on three characters in the play will illustrate this point.

The northern coal mining town in which *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* is set is remote, bleak, and desperate. Arden intentionally locates the play out-of-time to avoid evoking any specific events in history. The time, we infer, must be between 1860 and 1890 by virtue of the weaponry—a Gatling gun—and the importance placed on the coal strikes. However, the actions of the characters transcend boundaries of time and locale. Importantly, three figures emerge as principal participants in the struggle for order, authority, and orthodoxy—Musgrave, the Parson, and the Bargee (a ferry
boatman). In their actions we witness the fundamental mechanics of the established authority (represented by the Parson), the revolutionary urge (depicted by Musgrave), and the primitive force struggling for survival (seen in the Bargee). The Parson acts on behalf of the Church and the orthodoxy sanctioned by the state. He describes his function in terms that are as much governmental as pastoral:

No. No, Madam, no. I cannot be seen to countenance idleness, pauperism, beggary. If no one comes to buy your drink, I am sorry for you. But the fact is, Madam, a little less drunkenness and disorder will do this town no harm. The Church is not a speculative bank, you know, to subsidize pot-houses (19).

The Parson defines the role of the Church, or perhaps, for his convenience, redefines the Church's role. He insists that the Church is not in the business of speculative finance, but his Scene ii visit to the tavern aims at cajoling the workers into ending the coal strike (for the benefit of wealthy church members). The Parson is a "magistrate" equipped to strip the house of its operating license and thus undercut the livelihood of the proprietors. Ironically, his function in Arden’s schema is the enforcement and protection of the status quo and its existing hierarchy, rather than the servicing of his
parishioners. The Parson is a hyper-patriot, supportive of above all things state and queen.

The Parson can be viewed as pusillanimous, even craven, in his allegiance to the Mayor and the established authority of the mining town. Yet, Arden does not present a simple, one-dimensional portrait. In the final act of the play, Arden has the Parson speak out and challenge the dangerous Musgrave, declaring that Musgrave’s populist theology is blasphemy. The Parson does not here wield his clerical authority to save his own life. He genuinely believes the social/clerical rhetoric he has enunciated throughout the play. In Act I, scene ii, the Parson and the Mayor have realized the potential political advantage of having the army recruit the most hostile of the striking coal miners; yet, the Parson does not concede to the recruiters moral liberties as a means of inducing the Colliers (coalminers) to enlist. He stands by his duty of upholding an orthodoxy of economics:

Parson

I think I ought to make one thing clear, Serjeant. I know that it is customary for recruiting parties to impress themselves upon the young men of the district as dashingly as possible, and no doubt upon the young women also. Now I am not having any of that. There’s enough trouble in the place as it is. So remember.
Yes, sir. I'll remember.

I want no drunkenness, and no fornication, from your soldiers. Need I speak plainer? (30).

The Parson consequently seems sincere in his commitment to the authoritative order he serves—God, queen, and country—as opposed to the Mayor, who is willing to allow most any deviation from the social norm in order to further his own cause, i.e., the termination of the coal strike.

In Act II, scene iii, the Mayor agrees to buy beer for the Colliers as he stalls until the dragoons' arrival; moreover, he hopes that many of the striking miners (once intoxicated) will enlist in the army. The Parson, while supportive of the army, the Queen's wars, and the economic powers that be, objects to the use of vice as a means to an end. Arden's portrait of the Parson is not deprecating. While Arden does underscore the damage the Parson's blind devotion to the state inflicts upon the spiritual health of the community, the Parson is presented as an honest and sincere figure. Consider the Parson's impassioned address in Act III, scene i.

And Jesus said, "I came not to bring peace but a sword." I know very well that the times are
difficult. As your minister of religion, and as a magistrate, it is my business to be aware of these matters. But we must remember that this town is only one very small locality in our great country (85).

Although this speech may prove jingoistic perhaps, the Parson is convinced of the truth in his message. When Musgrave threatens to open fire on the town with the Gatling gun, only the Parson challenges him. The Parson's hermeneutic of the Gospel—respect for government as respect for Christ—requires him to preserve the social order at any cost. Musgrave's gospel conversely is one of violent rebellion (which targets the violence of the established order). This conflict between the Parson and Musgrave is reflective of the tension described in Arden's autobiographical essay. The Parson is part of an established hierarchy. Like Arden's mother in the story of the dessert, the Parson feels justified to speak with authority, to have a say in the conduct of his community and to dictate (to an extent) the behaviors deemed socially acceptable. Musgrave is the insurgent who unseats the old order and seeks to redefine the community. The Parson defends the right of the Queen to make war on hostile nations; Musgrave rejects outright the notion of state-authorized violence.
Musgrave, like the Parson, believes that he acts with divine sanction. Musgrave's authority, however, does not derive from the Queen's government, the Church, or the economic establishment. Rather, Musgrave believes he is acting upon a unique and individual revelation, one that mandates a mission that is both unavoidable and irresistible. Musgrave is clearly the rebellious force attempting to dislodge the established authority. His zeal for the task, however, clouds his awareness of the human consequences of his actions. For Musgrave, the dissemination of his message is paramount in importance. That message, to convince the mining town that war is wrong, is in Musgrave's mind God's "word." In Act I, scene iii, before the belligerent Hurst (one of the Serjeant's renegade followers), Musgrave cites his authority:

All I'm concerned about this minute is to tell you how you stand. And you stand in my power. But there's more to it than a bodily blackmail - isn't there? - because my power's the power of God (35-6).

Musgrave must believe that all his efforts are affirmed by God's authority, or, like the Parson, his actions have no legitimacy. Musgrave explains to Hurst: "Our message without God is a bad belch and a hiccup" (Act I, scene iii).
Musgrave then convinces himself that this "message" has been conveyed to him alone, that he has been specially chosen to spearhead its promulgation. Musgrave, in fact, describes himself as a Moses figure acting in accordance with God's given revelation.

Ultimately, Musgrave is aggrieved by a state of mental anguish that precipitates tunnel vision. Musgrave is blind to any argument save that which bears on "good order" and "discipline" (Plays One 108). The old order, the orthodoxy of the Parson, calls for an imperialist exportation of British authority and Christianity according to the dictates of state and Church. The Parson's order assigns honor to those willing to kill and be killed in the preservation and furtherance of this imperial effort. Musgrave does not oppose killing (his plan is to kill twenty-five in the village in order to shock the community into rebellion); Musgrave, however, does reject imperialism. In the explosive first scene of Act III, Arden moves beyond the bounds of irony and crosses into the realm of outright sarcasm. In the following passage, Musgrave indicts the orthodoxy of the Parson, the Mayor, and the Church of England:

You'll ask me: what's their purpose? Seeing we've beat the Russians in the Crimea, there is no war with France (there may be, but there isn't
yet), and Germany's our friend, who do we have to fight?...We belong to a regiment that is a few thousand miles from here, in a little country without much importance except from the point of view that there's a Union Jack flies over it and the people of that country can write British Subject after their names. And that makes us proud! (88-9).

Musgrave's speech makes three points concerning the old order (or the "bad") order. First, Musgrave claims that the country is of little importance. By placing this play in a temporally ambiguous frame, Arden makes Musgrave's statement timeless; in short, this country is like any country that falls victim to imperialist intentions. Secondly, Musgrave, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, reiterates the British governmental platform—what gives a foreign land importance is not its indigenous culture but British sovereignty and the fact that the Union Jack is planted upon its soil. Finally, Musgrave makes the point that the citizens of an unnamed, victimized land can call themselves British subjects, not that they should want to. To emphasize the speech's sarcasm, Musgrave has his two remaining disciples hoist up the skeleton of Billy, the young soldier from the village who was killed by natives of an "occupied" territory. The irony is persistent in this act as Musgrave
contrasts the soldier's "duty" to his actual employment by
the established order. To Musgrave, the soldier's duty
requires him to protect his country from "enemies of the
Queen," "invaders of his home," and "slavery, cruelty,
tyants." Of course, the faraway land in which Billy died
is not peopled by invaders, or even aggressions. The
British, in fact, have initiated warfare so that these
people might call themselves British subjects. The Parson
and the Mayor are nonetheless blind to the irony and even
believe that Musgrave is endorsing the powers to be.

The struggle between the established orthodoxy of the
parson and the "good order" or new orthodoxy of Musgrave,
eventually gives way to a third puissance represented by the
Bargee, a figure much like the Lord of Misrule found in the
medieval festival tradition. The Bargee embodies Arden's
sense of an innocent (yet chaotic) pre-Christian Britain.
The Bargee revels in disunity and disruption, propelling the
conflict to an eruption of violent celebration in Act III.

In Act I the Bargee conducts the disciples of the
rebellious order (Musgrave and his band) to the site of the
conflict; in the process he antagonizes them and incites
their hostility.

Musgrave

It's not material. We have our duty. A soldier's
duty is a soldier's life.
Bargee

Ah duty.
The Empire wars are faraway
For duty's sake we sail away
Me arms and legs is shot away
And all for the wink of shilling and a drink.
Come on me cheery serjeant, you've not left nowt behind (20).

The Bargee challenges the idea of duty and provokes the soldiers into defending their mission. The Bargee's perspective is objective, even other-worldly. The Bargee shows no sympathy to the ideals Musgrave, in fact, finds sacrosanct. In scene ii, he nevertheless shows an equal contempt for the established authority when he plays on the political obsessions and vanities of the parson to get a free drink at the pub.

Bargee

You're a power, you are: in a town of trouble, in a place of danger. Yes. You're the word and the book, aren't you? Well then: soldiers. Recruiting. Useful?

Parson

H'm. I do not think the Bench is in need of your suggestions. But I am obliged to you for the news (gives him a coin and leaves).
Bargee

Heh, heh. I said I could pay (23).

The Bargee actually does little to impact the dramatic situation, but by his presence and his commentary he expresses a cosmology of disorder. This cosmology is best defined in the pivotal first scene of Act III. Both Musgrave and the Mayor believe they themselves are conducting the proceedings. Musgrave believes he will convince the striking miners to rebel against the Queen’s wars. The Mayor and his aides, the Parson and the Constable, attempt through appeals to the Colliers’ patriotism to end the strike and restore order and economic stability. However, neither Musgrave nor the Mayor is in command. Musgrave’s religious zeal and quest are undermined by his poor choice of disciples; Hurst abandons the cause and turns the gun on Musgrave himself. The Mayor and the Constable are frozen with fear, disoriented by their misreading of Musgrave’s mission. Only the Bargee, who in almost chorus-like fashion represents the voice of the crowd, jubilantly shouts sarcastic assertions. The Bargee is aware that Musgrave will fail, that the Mayor’s authority is limited by time and economics, and that eventually only the miners, the class at the lowest end of the scale, will persist and survive.
The Bargee's "knowledge" implies that a primal innocence equips the victims of hierarchical struggle to survive the violence of their economic and political overlords. In the climactic Act III, scene i of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, this primal knack for survival is clearly dramatized. Chaos ensues when the dragoons arrive, and Musgrave is thwarted. The sequence that follows, however, does not bespeak the order represented by the Mayor and the Parson; it is a primal, even pagan erruption, a revel in which the Mayor and officials join hands and dance around the gallows (much like a May pole dance) while the beer flows freely. In this closing image, Arden has presented a picture of hope and survival, but this optimism is not bred by dogma or sectarian enforcement, rather it issues from man's most primitive instinct for survival.

Motifs of fertility and hope pervade the last act of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. The officer, Attercliff, notes the end of winter in scene ii. Attercliff voices hope that, despite the chaos their actions have engendered, the soldiers will have planted an "orchard." What the orchard represents is unclear. Albert Hunt contends that this image, along with that of the "green apple," embodies Arden's argument that violence is not easily solved and that pacifism may prove an impractical doctrine (Arden: A Study of His Plays 62-3). Frances Gray suggests that the apple is
the symbol of the mission and the hope that future
generations will end all war (John Arden 118-9). Arden’s
own comments are helpful; Arden’s preface to the play
states:

Accusations of nihilism seem to derive from the
scene where the Colliers turn away from Musgrave
and join in the general dance around the beer
barrel. Again, I would suggest, that an unwil­
lingness to dwell upon unpleasant situations
that do not immediately concern us is a general
human trait, and recognition of it need imply
neither cynicism nor despair (Plays: One 13).

Hunt’s assertion that the play attacks the idealistic
(and unrealistic) liberalism that preaches pacifism cannot
be correct if Arden is frank in his preface. The play does
not prescribe any solution, nor does it (as Francis Gray
suggests) prescribe a preferred ideology. The orchard and
the apple are what they seem--fruit, or survival of the
species. Arden, again in the preface, declares:

This is not (except perhaps unconsciously) a
symbolist play. Nor does it advocate bloody
revolution. I have endeavoured to write about
the violence that is so evident in the world,
and to do so through a story that is partly
wish-fulfillment..." (Plays One 13).
The violence that is evident in the world of Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance is the product of three contrasting orders and their struggle for control. The village, iced in, and isolated by time and geography, is a sort of laboratory environment created by Arden where the established authority (presented in part by the Parson) rebuffs the attacks of Musgrave (the rebellious usurper). The indigenous people (the Colliers and the Bargee) attempt to survive by resisting both of the dueling political forces. Arden’s creation of the world found in Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance allows the playwright to present a working model of the trilateral social view Arden understands. Arden’s characters in Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance are not as complex as those found in later works, and yet they provide a view to the approach Arden would take throughout his career.

Arden is observing his own humanity in Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance as much that of the society in which he lives. If the ideals of the characters are unrealistic, it is because Arden during this time of his life found his own ideals impractical. The observations made by Arden in Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance have been sharpened and have developed throughout his career.

Critics have grappled with Arden’s development and the extent to which his works reflect his own vision or that of his polemically oriented wife, Margarettta D’Arcy (Martin
Esslin, Personal interview, 20 July 1990). Certainly D'Arcy has played a significant role in shaping the contour of Arden's work. In order to understand fully how Arden's ideas and sensibility have matured through the course of his career, it is necessary to assess D'Arcy's contribution. D'Arcy's contribution to Arden's work has been substantial. She has drawn her husband into the language of political and religious discourse and prompted his work to become more clearly polemical.

In an interview conducted with Martin Esslin in July of 1990, Esslin indicated his firm belief that the balance and generosity of spirit evident in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance were eroded, even lost, when Arden began his writing partnership with Margareta D'Arcy. Esslin pointed to Arden's radio drama, The Bagman (1970), as a telling instance of this counterproductive effect. The play is both autobiographical and symbolist. The narrator (Arden) is sold a canvas army bag of magic dolls. The dolls perform for the entertainment of those whom the narrator encounters on his walk through life. At last, however, the narrator meets a militant woman (D'Arcy, according to Esslin) who fascinates and enchants him. She takes the narrator to her camp of revolutionaries where he is called upon to perform with his bag of magic dolls. The dolls catch a glimpse of the angry revolutionaries and retreat into the bag, never
again to emerge (Two Autobiographical Plays). Esslin's interpretation of the work suggests the obvious. Before D'Arcy, Arden was simply an observer of the human condition. His dolls—or characters—always enacted in mirror-like fashion the lives of the audience that watched them. When confronted with the demand that he do more than reflect, that he embrace the stance of rebellion, Arden lost his talents, or at least became unable to retrieve them. Near the end of the play, the narrator defends his reluctance towards violence and rebellion and asserts: "All I can do is to look at what I see" (Two Autobiographical Plays 88).

Arden, at the time of writing The Bagman, apparently believed that he was not a revolutionary, or a polemically didactic writer (Personal interview, August 1990). However, this self-appraisal changed. Between The Bagman's initial drafting in 1969 and its publication by Methuen in 1971, the work was produced and broadcast on B.B.C. radio (27 March 1970). During this time Arden and his family were being jailed in India for suspected involvement with insurgents, and Arden became critically ill with hepatitis. Upon his return to London in 1970, Arden met with Martin Esslin (the director of drama for B.B.C. radio) in his office and discussed the broadcast of The Bagman. Arden and D'Arcy listened to the broadcast, and Arden seemed pleased with the play and the production. That is, until Margheretta "gave
him a piece of her mind" (Esslin interview, July 1990). When the work was published in 1971, Arden added a preface in which he describes the work as follows: "It does reflect fairly enough the state of my mind in the spring of 1969. . ." (Two Autobiographical Plays 15-6). But Arden further qualifies the intent of the work by claiming that the narrator is "reprehensible, cowardly, and not to be imitated" (Two Autobiographical Plays 15-6). In an interview with Matthew Hoffman of the London Sunday Times in January of 1980, Arden further attempted to examine the work:

I was interpreted by some critics at the time as absolving the playwright from having anything to do in society. I don’t believe that, and I didn’t believe it then. The play is satire, a self-satire; if I were writing it now I would try to make that clearer (29 January 1980: 52).

If the play was meant to be self-satire, Arden is correct in acknowledging that the satire is not clear. The work seems honest and straightforwardly autobiographical. Esslin remarked that the play did not portray Arden as a reluctant revolutionary; the narrator is more than willing to use his bag of magical performances for the cause of the young woman’s rebellion. The talents of Arden are simply not suited to the fight, just as the little people will not
perform for the Bagman. Surely, Arden must have believed to some extent that he was not a playwright capable of writing overtly revolutionary works. Rather than aligning with radical causes, Arden’s interests and sympathies proved to be not so much with those who rebelled, as with those who suffered in the midst of the rebellion. Arden, through the development of his career, is clearly more fond of those indigenous groups who want simply to live in peace and security. Rebellion in his plays inevitably brings more suffering to the uncommitted and innocent bystanders than to their oppressors and tyrants.

Arden’s 1964 essay entitled "Brecht and the British," in fact, suggests common interests and concerns (Present the Pretence 37-41). Arden admits that Brecht was an unapologetic Communist; he also understands Brecht’s hope that his theatre would bring a "thinking" audience to share his political beliefs. Yet, for Arden, the plays of Brecht are not propagandistic tracts; they are portraits of humanity in work and life (To Present the Pretence 40). Arden contrasts two productions he viewed in East Berlin—one a Stalinist opera, the other a Brechtian drama. The Stalinist opera is described as "monotonous on the stage and [it] did not once astonish its audience" (Present the Pretence 41). Arden saw the Brecht play, on the other hand, as being "impregnated with youth, hope, enthusiasm, and
humour" (To Present the Pretence 40). The difference according to Arden issued from the fact that the Brecht piece emphasized the unpredictability of human beings, that errors and crimes can be committed by persons of any ideology (Pretence 41). Although Arden recognizes the power of strident, agitprop theatre, he is reticent to use it (while D'Arcy is not). Arden trusts that his audience will choose rightly on social, moral, and political matters when given an objective view of the circumstances. Arden believes that this was Brecht's view as well (41). This thread of optimism concerning human judgement runs throughout Arden's entire career and must be considered when examining his trilateral, historical view. Arden believes that those persons uncommitted to the orthodoxy (the official doctrine prescribed by the entrenched authority) or to the cause of revolution are uniquely free to choose either side, or neither side. His optimism holds that the non-aligned will prevail, and that society will be the better for it.

The view of critics such as Esslin, that Arden has been drawn into agitprop theatre by the more militant D'Arcy, has been addressed by both D'Arcy and Arden in essays written separately and in partnership. An example is the "War Carnival" incident described in To Present the Pretence. On a one-semester in 1967, guest residency at New York
University, Arden and D'Arcy allowed their students to create their own theatrical project. In 1967, and the war in Vietnam was very much a part of the campus consciousness. Arden and D'Arcy did not actively support the war in Vietnam, but, by the same token, did not intentionally draw the New York University theatre students into an anti-war protest. The "War Carnival" was an academic exercise in the study of improvisation. Arden describes ensemble improvisation as "perhaps the only force to jerk the theatre forward from the successive ruts in which it sticks year after year" (Pretence 47). Arden gives D'Arcy credit for taking him into the uncharted waters of experimental theatre in the 1960s and 70s and is quick to point out that much of the work she did has now found a degree of mainstream acceptability (even though D'Arcy herself is still considered a social and political pariah by the professional artistic communities of Britain, Ireland, and the United States).

Oscar Lewenstein (former artistic director for the Royal Court Theatre and the English Stage Company) in a July 1990 interview expressed his view that Arden's career in London's commercial theatre was as adversely affected as much by Margareta D'Arcy's public persona as by Arden's artistic choices. Arden, however, points out that D'Arcy was instrumental in arranging the first British tours of the
Bread and Puppet Players and the La Mama Company, both now recognized as principal innovators of the time. The view that D’Arcy has had a radicalizing influence on Arden and a counter-productive impact on his art must be given re-examination. D’Arcy, in fact, may have led Arden to explore certain themes with increased depth and awareness. Also, one must determine the degree to which D’Arcy actually believes her own rhetoric. In many of her more recent essays, it seems that she, like Arden and Brecht before him, simply looks to force people to think. An incident discussed in *Awkward Corners* will serve to illustrate the shared vision of Arden and D’Arcy; it will also emphasize the differences in their artistic expressions.

D’Arcy joined the Greenham Common Woman’s Peace Movement in 1987 (a non-aligned, activist group). The group picketed the RAF/USAF cruise missile base located at Greenham Common and actually lived in a tent community outside the main gates. D’Arcy’s essays describe how the once unified movement finally divided along racial and political lines (*Awkward Corners* 231). D’Arcy became frustrated with those whose allegiance was greater to the Soviet Communist Party than to the cause of peace. Protestors like D’Arcy, who were politically non-aligned, were denied a platform for speech. D’Arcy and others picketed the offices of a Communist Party newspaper, *The*
Morning Star, which by editorial policy refused to print opinions expressed by non-aligned protestors. Eventually D'Arcy and others were arrested and jailed. Throughout the duration of the protest, D'Arcy highlighted the fact that this was not theatre or a theatre event. This was political activity, an enterprise she undertook on her own. As noted in her essay, D'Arcy believed her political involvement to be her own province. Although shared interests make for convenient, common writing ground, D'Arcy relates that she and her husband do not share a great deal of common ground. In fact, in her essay, "Breaking Chains," D'Arcy states that she was initially drawn to Arden by his use of language and his keen historical perspective. Significantly, she did not enjoy his "provincial conservatism" (Awkward Corners 133).

Over the years, Arden has not lost the provincial conservatism he brought with him to the Royal Court Theatre in the late 1950s. Arden has simply become more sympathetic to the cause of the silenced voice (the politically repressed), regardless of ideology and context. Arden’s personal politics are rather difficult to discern. He certainly does not advocate revolution in the manner of D’ArCY. Arden’s autobiographical short story "Fork in the Head" contained in Awkward Corners indeed illustrates the passionate dichotomy that exists in his marriage. The story
concerns an afternoon of anger and fear as the narrator (Arden) returns home to Ireland from a business meeting in London. The narrator expects to find his wife ready to assail him for wasting his trip on adult movies and apolitical diversions. Instead, the narrator discovers that his wife has attended a political rally and has been killed in an altercation with the police. In a frightening scene of guilt, remorse, and bitterness, the narrator looks from the side of his boat to see a vision of his wife dead, underwater, with a fork in her forehead.

The story suggests that Arden does not agree with all or even the majority of D'Arcy's political stances. Also, it reveals the sense of anxiety he feels about losing her and of engaging her wrath. Yet, the fervor D'Arcy brings to her causes draws him to her. Arden seems to be most devoted to the person, not the image. The person of Margaretta D'Arcy challenges the orthodoxy and the would-be orthodoxy. In some measure, Arden may view D'Arcy as a modern representative of the pre-Christian tribal culture embodied by the Bargee in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. The Bargee is a disruptive force (not chaos for chaos' sake) and an unsettling element. D'Arcy's fierce independence and relentless resistance to power structures, religious and political, positions her outside the politics of the right or the left and beyond the theologies of Christendom.
D'Arcy seems out of joint philosophically with the contemporary world. She brings to it a primitive, aggressive, natural sensibility. D'Arcy seems to value most systems that are tribal in structure. According to Arden, she is family-oriented and devotes a great deal of time to her children, regarding them with the same fervor she extends to her writing or demonstrating (Personal interview). For D'Arcy, the survival in the pre-Christian tribal world was born of struggle and resistance; importantly, the strongest of the tribe could survive only if they provided for the weakest. D'Arcy sees her role as playwright as one who exposes ill-provision for the underclass (Awkward Corners 190). In Armstrong's Last Goodnight, Arden explores tribal society and encroaching modern power structures. The central character, Johnny Armstrong, in fact, exhibits traits that bring Margaretta D'Arcy's to mind.

Armstrong's Last Goodnight (1965) stands as Arden's first examination of the trilateral struggle in actual historical events. In this play, Arden reasserts the themes introduced in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance (in 1959); a national orthodoxy rebuffing the challenge of a nouveau theocracy, while a third group, the primal, pre-Christian community struggles against both for survival. The emphasis in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance is on the conflict between the
state orthodoxy and the new, insurgent theology. 

Armstrong’s Last Goodnight focuses attention on the government’s forced eradication of the pre-Christian, "natural" community.

Armstrong’s Last Goodnight is set in early sixteenth century Scotland during the reign of the young James V. Armstrong is one of the last of the feudal lairds and conducts his realm in the manner of a tribal chieftain. Armstrong leads raiding parties into the north of England, stealing money, valuables, and livestock. Lindsay is the young king’s tutor and chief aide-de-camp. Armstrong’s continued excursions provoke the English into threatening war, a turn of events that prompts the young king to send Lindsay as ambassador to Armstrong. Lindsay is accompanied by his mistress (whom Armstrong seduces) and McGlass, Lindsay’s secretary. Throughout the play a character referred to only as "the evangelist" appears, espousing a reformation oriented gospel and calling the Scots to repentance. Lindsay is the embodiment of diplomacy, social grace, and the established orthodoxy (the Catholic Church). Armstrong is the primal man. In contrast to the quick wit and poetic verse displayed in Lindsay’s dialogue, Armstrong stammers and struggles with verbal expression. Armstrong’s most effective communication is conducted at the animal level—in killing, seducing, and hunting.
A contrast of significant speeches in the text reveals the essential distinction between Lindsay and Armstrong. In Act III, scene xii, Lindsay’s plan has been all but accomplished, drawing the unsuspecting Armstrong out of his castle for capture and hanging. Lindsay delivers a poignant ode upon the irony of his success:

I did swear a great aith
I wad wear this coat nae further
Till Armstrong be brocht
Intil the King’s peace and order.
To gang against his house
As ane man against ane many
Through craft and through humanity -
Alas, and mortal vanity,
We are but back whaur we began.
A like coat had on the Greekish Emporour
When he rase up his brank like a butcher’s cleaver:
There was the knot and he did cut it.
And deed of gravity. Whadaur dispute it? (340).

In sum, Lindsay finds his own loyalty to state policy distasteful, resulting in deceit and amorality: he questions the legitimacy of his beliefs.
Armstrong, to the contrary, relishes the few remaining moments of his life and does not wax philosophical or regretful; he revels in his life and offers up a song.

To seek hot water beneath cauld ice
Surely is ane great follie
I hae socht grace at a graceless face
And there nane for my men and me.

King
I said to you to hange him up. For what do you wait?

Armstrong
But had I wist ere I cam frae hame
How thou unkind wadst be to me
I wad hae keep it the border side
In spite of all thy men and me (347-8).

Armstrong’s song is not one of remorse either for his life or the choices he has made. Armstrong, rather, is accusatory, laying the blame for his end and that of his tribal way of life (of which he is "ane gentleman of land and lineage"), upon the king, who has been "unkind" or dishonest in conducting his affairs of state.

Plotwise, the evangelist’s function in the play is minimal. In Act III an argument ensues between the evangelist and McGlass, Lindsay’s secretary, over the cause of the madness of the young woman, Meg. McGlass condemns
her as a murderer and a follower of Armstrong. The evangelist, in an adamant declamation of the priesthood of the believer, defends her soul, claiming, "I did trow she was penitent" (334). But McGlass persists with his orthodox-inclined argument, implying that the evangelist is employing his ministerial posture for carnal uses, "Is it no reciprocate in your body? It is indeed, consider: maist certain ye do feel ane risen lust within you! She hath hauld upon your garment - look!" (335). In a fit of frustration and anger, the evangelist takes the dagger from McGlass's belt and stabs him.

The evangelist, as a character, parallels Musgrave. The evangelist carries the message that the orthodox, state religion has failed to engender a social gospel, one that redeems and elevates the whole of society. The evangelist refers to Scotland under Lindsay and James V as "this barren land of Anti-Christ and corruption" (331). Like Musgrave, the evangelist is unable to distinguish between his own zeal and the reform itself. Just as Musgrave is willing to ignore the murder of Sparkey as immaterial, and to turn the Gatling gun upon the townsfolk, the evangelist commits an act of murder, killing McGlass in an attempt to rid the community of a sinner. For the evangelist, like Musgrave, the end justifies the "sin." Logic is lost in the fervor and zeal of revolution. (Arden expanded on this notion in
later works by creating central characters—with whom the author is clearly sympathetic—who are consumed and disoriented by political or religious ideals).

Arden admits that Armstrong's Last Goodnight is based loosely on figures drawn from history. In works following, Arden also uses historical figures and settings, a strategy that highlights timeless principles of social organization and patterns of conflict and struggle. These works place an increasing degree of emphasis on the involvement of Christianity in cultural and political formation.

Arden has moved interchangeably from subjects of history (i.e., Armstrong and Bale) to subjects of myth or ritual (King Arthur and the Christ Child). For Arden, history and myth are similar in that they are both cultural products, efforts aimed at explaining and entrenching social and political structures. Through the course of his career, Arden has viewed myth and history with skepticism, hostility, and, more recently, sympathetic resignation. Arden’s use of myth and history in his work has also moved from institutional or national commentary to a more individual exploration of persons who create and people the histories and myths. The common element to all of Arden’s artistic endeavors is his focus on Christianity, which serves as a barometer of individual liberty. For Arden,
prevailing doctrines in Christianity mirror the political and social climates of Western history.

This study will examine the evolution of Arden's thought concerning Christianity and its involvement in the hierarchical and political structures of Western civilization. Starting with the church drama, *The Business of Good Government*, and advancing chronologically to the novel, *The Books of B a l e*, this study will highlight Arden's progressive fascination with political dynamics and the illustration of orthodoxy (as it has been projected through history). Arden's views will be contrasted to those of historians, theologians, and social theorists in an effort to delineate the unique vision of Arden, a playwright Martin Esslin referred to as "a major poet" (Personal interview, July 1990).
Notes

1 Arden on File, compiled by Malcolm Page, contains a biographical chronology, and John Arden by Frances Gray contains biographical references. No comprehensive biography of John Arden's life has as yet been published.

2 In a July 1990 personal interview, theatre critic Martin Esslin stated his belief that Arden's strength as a writer in his early career lay in his willingness to avoid prescriptive political and social themes. Esslin contrasted Arden with John Osborne, whom Esslin termed a "Johnny-one-note," for Osborne's insistant anger and incivility. Arden was, for Esslin, the much superior playwright in the early sixties.
Works Cited


Esslin, Martin. Personal interview. 27 July 1990.


Chapter II - The Business of Good Government: Arden and D'Arcy's Use of the Nativity as Historical Model

The political and social function of myth and history emerged as a central theme of John Arden's work early in his playwriting career. Arden became interested in the re-examination of myths and history from alternative viewpoints as a means of analyzing the impact of events (political and religious) on the lives of the underclass (Personal interview. August 1990). The Business of Good Government (1963) was Arden's first published work to focus upon a specific mythical or historical event as a means of re-evaluation.

In The Business of Good Government, a play written by Arden and his wife, Margareta D'Arcy, the Ardens examine the nativity of Christ not just as a religious event but as an historical event, one like any event affected by social contexts and political power play. The Ardens again utilize the trilateral model of social/historical process used in Armstrong's Last Goodnight. The Business of Good Government, however, does not strike a balance between the established authority and the revolutionary. The Business of Good Government is centrally about Herod, the reigning authority, and how he resists revolution and the threat to established order. The Ardens employed a style that they knew would be familiar and acceptable to their English
country audiences (i.e., a medieval mystery play), in order to involve a church congregation in the exploration of this significant historical event (Personal interview, August 1990).

The Business of Good Government was written "specially" for St. Michael’s Anglican Church in Brent Knoll, Somerset, in 1960. Upon attending services in the church, Arden became intrigued with the theatricality of the structure’s architecture. The chancel in the church was raised four feet higher than the nave and included no screen. Arden offered to write a Christmas play for the space to be performed by and for the congregation.¹ In an August 1990 interview, Arden recalled the process and aim he and D’Arcy employed. In retrospect, Arden believes that the play had a two-fold purpose. First, he and his wife wished to retell the Christmas story in a simple and accessible fashion, much in the manner of a medieval mystery play. Secondly, Arden hoped to shed new light on conventional characterizations found in the biblical narrative. A survey of his succeeding works reveals that this brief, but significant, 1960 work marked a turning point in Arden’s career, indicating a shift in the subjects and themes of his solo projects and his collaborations with Margaretta D’Arcy.

With The Business of Good Government, Arden began to take more license with the recounting of historical events.
The fictional "additives" to history are a consistent trait of Arden's work from this point on, and he would use this strategy to emphasize his view of historical power play.

The Business of Good Government focuses on a recognizable and prominently regarded historical mythology—the nativity. The reworking of the story, along with the humanization of its characters, offers a political "parable" for the audience to analyze and evaluate. Arden, in fact, uses the term "mythology" in reference to the biblical account, neither to denigrate those who adhere to the factuality of the story nor to comment himself on the veracity of the gospel narrative, but rather to define more clearly the role of the gospel story in Western civilization. Throughout history, the gospel myth has been employed by clerics, governments, and sundry charlatans to justify a virtually infinite variety of practices, abuses, and invasions of personal privacy. (Arden would later explore the historical uses of the Gospel for political power in works like Whose is the Kingdom? and Books of Bale.) As a case in point, D'Arcy notes the male-centered interpretation of the Gospel espoused by the Church in England and Ireland. For D'Arcy, this "misuse of the Gospel" has served as a means of subjugating women and is a blatant attempt to relegate them to home and "breeding" (Awkward Corners 147-8). The Ardens' first look at this
myth is interestingly affectionate, sympathetic, even hopeful (regarding the truth of its message).

Albert Hunt has noted the affirmative nature of the Ardens' nativity play and suggests that the authors are 
... not putting a question mark against the supernatural events or trying to explain them away. They accept them as given and incorporate them into the more general mysteries of birth, growth, death which are at the heart of the folk-poetry he uses in the play (111).

What Hunt has not acknowledged is that the Ardens are not merely incorporating "the singular miraculous event into a general mystery of life" picture (111). Rather, the Ardens have assumed a traditional Christian voice in the telling of this tale, one that emphasizes the ideology of the gospel narrative, at least the ideology derived from the hermeneutic of these playwrights. The Ardens would define in later works (particularly Whose is the Kingdom?) a doctrine which devalued the Pauline idea of a spiritual kingdom in the afterlife. The Ardens thought the Gospels clearly present a Christ who called for a spiritual kingdom in this earthly life (Awkward Corners 238). The Ardens thus view the Gospel account of the Christ Child's birth as offering hope more for the living than for the dead. For the Ardens the miraculous is possible in human existence and
is perhaps its apotheosis. Also inherent in the Ardens' confirmation of the Christ myth is an optimistic belief in redemption of all individuals.

At the outset of the play, the Ardens indicate their acceptance of the Christian myth by adopting a structure that resembles the worship. A processional begins The Business of Good Government in which all the characters are led into the sanctuary by the Angel. The characters sing a carol of praise and rejoicing:

And all the bells on earth did ring,
On earth did ring, on earth did ring,
A welcome to our heavenly King,
On Christ’s Sunday at morn
(Business of Good Government 17).

The Angel then addresses the congregation and the players in the manner of a predicant conducting worship. He recites the familiar declamation from the Gospel of Luke, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill towards men" (18). Assuming the role of predicant again on two later occasions in the drama, the Angel delivers a sermon of warning from the book of Revelations and concludes the play with a hymn of praise.
The Angel also functions as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Arden's comments, however, would tend to refute this suggestion:

The play is realist in that the characters stand for themselves as Shepherds, Wise Men, Kings, and what have you, and are not intended to carry symbolical or psychological overtones (Business of Good Government 10).

A footnote to the preface nonetheless highlights the Angel as a special instance; Arden writes that the "Angel in this play is not only a Divine Messenger, but also the presenter of the Play, the Prompter, Herod's conscience, a kind of Devil, and a palace official," (10-11). The Angel does not function as a devil in the Faustian sense or like the Satan that appears in the Gospel of Mark (as Christ's temptor). The Angel of Ardens' work interacts at will with each character in the play, forcing them to consider the supernatural consequences of the events which are unfolding before them. The Angel in their nativity play thus emphasizes the kind of deity the Ardens wish to portray. He betokens a God who is active in building a spiritual kingdom within the earthly lives of his people. In the court of King Herod, for example, the Angel acts as an agent of reason, persuading the King to weigh these events with due consideration. The Angel is here Old Testament in nature
and akin to the angel of the Exodus account (Exodus 14:1-12). In the Exodus story, Pharaoh is blinded to God by the supernatural actions of the Angel. The resulting image of Pharaoh thus presents a stark contrast to Moses, who wants to free God's people. Why God chose to "harden" the heart of Pharaoh is a mystery, and the Ardens find use for the mysterious actions of God as well.

The Angel in *The Business of Good Government* prompts Herod to make decisions expeditious to the delivery of the Christ Child and the fulfillment of prophecy. In his meeting with the wisemen, Herod is confused by their message and mission and is ready to dismiss the encounter as an act of international espionage. The Angel, however, goads him to further reflection.

*Herod*

What are they talking about? Everybody knows I have had no children.

*Secretary*

There must be a mistake.

*Herod*

Whose mistake? Mine? What has this to do with Persia? Each of these men dangles from the King of Persia's fingers.

*Angel*

Be careful.
Herod

I will be careful...Gentlemen, we are not at one.

Your stars have deceived you (21).

The Angel interacts with Herod again when the wisemen visit the court a second time. On this occasion the Angel chides him to think and act as a king. The Angel is again serving as the agent of God, conducting mysterious activity on the behalf of the Divine. The Ardens appear to use the Angel as a means of depicting divine activity in historical terms, of bringing the supernatural to the realm of the visible, the immediate, the political.

In an interview in The Theatre at Work, Arden admits that the historical Herod does appear to have been a despot (Theatre at Work 47). Yet, Arden finds it necessary to create a different portrayal of the well known figure. In The Business of Good Government, Herod is presented as an unsure leader, not a malicious tyrant. Herod’s actions in the Ardens’ play stem from his personal fear and the urgings of supernatural influence. Herod acts as he must. Given its deterministic quality, the theology of the play seems at odds with the Ardens’ stated intent—for the play to show "the evil in the world and how evil was it," (Personal interview, August 1990). To a large degree, Arden stresses free will in this play. The Angel intervenes at critical, vulnerable moments in Herod’s ruminations, directing him
toward specific trains of thought, much in the manner of an Old Testament angel or "spirit of the Lord." The Angel does not force Herod's decisions, and Herod's free choices are in contrast to the directives given to the holy family (to flee to safe haven in Egypt). The Angel is a poetic representative of the intangible. By using the Angel as a symbolic force, interacting with historical figures, the Ardens create a world grounded in real time but subject to the intervention of the Divine.

The speech of the holy family, Herod, and the shepherds is utilitarian and natural. This contrasts to the language of the Divine spoken by the Angel. The Angel's speech veers into verse, laden with images and references to the life, death, and influence of the Christ. In the following passage, the Angel refers specifically to the Child King:

Mary
What have you told him? What is to happen? Who are they going to kill?

Angel
The King if they can.
The axe will drive into the timber
And the leaves are not yet green.

Joseph
What are you talking about — King?
King Herod, do you mean?
Angel

Green leaves for that One?
No sir, he is red and he is gold
And he will fall. On which day
And in which year is not foretold.
But there is time for the next King to grow,
Short time, narrow time, time enough to know
That night will be over
And the day will be wide
And as wide as the world (47).

The King alluded to is the Christ Child, and the "wide" day refers to the world-wide influence of Christ. Later in the same exchange, the Angel invokes the image of the crucifixion. The Angel has a vision into the future and is not limited by the constraints that hinder Joseph and Mary.

The crucifixion is a conundrum for the Angel, suggesting that the mind of God exceeds the understanding even of his messenger. The exchange between Mary and the Angel reveals the Angel’s uncertainty and in so doing makes the Angel an accessible, even sympathetic character.

Mary

Let the timbers only be seasoned under the strong dry sun.
The Angel questions his own understanding of what must be, like the Father sending the Son to the cross. The exchanges between the Angel and the mortal characters are important as the Ardens are grounding even the miraculous aspects of the myth in a historical reality. The Angel becomes a character in the trilateral struggle for power by assisting a God he does not comprehend and by manipulating the events of history with interchange.

The Ardens employ other characters in support of the myth's traditional thrust. The visit of the shepherds allows for the wisest, or perhaps most hopeful, of the shepherds, the Old Shepherd, to prophesy upon the scope of the Christ's influence:

Go to sleep, little baby, and then you will see
How strong grows the acorn on the branches of the tree.
How tightly it lives in the green and the brown
But the strong storms of autumn will soon shake it down.
The deeper it falls then the stronger it will tower
Bold roots and wide limbs and a true heart of power (33-4).

The Ardens, furthermore, use the image of the tree first to foreshadow Christ's purpose and then to forecast the cross and crucifixion. Herod accepts the inevitability of prophecy's fulfillment, evidenced in his explanation of the Old Testament prophecy concerning the birth of the Messiah:

So therefore, any prince liable to find loyalty in Israel, who does not spring from the seed of David; and according to the logic of prophecy - which I am sure you will understand - you must look for him in Bethlehem. Jerusalem is no good. I am sorry to have wasted your time (38).

The willingness of Herod to believe in traditional prophecy makes him vulnerable and serves to create another dimension to a character who is traditionally depicted as concerned only with his own well being. The Ardens' Herod is a political leader attempting to sort through the maze of prophecies and official dictates relative to the Messiah's birth. The Ardens moreover create an additional character, one easily played as a farm girl. The figure is drawn from the Apocrypha and is embellished to heighten the play's sense of the miraculous in contrast to the historical. The girl is forced to tell King Herod that the holy family has crossed her family's land. However, when Herod and the girl
examine the field for a trail, they discover that corn has grown to full maturity in only an hour, covering the tracks, and thus allowing the holy family to escape. The Angel responds to the miracle by reciting the prophecy from Jeremiah 31 concerning the Christ’s return from Egypt. Following this sequence, the entire cast sings a Corpus Christi Carol, a carol of great hope, which bespeaks renewal and the promise of life after death.

At the foot of the bed there grows a thorn
The bells of Paradise I heard them ring
Which ever flows blossom since he was born
And I love my Lord Jesus above everything.
Over the bed the moon shines bright:
The bells of Paradise I heard them ring
Denoting our Saviour was born this night
And I love my Lord Jesus above everything (53).

The exchange between the farm girl and the other characters in the play further connects the nativity events to the Ardens’ Brent Knoll audience. The farm girl is a person easily recognizable as one of the local rural community, and one is forced to decide what should be done with this idea of Christ. The hymn of praise serves to suggest (with the entire cast singing) that the historical Christ is the same one worshipped and prayed to by the parishioners of Brent Knoll. The hymn indeed invites this
affirmation of faith. But worship for the Ardens is not sufficient reason for treating the myth to a retelling. The nativity myth must (for the Ardens) have a modern, active relevance that affects how parishioners lead their lives.

The Ardens specify the myth of the Christ Child’s birth again, perhaps most effectively when the characters speak to the myth’s social implications. In the Biblical account, each wiseman, of course, brings a gift to the Christ Child. The Matthew text clearly leaves the significances of the gifts open to interpretation:

When they saw the star they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gold, incense, and myrrh (NIV Matthew 2:10-11).

The Ardens expand upon the social aspect of this event and treat the giving of the gifts as a miniature sermon, one which foretells the ministry, teaching, and application of Christ’s life.

In the Ardens’ play, the black wiseman presents the child with gold and declares: "Gold speaks of power. Where there is power there lie the benefits for future generations" (44). This statement implies that Christianity, to have any lasting influence, must be
political. For the Ardens, the political and social dimensions of Christianity are two-fold (Personal interview). Christianity must meet community needs (food, shelter, clothing) and also provide for community unity (politically and socially). The use of Christian doctrine as a tool for the subjugation of the lower classes is hence for D'Arcy a misappropriation (Awkward Corners 262). Still, the Gospels do have a social implication. In Whose is the Kingdom?, the Ardens develop the idea of a social gospel that stresses equality of wealth and opportunity (in the Marxist mode). This theme is only hinted at in The Business of Good Government, though the Ardens without doubt identify the chief function of the Church as feeding, sheltering, and clothing the less fortunate. The Church thereby becomes a social protectorate.

The young wiseman presents the frankincense before the Christ Child and states: "Frankincense speaks of religion. As Men of Science, we cannot but recognize those great forces in our lives we do not fully understand" (44). The passage suggests that while many may not accept the entirety of the Christian myth (perhaps even the Ardens discount many elements), there is much about Christianity that cannot be accounted for by science and reason. The factuality of the narrative is always a possibility for the Ardens. They do not discount the potential for the miraculous; and yet,
their imagery emphasizes not the miraculous, but the tangible. The foreshadowing of the crucifixion is used not to create any hope of resurrection but the hope of social renewal by the example of the martyred Christ.

The Old Wiseman, finally, gives myrrh and declares: "Myrrh speaks of death, and no one can escape it. Yet, in a well-governed land the good work of one man will be continued by his successors" (44). The final gift implies a sentiment, perhaps authorial, that the good accomplished by the Christian myth is greatly dependent on those who promote its perpetuation in succeeding generations. The reference to a "well-governed land" suggests that the myth must have political and social application in the earthly realm. Believers should not simply enlist candidates for the hereafter. The Ardens here seem to be expressing a Calvinist argument that the proper regulation of civil society is indispensable for finding the heavenly kingdom in ourselves. Calvin wrote in Institutes:

The former [civil government], in some measure, begins the heavenly in us, even now upon earth, and in this mortal and evanescent life commences immortal and incorruptible blessedness, while to the latter it is assigned, so long as we live among men, to foster and maintain the external worship of God, to defend sound doctrine and the
condition of the Church, to adapt our conduct to human society, to form our manners to civil justice, to conciliate us to each other, to cherish common peace and tranquility (1487).

The Christian myth then for the Ardens must be illimitably applicable to society. This need for political and cultural awareness accounts for why the Ardens have elected to represent the myth in the medieval tradition. Arden calls for an approach to production that is not time-bound, but that, like the text, moves from ancient Judea to the twentieth century. Arden said that his intention was not to write a mystery play. However, he was quite conscious of, even influenced by, the medieval mystery plays, particularly by the manner in which they found relevance in the lives of the common people (Personal interview, August 1990). The Ardens hoped The Business of Good Government would similarly strike relevant chords in the Brent Knoll congregation of the 1960’s. To emphasize the contemporary value of the myth’s message, the Ardens employed the mystery cycle tradition of mixing costume styles and periods. For example, Herod was given a crown and cloak (a king’s historical attire) suggesting a medieval milieu. The cloak, however, was worn over a business suit, giving Herod a sense of timeless authority. The Ardens even cast the play according to counterparts in the village. The
Brent Knoll production employed a local tax collector, a portly, well-dressed man of business demeanor, as Herod. The midwife was played by a local nurse who dressed in uniform (except for the addition of a fifteenth century headdress). The holy family, conversely, was costumed in the traditional nativity robes—Mary in a pale blue robe with white and Joseph in earth tones. The effect was such that the holy family appeared unfettered by time and place, able to appeal to and touch lives through the centuries. This indiscriminate movement through time and the re-examination of the traditional characters in familiar terms served to rediscover the entire myth, which was the Ardens' principal aim.

In describing the purpose for writing the play, Arden remarks: "We were at that time particularly interested in the political implications of the story and what this miraculous birth portends for a Machiavellian ruler" (Personal interview, August 1990). Arden hoped to use the mythology to explore a people with the same proclivity to good and evil as modern man:

It is not exactly a play to rehabilitate King Herod, but it is a play to help people understand King Herod in a way which is not normally handed down to them in the handling of the Christmas legend in church (August 1990).
For the tale to be worth retelling the Ardens believed the text needed embellishment. Arden makes the point that our understanding of the legend is influenced by two factors. First, years of teaching from clergy, Sunday school instructors, and family members have given us a fixed perception of the myth's characters. Arden declares that "Whether this interpretation is right or wrong, we see the text through this prism for the rest of our lives" (Personal interview, August 1990). Secondly, in providing this traditional "context," teachers and clergy are, in fact, supplying an element not inherent in the Bible story itself. According to Arden:

What you don't get from the text is the flavor of the thing. Assuming (and it is a fairly big assumption) that the words of Jesus were as they reported in the Bible. What you don't get is the tone of voice, the facial expression. You don't have any indication of a sense of humor or how those words would have been heard by that audience (1990 interview).

Arden provided an example of what he intended to do with The Business of Good Government in reference to a familiar saying of Christ's, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's." Arden elaborated:

What on earth does that mean? He might be
sarcastic of he might be revolutionary. Put this way, you have one of those politico-religious orators in Hyde Park and he’s going on and on and someone yells, "What about the poll tax, then?" and he says, "What about the poll tax? What do you pay it with? Whose picture is that?" "Why it’s the Queen of Fuckin’ Britain then, isn’t it?" "Then give the Queen of Fuckin’ Britain what the Queen of Fuckin’ Britain needs and don’t ask silly questions." Now that could be the tone of voice behind Jesus’ response. To the audience, if they were Jewish nationalists, what Caesar wants is a knife in the belly (1990 interview).

Since context is not evident, Arden feels that it is fair game to supply a context as a means of "looking at the evil in the world, and determining how evil it was, and who was mixed up in it" (Personal interview, August 1990). With *Whose is the Kingdom?*, the Ardens would explore how a male-dominant orthodoxy supplied context to the Gospel and created the hierarchical structures of the West. In *The Business of Good Government*, the Ardens are applying their own context in hopes of giving the nativity myth a fresh meaning.
The Ardens supply context by accentuating the social circumstances of the myth and by providing information (not always biblical) that seems reasonable to assume. The characters are thus not drawn as types but are represented with human complexity. Herod is not a wicked and cruel king per se. The Herod of the Ardens' play is simply a savvy, political leader caught in a precarious situation. Israel is sandwiched between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire. Herod elects to pay homage to the Romans out of expediency (the Romans are presently the most powerful). Herod's principal aims are therefore those of order and survival.

Herod

Good will, great joy, peace upon earth. I do not believe they are altogether possible. But it is the business of good government to try and make them possible (18).

Herod faces political risk with his every decision, and he governs as much by fear as by logic. Herod is moreover not a devout Jew in the Ardens' play, as evidenced by the fact that he is unfamiliar with the prophecy announcing the Messiah. In fact, the religious consequences of the Child's birth do not agitate the ruler. Herod in the Ardens' play is not even concerned with protecting the throne for his
lineage or for himself. This Herod seeks only self-preservation.

Herod

Supposing a son of David should have been born and supposing he is demonstrated to carry some Divine Marks of Royalty or whatever the Bible says?

Angel

The situation should be within your control. Are you not the King?

Herod

I am not trained to understand prophecies superstitions! Those that do understand them have assured me it is unwise to ignore their political importance. Here are the king of Persia's men, looking for what might be a claimant to the ancient line of Israel. If Persia determines to recognize such a claimant, Rome will punish me (39-40).

It should be noted that Herod is not entirely self-consumed, that he seems to link his own survival to the integrity of the kingdom. This "patriotic" aspect of Herod's characterization is not evident in the biblical text nor in the mystery plays. This patriotism adds a sympathetic dimension to Herod that makes his struggle over
whether or not to slaughter the infants of Bethlehem a genuine dilemma. In fact, Herod's speech prior to the fateful order raises the very question, "What constitutes a good government from an historical perspective?" Clearly, Western history (and the Christian tradition) has depicted Herod as a despot. The Ardens nevertheless raise the possibility that this "historical" account may ignore much in Herod that was not reproachable; indeed, his edict for the slaughter of the babes may have stemmed from patriotic rather than self-serving reasons.

Herod

The end of my world. The end of peace of life. The end of good order. . . The king must rule his human subjects by means of his own humanity. And naturally within his rule must be comprehended such difficult extremes of good and evil as may be forced from one end to the other of his fortunate kingdom. . . Citizens! Patriots! Through the years I have been your leader I have kept you free from war and provided unexampled prosperity. You are richer and happier than ever you have been! Your children are receiving opportunities for education and advancement that your own fathers never imagined in their wildest dreams. Dare you see this prosperity destroyed in one night? (to
the Angel) You understand I am putting a very particular mark against my name in the history books, and I know it, and I am not afraid. It is fitting that the honour of one man should die for the good of the people (49-50).

That Herod did or did not adopt the posture of a patriot appears immaterial to the Ardens. What is of importance is that the "facts" can never fully be determined. We have "versions" of the facts which suggest that Herod may not have been entirely corrupt nor entirely good. Herod's choices were defensible in his own mind. The Ardens are thus advocating a humanist approach to history, one that explores sacred texts as a means of explicating our knowledge of cultural dynamics.

In this vein, the Magi too are given added dimension in the Ardens' work. The Matthew account gives little insight into how the wisemen reacted to the events they encountered. In the Ardens' play, the Magi are not altogether wise nor are they altogether altruistic. In the court of Herod, the wisemen are unsure whether Herod's taciturn responses come from political maneuvering or a simple lack of understanding.
Young Wiseman

We may not have understood. Gentlemen, we must reconsider our calculations. Politics and philosophy are becoming confused (22).

Furthermore, the wisemen are not convinced of their mission even upon seeing the Child. The wisemen question the stars and their interpretation.

Black Wiseman

I too had expected. . . These people obviously have nothing to do with politics. And I see no connexion either with religion or with prophecies, or with anything else (45).

The wisemen are better described as religious pilgrims in the Arden text. The wisemen hope for a messiah but are unsure as to what they are looking for. The wisemen are attempting to verify the activity of the divine in the known world, and in this light, are representative of the Ardens' view of the common man.

Other characters also display degrees of humanity unaccounted for in the biblical text. The shepherds in the Luke gospel are simply described as being "terrified" by the appearance of the Angel (NIV Luke 2:9). The Arden text adds humanity and dimension. The shepherds are introduced as
laughing, jovial characters committed to their work. In the play's introduction, the Old Shepherd is defined as patient and hopeful. The Solid Shepherd is diligent but cynical. The Young Shepherd is flighty and naive. The appearance of the Angel shocks each of them and provokes actions consistent with their personalities. The Young Shepherd is taken by the excitement and is ready to leave for Bethlehem. The Solid Shepherd is beligerent and rejects the Angel's message. The Old Shepherd is not convinced but patiently agrees to do as the Angel suggests.

The Hostess of the inn is given unexpected complexity as well. The biblical text simply points out that the inn is full and the holy family can only find lodging in the stable. The Ardens give the Hostess of the inn a monologue which reveals her as quite concerned, even generous. The passage points out that military and governmental officials have filled the town and have occupied the inns at reduced or free rates. The late arrivals thus find lodging difficult to obtain. In an act of sympathy, the Hostess, unable to do more, apologetically offers the stable and promises its cleanliness.

The Ardens also add characters that develop the contemporary accessibility of the play, including a midwife who delivers the Christ Child and takes the holy family into her home. The Farm Girl is moreover employed at the end of
the play to illustrate the dilemma many individuals of Christ's day confronted. The Farm Girl describes a brutal, tyrannical government that encroaches on the lives of its citizens. The ever-present threat of reprisal is addressed in the Farm Girl's soliloquy. When Herod asks the girl if the holy family crossed her farm, she responds:

Farm Girl

They [the Romans] burn houses. I've seen them. Kill my husband, kill the children, take all the last harvest stored in barns. What about my father? He's been ill in bed all winter. They say there's not a farm on the frontier lasts more than twenty years. I've seen some burnt three times in two years. We have to take care (48-9).

By affirming the value of the Christmas myth and by contributing to the legend's humanity and immediacy, the Ardens created a fresh set of conflicts for examination. The authors hoped that the audience could recognize the dynamics of social interplay at work even in this most familiar of stories. This treatment of the Christmas myth was the first of Arden's attempts to take a documented, historical event (however questionable the details) and to redefine its material for the purpose of socio/political/historical critique. Just as in Serjeant
Musgrave's Dance, a play that referred to historical events, but is not based on historical record, a triad of interests are represented in The Business of Good Government. The state-accepted orthodoxy is defined in the character of Herod, who is committed to the maintenance of order and the preservation of the status quo. Herod, however, more closely resembles the Parson than the Mayor of Serjeant Musgrave's Dance. The Mayor's character, one recalls, is quite malevolent. He consolidates the status quo by repressing and exploiting other interests. The Business of Good Government evinces a straightforward plot which essentially offers no equivalent to the Mayor character. (In later works, Arden's historical and legendary topics would give fuel to both the Herod and Mayor character types.)

Significantly, in this Christmas play, it is the holy family itself that represents the threat to orthodoxy and the established order. Interestingly enough, unlike the menace Musgrave, the threat posed by the Christ child is only implied in very general terms. The Christ Child's ultimate mission is not specifically defined by the Ardens, and, yet, his birth and the outlook he portends is enough to provoke resistance from the established orthodoxy.

The third interest, that of the primal, rustic orders, can be seen in several characters in The Business of Good
Government. The shepherds are the timeless servants of the land. They sing folk ballads of English and Irish extraction; they know only the small, insular world of tending the flocks. The taxation imposed by Rome along with the birth of the Christ Child (the threat of revolution) act as disruptions to their rudimentary way of life. Some are willingly drawn away (the Young Shepherd); others like the Solid Shepherd fight intrusion from any side. The Ardens developed the pre-Christian, tribal character to a much fuller extent in later works, but the Solid Shepherd clearly is an early expression of this type. This figure, like Johnny Armstrong, is rooted in a way of life that predates the introduction of Christianity. This order of experience is rooted in the land and tied to the natural rhythms of the soil.

The examination of historical myth and power dynamics of religious orthodoxy that we see in The Business of Good Government is expanded in the Ardens' later work, Island of the Mighty. The Business of Good Government nonetheless stands on its own merit as a rich play, filled with questions, not answers. Myth and history provide the Ardens with models of conflict, power, and rhetorical expression. The accounts of traditional history and orthodox faith are released from their conventional contexts, peopled with fictional characters, and placed in a different light, all
in all effecting a most unsettling ambiguity. The enigmatic and questioning nature of the Ardens’ narratives does not underscore political ideals or moral imperatives but rather foregrounds the complex nature of the human condition. The nativity myth, in the Ardens’ hands, invites no celebration of the birth of God. It begs reflection on human fallibility and the possible perfectability of the social order.
Notes

Works Cited


Arden, John. Personal interview. 3 August 1990.


Chapter III - Island of the Mighty: Christianity Absorbed and Defended

In The Business of Good Government, John Arden and Margareta D’Arcy examine Christianity as a force for rebellion or civil disruption. The Ardens recognize that Christianity has experienced a dual existence; that is, it has been a movement threatening existing power structures, and it has also been used as a tool of the status quo, protecting existing institutions with the shield of orthodoxy (Awkward Corners 247). With The Island of the Mighty, the Ardens explore this Janus-like dynamic of Christianity in "the matter of Britain."

In the Royal Shakespeare Company newspaper, Flourish, John Arden wrote that, "The Matter of Britain [or the Arthurian myth] is the story of what happened after the Roman Imperial administration had been withdrawn from this island" ("The Matter of Britain" 3). Unlike The Business of Good Government, Armstrong’s Last Goodnight, and even Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance, The Island of the Mighty is concerned with an empire and an orthodoxy in decay. The Business of Good Government is set in the height of the Roman Empire under the rule of Augustus and his sub-emperors (such as Herod). Armstrong’s Last Goodnight exhibits the Scottish monarchy on the rise, as the king consolidates his authority over feudal lords. In Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance the actions of the monarchy may be questioned, yet the
strength of the British Empire is assured. *The Island of the Mighty* conversely explores a power vacuum, one created when the Roman Empire gave over Britain to the authority of generals and feudal lords in the fourth century. Arden describes this particular political dissolution in some detail:

The Britons reverted to a tribalism which, although politically inept and self-destructive, was accompanied by a strong sense of liberty and individual pride. The invading English (Anglo-Saxon) did appalling damage: but, after intermarriage with the Britons, and once they had learned a measure of the native poetic tradition, they proved in the long run to have absorbed as much as they destroyed ("The Matter of Britain" 3).

The question of how Christianity may be absorbed into a pre-Christian, tribal world becomes an essential issue in *The Island of the Mighty*. The Arthurian era as conveyed by John Arden and Margareta D’Arcy is not one of social stability, romance, and the chivalric code. Rather, in this work, political chaos gives rise to religious chaos. The decay of Roman Imperial rule mirrors the crumbling influence of the centralized authority of the Roman church. The conflict between Roman order and the remnants of primitive
tribal organization precipitates the ironic rediscovery of the island's ancient pagan past (and its rituals).

The collapsing Roman authority of this period is further jeopardized by what the Ardens call "land hunger." The Ardens, in effect, describe a third world crisis in the thirteenth century:

At the time of Arthur, people pushed west from Asia till some fell in the sea and came to England. And the play is about this, and the ordinary people who live daily lives through massive upheavals, and how they are affected while playing no conscious part whatsoever in these violent changes in their lives and history ("Island of the Ardens" Pam Gems Plays and Players Jan. 1973: 17-18).

The Arthurian Britain described by Arden, and its political disposition, compares easily with contemporary situations. In Arden's trilateral, historical view, the "ordinary" people are all those who are neither active participants in the established governmental or religious authority, nor are rebels to the established authority. The plight of this group as depicted by the Ardens can be observed in the contemporary world in scenarios involving with Romanian refugees fleeing poverty to Unified Germany or Haitians fleeing an embargo-starved economy for the Florida shores.
In the Britain of *The Island of the Mighty*, the Ardens are concerned with those who have been forced to migrate to the island of Britain because their farm land has been stolen by stronger tribes.

The Ardens developed *The Island of the Mighty* over the course of several years. Arden initially wrote a trilogy for the B.B.C.; the project, however, was shelved. The play was then offered to a company calling itself the National Theatre of Wales. Again, the work was not produced, this time for financial reasons. While in India in 1970-71, Arden undertook a revision of his play initiated by his observations and experiences in the third world. Arden became ill with hepatitis and turned the project over to D’Arcy for additional rewrites. The voice of the play reflects this partnership; it is a voice at times poetic and graceful--at other times grinding and acerbic, with a political axe that proves laborious and tiresome (Arden, interview, "Island of the Ardens" 17). Indeed, Arden’s third world, Indian experience colored the work dramatically. Finally, the play was staged at the Aldwych Theatre on December 5, 1972 by the Royal Shakespeare Company and directed by David Jones. The produced version of the play was not approved by the Ardens as cuts to the text were made without the permission of both Arden and D’Arcy. In
fact, the Ardens picketed the opening night performance (*To Present the Pretence* 159-60).

*The Island of the Mighty* is comprised of three plays. Part I, "Two Young Noblemen," focuses on Arthur, the aging general of the Roman army, as he attempts to put down rebellions by pagan tribes (the Wildcat Picts) directed against his nephew in Galloway. Arthur is also confronted by invading Germanic tribes, the Angles and the Saxons. The story of the twin brothers, Balan and Balin, mythic figures of the native British tribal history, is also woven into the Arthurian scenario. Balan and Balin want the army of Arthur (a former enemy) to rebuff the Germanic tribes at any cost. The brothers disagree on the methods needed to gain the support of the Roman forces. Balan becomes the king of the Wildcat Picts and after a year and a day is forced to defend his title. His brother emerges as his opponent. In a fight to the death, they are both mortally wounded. The war between brothers for the kingship is indicative of a civil war-torn nation, one that has broken down into tribal units with each unit declaring sovereignty. The fight between Balan and Balin suggests a society in which innocent people are forced by the chaos and social disruption of the times to take up arms for the preservation of their traditional lifestyle.
Part I of The Island of the Mighty serves to introduce the political and social conditions of a post-Roman-occupation of Britain. The Ardens create a world whose basis for law and order (the Roman army) has been removed, leaving the people to face a prospective return to tribal existence.

Part II, "Oh Cruel Winter," involves the ill-advised marriage of the aged Arthur to the young Gwenhwyvar. Gwenhwyvar turns her affections to Arthur's illegitimate son, Medraut, and together they lead a rebellion against the aged general. Arthur is killed, a power vacuum ensues, and a chaotic flood of tribal forces are unleashed. Part II embellishes the portrait of chaos created in "Two Wild Young Noblemen." In Part I, Arthur is portrayed as the last vestige of Roman order. However, in Part II, Arthur's senility and pride (akin to that of Shakespeare's Lear) make clear the point that Roman order is assuredly lost and tribal warfare inevitable.

The dramatic action of Part III, "A Handful of Watercress," occurs after Arthur's death. Merlin, Arthur's chief poet, goes insane and wanders the countryside. He is befriended by a Cowman's wife who inspires him with her simple generosity and naive faith. In an ironic conclusion, the Cowman returns to find Merlin (naked from his travails) reciting verse to the wife. The Cowman promptly slays the
visitor in a jealous rage, unaware that Merlin only regarded his wife with gratefulness, not lust. The play's final image is of Bewyr, Arthur's last loyal aide de compe, and the poet, Anevrin, who retreat together and hold to one last image of hope, Arthur's broken sword. Part III thus bespeaks the chaos of a Britain abandoned to primitive, pre-Roman traditions. The last loyal follower of Arthur is trapped by the invading Germanic tribes and faces certain death. The Ardens have created a world in transition: a highly ordered civilization reduced to chaos, inviting the birth of a new civil order. Yet the Ardens do not treat the story with a sense of loss or tragedy (as is often the case). In fact, the authors suggest that a hopeful quality arises in the raw brutality of the primitive tribes. These tribes, while at times brutal and violent, are representative of the "ordinary" people's will to survive in spite of the comings and goings of various political authorities. The primitive tribes in The Island of the Mighty are thus equipped to survive when the power of Roman authority has crumbled completely. The Island of the Mighty reveals the Ardens' conscious decision to portray Arthur as the symbol of the Roman Empire at large, falling before the onslaught of hostile forces. The Ardens' Arthur is half Roman and half Briton by birth, but fully Roman in allegiance. Arden claims Malory and Geoffrey of Monmouth as
his primary sources, and while some similarity exists between the representations, the Roman allegiance is purely Arden's invention, one that gives the play a decidedly anti-imperialistic slant. The Malory text seems concerned, in particular, with the ideal of chivalry and the decay of an age of honor. The defeat that occurs in Malory's version is due more to the inability of individuals to match the standards of a chivalric code than to Machiavellian political miscalculation or to a conscious mistreatment of an entire racial or national tribe (Mourman 63). Malory's use of the Guinevere and Lancelot story, for example, illustrates the principle of courtly love and loyalty turned destructive when ideals are subjected to simple mortal passion. Malory's Lancelot is culpable and yet victimized by the imprudent Guinevere.

Perhaps the most familiar telling (to twentieth century audiences) of the Arthurian myth is T. H. White's popular novel, The Once and Future King. White's Lancelot-and-Guinevere scenerio is cloaked in Victorian pathos. Guinevere is given a careful, if simple, rationale for drawing Lancelot outside the parameters of courtly love:

> It is difficult to explain about Guinevere, unless it is possible to love two people at the same time. Probably it is not possible to love two people in the same way, but there are different
kinds of love (Once and Future King 362). White's mild satire does not mock the imperialist ideal of the Arthurian tale, rather it uses the tale in a good natured way to contest Victorian mores. White's work says little about the efforts of the politically dispossessed or any "hunger for land." Yet White's rendering is perhaps more familiar to today's readers than that of Malory, and certainly better known than the Arden work. The White novel is less threatening politically and religiously than Malory's telling and surely less thematically cumbersome than the Ardens' play—these features may account for White's enduring popularity with broad-based audiences (Maureen Fries Trends in the Modern Arthurian Novel 212).

The Once and Future King does not invoke the question of religious conflict nor does it acknowledge a "resistant" pagan past. In fact, the White novel fails to explore the grail quest, a prominent feature of the Malory source. For Malory, the grail moves the work toward allegory, emphasizing the spiritual journey of Pilgrim's Progress, an odyssey fraught with peril, but worthy of pursuit, whether successfully completed or not. Malory sought to express the want of spiritual renewal and faith in the Arthurian court. Lancelot is not faithful to his friend (and king). Guinevere is not faithful to her husband. Similarly, Arthur is not faithful to his land or Queen. In the Malory text,
the author is chiefly concerned with the restoration of fidelity to a world grown apostate.

Apparently, for the Ardens, notions such as universal Christianity, loyalty to king and country, and eternal fidelity are simply naive. Their work poses the questions: Were such naive concepts ever actualized? Are they the product of an historical myth, born of the populace's appetite for romance and sentimentality? The authors, however, approach historical myth with their own mixture of romance and affection. The Ardens' Arthurian tale, nonetheless, contrasts the romance of myth with the harsher realities of existence. They create characters who are concurrently sympathetic and loathesome. These characters draw affection, with poetic or humorous expressions, and then in turn behave abominably, evoking a sense of incongruity that somehow appears very modern. As Joseph Campbell explains, "The perfect human being is uninteresting; it is the imperfections of life that are lovable" (The Power of Myth 4). Campbell conclude that so many in Western society have difficulty loving God because of His perfection: the Christ on the cross, however, is lovable (5).

The Ardens' tale takes this sense of "imperfection" beyond the sentimental indiscretions of T. H. White's figures, beyond the open failure of honor found in Malory.
The Ardens' characters possess an exuberance reserved for the national myth of Britain. The Ardens' version of the myth focuses on the flawed, the dangerous, the malicious, and the foolish—all traits that should make the mythical characters lovable by Campbell's estimation. Such accessible and "lovable" characters thus draw the audience into the world of the story. It is as though the characters are historical and parallel the needs and emotions of those experiencing the play in the contemporary world.

Having depicted for their audiences colorful, vital, and multifaceted characters, the Ardens use the story line as a means of examining the trilateral, historical conflicts examined in The Business of Good Government and Armstrong's Last Goodnight. The Ardens ultimately find a profound conflict of cultures and politics is best evidenced in the story's clash of religions.

The Island of the Mighty is peopled with characters representing conflicting religious faiths resulting in often violent interactions. The Ardens' decision to alter some traditional characters, to ignore others, and to invent unique figures of their own underscores the issue of religious contestation. Their strategy challenges easy assumptions and unsettles any accepted faith in the virtue of the nation.
In *The Island of the Mighty* the Ardens depict the Roman general, Arthur, as nominally Christian. Aged and battle-hardened, Arthur accepts that Christianity is the prevailing doctrine of the time and chooses to negotiate from the Christian point of strength. Yet he does not favor Christians over "pagans" in the diplomatic process. A case in point, the prince of Strathclyde seeks Arthur's help in subduing the Picts of Galloway. The Picts are essentially Druids who practice sacrificial rites (including human) and uphold ancient fertility rituals. Nevertheless, Arthur is willing to give the Picts an equal hearing and treats their ambassador, a woman, tattooed and bizarrely apparelled, with proper diplomatic etiquette. When the ambassador is murdered by the impetuous Balin, Arthur responds by ordering Balin's banishment (not execution), a politic, but severe response. Arthur sees the crime as more political than spiritual. Balin sins as much against Rome as against Christ:

Arthur

He has dishonored my Roman command and the reputation of Christ (*Island of the Mighty* VI).

Arthur is not chiefly concerned with any spiritual or moral violation. Rather, Balin has committed an indiscretion of a social and political nature. Christianity for Arthur is not so much a religious faith or a moral code;
it is a political and legal leviathan. This point contrasts interestingly to the depictions of Arthur in Malory and White. For Malory's Arthur, the Christ was part of the chivalric triune, alongside woman and martial conduct. In Malory's version, failure to heed the high calling of any triune element was sin and thus jeopardized the kingdom's stability. Malory's Arthur thus regards the Christ in much the same fashion as he regards woman, as pure symbol. The image of an active divinity assisting the poor and healing the sick as described in Acts, Chapter 2 (the Pereklete or comforter) is not present in the Malory text. The Christ of Malory's Arthur is one that must be, like the grail which represents Him, pursued as ideal. Malory laments the superficial practice of Christianity in Arthur's court and the inability of Arthur and his knights to exercise their faith in daily affairs. For instance, Arthur's knight returns from the Grail quest, and the event is depicted as a joyous and festive occasion, one that renews religious conviction. However, in the second paragraph of the "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," Malory writes:

Then, as the book seyth, Sir Lancelot began to resort unto quene Gwenyvere agyne and forgate the promyse and the perfection that he made in the quest (Works 611).
Launcelot, in Malory’s tale, is never able to live up to the ideals of the Arthurian court and thus is an unredeemed figure.

Malory’s Arthur and Lancelot are indeed flawed. Both the king and the knight in the Malory myth are marked with good intent but are unable to practice fidelity (due presumably to the apostate nature of man as depicted by Malory) and therefore wracked with guilt. The Ardens’ Arthur, however, does not feel the burden of guilt associated with the unattained religious ideal. With Christianity as a standard (not intended for practical living) the Ardens’ Arthur is capable of espousing credal oaths while, without compunction, executing atrocities in the name of the sovereign authority. For example, Arthur ambushes the unsuspecting camp of King Pellam—Pellam represents the traditional Roman presence in Britain, the vestige of pagan Rome—and Arthur shows him only limited mercy. Arthur destroys Pellam’s forces and mockingly condescends to spare his life; he leaves Pellam, a spear piercing his body, to die:

Arthur

Ah...we will leave it where it is. Let the barefoot beard who put the nonsense in your mind pull the steel out of your flesh - if he is able (Island of the Mighty XII).
Clearly the chivalric code of Malory's Arthur, which allows honor to those defeated, is not evident in *The Island of the Mighty*. Yet, the Ardens' Arthur invokes a contemporary sensibility that renders him understandable. This Arthur draws a certain mystical fascination, an impression furthered by his obsession with the buried skull of Bran (the Celtic/Briton patriarch) and the promise of protection implied by its burial. In part, Arthur rationally rejects such primitive superstition; he nonetheless still evinces a need to believe.

Arthur

In the name of Christ let me remind you, we are not predestined to win. . .Companions: you alone are responsible for the continued religion and civilization of Britain (*The Island of the Mighty* XVI).

Addressing his troops, Arthur rejects any notion of a Christ who empowers armies or provides a providential defense of the isle. And yet Arthur ultimately is unable to convince himself that there is no truth in myth and that supernatural forces do not govern his fate. He chants, attempting to reassure himself as much as his forces that his might is sufficient:
Arthur

It is the Head of Bran, I dug it up: the charm has been brought to an end. No magic now defends this Island only the courage of me and my men (The Island of the Mighty XVII).

Yet, the act of digging up the skull, like the conquering of King Pellam for the Christian relic (the spear which pierced the side of Christ), shows that Arthur does not believe the world to be absent of supernatural forces. So for the Ardens' Arthur, a balance must be maintained and a veneer of self-determination preserved. This is done with reason and might. Arthur is the prototypical late-twentieth century statesman. Arthur's vulnerability, evident in his slight intimations of doubt, makes him attractive and accessible. But his Christianity is one that makes virtually no reference to the Gospel. Arthur’s Christianity resembles the emblematic Christianity found in the religious-right politics of contemporary America. Arthur’s Christianity is one that is inseparable from a strong government and military. Arthur furthermore resembles the American religious-right in his coupling of orthodox Christianity and patriotism. Arthur cites a number of figures in his eduction as a leader:
Arthur

Britain is not protected by the head of an ancient hero turned into a discredited god. It is protected by an experienced Army under orders of a careful and Christian General, who alone among his countrymen has read books full of good sense. Titus Livius, Julius Caesar - *(The Island of the Mighty VII).*

Notably absent from Arthur's list of books of good sense are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The Ardens' Arthur is chiefly concerned with books of strategy, order, and state conduct. This Arthur's Christ does not empower; He is empowered in much the same way modern Western governments attempt to empower the name of Christ by legislating morality and by carefully selecting enemies who may be characterized as evil incarnate. Consider such actions as the American military responses in Panama and Kuwait; both actions were fixed on symbolic figureheads, Noriega and Hussein. By focusing on symbol rather than issue, the suffering of civilians killed in the crossfire can be disregarded *(Awkward Corners 101).* The Ardens' Arthur embraces the symbolic Christ but ignores the issue or import of Christianity-- "Love thy enemy." The Christianity of the Ardens' Arthur is a synthesis of Roman imperialism, pagan ritualism, and Old Testament judgement. Only the name

The Ardens' Arthur is in many ways a fully developed version of Sergeant Musgrave and Herod (of The Business of Good Government). Musgrave writes his own gospel as he proceeds, while Herod practices a religion of expediency. The two characters and their dominant traits seem synthesized in the Arthur, who does not know the Gospel but realizes what he needs to enforce God's will as he sees it. Arthur is a more sympathetic figure, however, than either Musgrave or Herod. Musgrave's tunnel vision and willingness blindly to sacrifice the lives of his followers for his cause detract from the audience's sympathy; Herod's character is, above all, logical and orderly, which makes him appear dispassionate. The Ardens' Arthur is at times cruel, but his passion makes his cruelty familiar and thus illicits sympathy. Perhaps it is his age, or again the threat of vulnerability, but Arthur mirrors a contemporary need. Arthur draws us to him in spite of his atrocities. In Part II, Arthur seeks divine assurance that he has made the correct choices as the leader of Britain, but he is never quite certain and thus dies a skeptical, nominal Christian. As a note, Arthur's attempt to seek God's assistance in subduing his enemies would also figure prominently in the Ardens' later character, Constantine, in
Whose is the Kingdom? Arthur is, in essence, the representative of the established authority, and like Herod in *The Business of Good Government*, assumes that his God wants this order to survive. No doubt Arthur feels confident that God will intervene on his behalf.

The Merlin character in *The Island of the Mighty* is a synthesis of Christianity and pre-Christian, tribal ritualism. He is portrayed by the Ardens as a mystic. Unlike the Merlin of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* or the more familiar Merlin of White’s *Once and Future King*, the Ardens’ Merlin is not referred to as a sorcerer, wizard, warlock, or other conjuring figure. The Ardens’ Merlin is a court poet, an office which the Ardens depict as central to the play’s intent:

The *Island of the Mighty* now consists of three distinct tales linked by one theme - the relationship of the poet to society. In the old Celtic civilization the poets played an important role in shaping the politics of the community (XV).

The Ardens’ Merlin is described in the playwrights’ note as forty-five years old and attired in a dark blue gown. The image suggested is that of a middle-age cleric. Malory’s Merlin is a mysterious figure capable of creating enchanted mists and changing shapes (as he does for Uther
Pendragon, who wishes to seduce the Igrain, Duchess of Cornwall). Malory begins his book by foregrounding the mysterious works of Merlyn, thus invoking a world pervaded by supernatural forces. On the other hand, T. H. White's Merlyn is comic, bumbling, though well intentioned. Yet, in a sense, White suggests that perhaps his Merlyn performs no magic at all, but rather weaves illusions for the education of an imaginative boy. White gives us the boyhood adventures of Arthur in which Merlyn has Arthur experience nature in the bodies of a fish, a bird, and other animals. White's Merlyn serves to explain the compassionate side of Arthur, the Arthur so attuned to nature's vagaries and mysteries that he can forgive his wife and best friend for their long-running liaison. Again, White's work is reassuring, as a fairy tale can be, but its outlook is naive. The Merlyn of White's work is something of a Messiah figure, part prophet and part demon, but wholly other-worldly, rooted in the fifteenth century fear of the unknown.

The Ardens' Merlin, as poet, is a self-possessed prophet, who holds the threat of the supernatural in abeyance. Early in Part I of The Island of the Mighty, Merlin prevents Balin from killing his brother Balan and when threatened by Balin, suggests "I could turn you into a pillar of salt with one four line stanza!" (III). Though
Merlin never performs supernatural acts, he establishes that he is capable of such acts. The Ardens’ Merlin functions as a Shaman, as described by Joseph Campbell:

The Shaman is the person, male or female, who in his late childhood or early youth has an overpowering psychological experience that turns him totally inward. It is a kind of schizophrenic crackup. The whole unconscious opens up, and the Shaman falls into it (85).

In the Ardens’ play, Merlin has had an estatic, visionary experience and is educated in the forms and composition of poetry. With a unique, mystical vision and the poet’s skill, Merlin is able to record and interpret events in their spiritual dimension. Campbell describes the story of the Sioux, Black Elk, who as a boy became catatonic and immobilized by convulsions. The Shaman who treated the boy introduced him to the deities that possessed him, and thus cured him (88-89). This parallel, in a sense, points to the function of the Ardens’ Merlin. He introduces his king to deities previously unregarded and attempts to bring together the broad spectrum of mythologies inhabiting the Island of the Mighty.

Campbell equates this function of the Shaman to that of the modern day poet, in much the same manner as the Ardens:

The Artist is the one who communicates myth for
today. But he has to be an artist who understands mythology and humanity and isn’t simply a sociologist with a program for you (99). For the Ardens the function of the poet is political, social, and spiritual; and their Merlin exemplifies this model with his various successes and failures. In his monologue at the end of Scene I of Act I, Merlin discloses his duty:

Merlin

As Chief Poet to the General my first responsibility is to praise him by means of verse and music.(II)

In other words the poet serves a social function as a sort of public relations agent, creating the image the leader is obliged to confirm. Merlin also defines his political role when he recounts his duty as a spy, one who analyzes a potential enemy’s chances for success in an ill-guarded region. Merlin’s spiritual function becomes clear only over the course of the entire three-part work. Initially he appears to be allied with Arthur’s imperial Christ. But through a series of encounters we find Merlin to be a synthesis of spiritual experiences and an emissary to unfamiliar cultures.

In Scene iii, Merlin defends the action of the Wildcat Picts, whose society is structured differently from that of
the Christian Romans. The Picts are matriarchal, with women functioning as political as well as social leaders. Men are progenitors and military pawns. Men in the Pict society are expendable and therefore are used in battle to protect the females, who function as the social and cultural elite. Importantly, the Pict ambassador is like Merlin, more a Shaman than a political figure. In fact, the ambassador’s ecstatic utterance prompts Arthur to draw his sword in alarm, but Merlin intervenes. Merlin’s understanding of, even empathy with, the Pict ambassador is parallel to circumstances described by Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth*:

>I had a friend who attended an international meeting of the Roman Catholic meditative orders, which was held in Bangkok. He told me Catholic monks had no problems understanding the Buddhist monks, but that it was the clergy of the two religions who were unable to understand each other. The person who has had a mystical experience knows that all symbolic expressions of it are faulty. The symbols do not render the experience, they suggest it (61).

It is important to note that Merlin and the Pict ambassador are comparable to monks, not clergy. They have experienced the mystical side of existence and understand
the difficulties of representing it. Merlin represents the mystic experience in verse and art. The Pict ambassador executes an unknown ritual, a lost rite, perhaps once connected to nature cycles. Nonetheless, Merlin can appreciate the mystic aspect of the event while Arthur cannot. Ironically, the ambassador and Merlin are linked in death as well as life. The Picts are doomed and starving, and, as Merlin describes them, coerced into an acceptance of Christianity:

Merlin

That Oatmeal upon the ground represents a whole day's food for one family of the Wildcat Picts. It is a matter of wonder so few of them become Christian, for thereby they could certainly get more (V).

The ambassador is desperate and at the mercy of the Roman general, Arthur. She is delirious and perhaps convinced that no worse fate can befall her and so challenges and unnerves Arthur with a ritual dance. As noted, Arthur moves to kill her but stops. At the moment when hope seems imminent, effected by the supplication of Merlin, she is unceremoniously hacked to death by the enraged Balin.

Merlin too is at the complete mercy of his hosts; in Part III, Scene xix, Merlin has lost all purpose and is
wandering, near starvation. The merciful Cowman's wife acts to save his life, restore his hope, and renew his will to live. Merlin recognizes the truth of the Christian myth, not evident in the clergy, Arthur's military order, or in his own mystic experience, but through the simple Christian hope and faith of the Cowman's wife.

The Merlin character embodies the empathetic aspect of the Arden/D'Arcy voice. A new tone is evident in The Island of the Mighty, however, one that is not present in John Arden's previous plays. The Island of the Mighty evinces a shrill voice of protest, aimed squarely at acts of imperial, governmental powers. Logic suggests (and hard evidence is absent) that this strident feature is attributable to D'Arcy. Significantly, this voice will grow more defined in the couple's later collaborations, especially Whose is the Kingdom? The Ardens create a stark contrast between character types to advance their ideas. The Merlin character is empathetic to Christianity and varieties of spiritual experience in general; Kybele, the narrator of Whose is the Kingdom? will prove a further expansion of this figure type. The opposing character type in the co-authored Arden works, however, rejects Christianity as a means of renouncing the imperialist governments who support it and its male-dominated structures. These characters are enraged by political and social conditions and rebel violently
against them. For example, Gwenhwyvar in *The Island of the Mighty* assails Christianity for the same reason she resists Roman authority; she believes it to be an institution that subjugates the people.

The first of the "enraged" characters to appear in *The Island of the Mighty* are the "two wild noblemen," Balin and Balan. The characters are Celtic farmers. Their claim to nobility is based on local standards and not on the political realities of Arthur’s Britain. The parallel between the two fanatical brothers and the Irish Republican Army must be noted. D’Arcy admits in her preface to the collection, *Plays: One*, that she is willing and able to attack the left and the right, and she implies a frustration with I.R.A. tactics (xii). Yet, there is an explanation for why two natives (Balin and Balan) expelled from their homeland would lash out in violence where the government empowered to protect them proved ineffectual. Balin, like the I.R.A., acts in senseless rage when he kills the innocent Pict ambassador; however, in that conduct there is, perhaps, a cry for understanding, a cry that D’Arcy may recognize in the random deeds of terror perpetrated by the I.R.A. Balin calls out: "Picts, it is nothing but petty, barbarous Picts and their ridiculous grievances!" (V). Balin is inconsolable as he exclaims: "The English killed my family!" (V). He fails to recognize the loss his own race
has inflicted on the Picts just as the I.R.A. is blind to
the innocents who suffer its acts of terror.

Gwenhwyvar is also a figure of protest in the Ardens’
play. The Malory text portrays Guinevere as a self-
indulgent queen whose lack of character unravels the moral
tapestry of a chivalric society. Malory’s Guinevere is
devalued, treated as a simple character who is ruled by base
factors—lust, pleasure, and pride. The Guinevere of T.H.
White is the more familiar queen, the Romantic figure whose
idea of love reflects the Victorian view of marriage. She
is innocent by reason of sincerity. Again, the White novel
creates a fantasy character devoted to her husband but
passionately in love with Lancelot. This Guinevere is
spiteful, insipid, and selfish, but because she is the
product of a naïve world, her vices are superficial (as are
her strengths).

The Ardens’ Gwenhwyvar appears to be a D’Arcy imagined
heroine. Gwenhwyvar in The Island of the Mighty is the
daughter of a Celtic lord and the descendent of the Celtic
demi-goddess, Branwen. She reflects a savage, indomitable
spirit. She represents the rebellious order in the Arden
trilateral, historical model. Like Musgrave, she wants to
overthrow the established authority and create a new one.
Gwenhwyvar rejects the Christ of Rome as the figurehead of a
misogynist empire:
Gwenhwyvar

General I tell you, if you believe in the omnipotence of Christ, you are very much deceived (XXII).

The Gwenhwyvar of The Island of the Mighty seems to be a prototype for the priestess, Mother Earth cult figure, who appears in Whose is the Kingdom?. Gwenhuyvar is as cruel and deceitful as her male counterparts are patronizing and condescending. She lures the aged Arthur into marriage for the express purpose of destroying him. D'Arcy seems to think that this strain of violent, anti-male vehemence is germane to the feminist movement. As with the I.R.A., D'Arcy appears to express empathy for, if not approval of, this perspective. D'Arcy contends that "Women in Western culture can be generalized about - overall we are treated as an inferior caste," (Awkward Corners 141). Arden, a pacifist by preference if not by practice (as he explains in his preface to Serjeant Musgrave's Dance), finds acts of treachery and terror a common, if not expected, reaction to political, economic, or social subjection (Arden interview August 1990). The Gwenhwyvar figure is thus an embodiment of the protest mentality, the rejection of all things held precious by the subjector. She is an unsettling, dangerous character because hers is the voice of the victim turned aggressor. Her voice is a part of the contemporary
consciousness, not a fantasy creation concerned with courtly manner and appearance. Gwenhwyvar is a facet of D’Arcy’s own persona—this much is difficult to refute. D’Arcy describes her role as artist as

That of an experimenter in the breaking-down of barriers: and sometimes these barriers have been protected by the police, which accounts for my three periods inside British gaols (Awkward Corners 126).

The Ardens have created in Gwenhwyvar a character that turns misogyny inside out creating a miso-masculent persona. Later works employ a similar character type. The character is well defined, and the reasoning process is illuminated for the audience. Gwenhwyvar is the product of hundreds of years of the subtle subjection of women and under-classes by the nobility. Stathclyde, for example, feels noble blood lines are carried only through the males. The more savage misogynist, the commander Garlon, beats his female companion and uses her as a pack animal. The Ardens do not vilify the myso-masculent Gwenhwyvar, but they likewise do not condone her violent opposition.

In her essay "Lift the Taboo," D’Arcy discusses what she calls "sexual ghettos," a compartmentalizing or segregation of the sexes created not just by men but by the overzealous activists in the feminist movement, those who
reject males for their maleness (Awkward Corners 148). Gwenhwyvar also displays an astute ability to exploit male fragility. She appeals to Arthur's vulnerability, namely his fear of aging and loss of virility. She also manipulates Medraut by appealing to his sense of tradition and tribal authority. In each instance, Gwenhwyvar, like the Queen of the Picts, sees men as drones, useful but inferior.

Consistent then is Gwenhwyvar's rejection of Christianity (in favor of a variation of Celtic rites). Gwenhwyvar invokes a fertility cult centered around the worship of Branwen (an earth mother goddess) not so much for any spiritual needs but rather as an act of protest. The sincerity of the miso-masculent characters that use fertility cult worship is difficult to assess. Gwenhwyvar does not seem committed to the worship of a goddess so much as she seems opposed to Christianity and male-centered religions. Gwenhwyvar views religion as a tool of political power.

The use of religion as a means of political empowerment emerges as a consistent theme of the Ardens' works. Absent from The Island of the Mighty, however, is any suggestion of doctrinal orthodoxy. Arthur wants Christianity to serve as the national religion, but he lacks a working knowledge of Christian doctrine; therefore, he draws together disparate
military and political philosophies (Livius, Caesar, etc.) and calls them Roman and Christian. Merlin, on the other hand, is an eclectic; orthodoxy is not a viable tool for a Shaman (that is, a spiritual translator as Campbell defines the term) or for a diplomat. Gwenhwyvar and her convert, Medraut, call on an ancient belief system, a system that they could not possibly understand as the new orthodoxy. But in the chaos of civil war, no single authority emerges; no orthodoxy is dictated. The Ardens create a world of spiritual and political diversity, one where the variety creates irreconcilable conflicts that erupt into violence. In later works, the Ardens explore how orthodoxy is imposed in an effort to control violence and suppress dissenting voices, but in The Island of the Mighty, Britain is left chaotic and incorrigible.

Finally, the Ardens draw on the Malory source for familiar minor characters but alter them considerably, investing them with political and religious implications. Pellam, the descendent of the original Roman invaders, is a variation of the King Pellinore of Malory’s work and King Pellam, the Keeper of the Grail (Moorman 56). Pellinore in Malory’s tale is a king in the feudal mode, a local tyrant devoted to his own cause. He neglects his kingdom to pursue the Questing Beast and once on his quest ignores the code of chivalry, refusing aid to a damsel and knight in distress
(Malory 72). Pellinore’s pedigree is unclear in Malory and the nature of his kingdom is traditional or mythic, not rooted in known history. Pellinore in the Malory text serves as an object lesson, warning that those who become too zealous, even in the service of their king, are prone to sins of omission; that is to say, failing to do good deeds along with the righting of wrongs. The King Pellam (or as some texts read, Pelles) figure in the Malory text is again a shadowy, mythic figure referred to on two occasions, both in relation to the Grail. Balin, the wild, rash knight strikes Pellam down. He then is healed by Galahad who serves him ablution from the Holy Grail. Then Lancelot, Perceval, and Gawain conclude their quest for the Grail, finding Pellam as the Keeper of the Relic.

T. H. White expands the Pellinore figure and excludes Pelles. Pellinore in The Once and Future King becomes a mildly comic, lovable figure, bumbling and devoted to his questing beast until he finds love. Pellinore in White’s work is a creation of pure fantasy, a comic who stumbles into altercations and evokes anger more out of misunderstanding and happenstance than malice. All this supports White’s premise that violence and war are lamentable, but inevitable features of the human condition.

The Ardens do not let their audience off the hook so lightly. The Ardens combine the Pellinore of Malory, an
ancient king of uncertain pedigree, with the eccentric Pellinore of White. To this they blend in the Pellam figure. The Ardens' Pellam thus is the keeper of an ancient Christian relic, the sacred spear that pierced the side of Christ. The Ardens also give the Pellam figure a historical context, making him the heir of the first Roman invaders of Britain. Arden's notes even call for Pellam to be dressed in a Roman toga. The Ardens then make Pellam a John the Baptist character who cries out against Imperialist Arthur and his pagan alliances. Pellam is a further development of the Evangelist character found in Armstrong's Last Goodnight. The Evangelist encounters Christianity outside the context of orthodoxy, through an experience of personal discovery. Pellam, likewise, is Christian because of a personal encounter with God and the sign of the relic. Like the Evangelist, Pellam has no allegiance save to that which he deems as a holy kingdom. He has no fear of the false king he perceives Arthur to be. Ironically, (and true to the Malory text), it is the wild young noble, Balin, who wounds Pellam, but unlike the Malory version, Pellam does not recover; the wound is caused by the relic spear. Pellam has, like Musgrave, become deluded in his perception of God and his holy mission.

The Ardens' omission of the Grail and their use of the relic spear as an instrument of death do much to
demythologize Christianity in *The Island of the Mighty*. With the element of spiritual mystery and miracle removed, a Christianity based on reason alone holds no more or less viability as a faith than the religion of the Picts or the savagery of the invading Saxons.

With *The Island of the Mighty*, the Ardens explore the idea that Christianity in the Western world is an admixture of Pauline and Gospel doctrines and the pre-Christian traditions of the tribal consciousness. Furthermore, the Ardens' model suggests that when Christianity and pre-Christian practices conflict, the pre-Christian customs will prevail. For example, Arthur conflates Christianity and the rhetoric of Julius Caesar; but when the issue is "love thy enemy," Christianity is suppressed, and Caesar's code of war prevails. Strathclyde claims pre-eminence because his is a Christian region populated by Christian citizens, but he elects to ignore the suffering of the neighboring Picts. The Ardens' play suggests that purely biblical, Christian doctrine is not employed by Western power structures and that Christianity is invoked by the prevailing authority only when religion is expedient.

*The Island of the Mighty* is for the Ardens a statement first and foremost about the imperialist nature of Western governments—so much so, that when the Royal Shakespeare Company edited the piece and (to the Ardens) softened its
indictment on imperialism, the Ardens felt compelled to declare themselves on strike against the R.S.C. The divorce incidentally continues to this day (*Plays: One* 373). The Ardens now view the Royal Shakespeare Company and other governmentally subsidized theatres as tools of the imperial power structure, resistant to dissenting voices. The R.S.C. and the National Theatre maintain a political and artistic orthodoxy that the Ardens seem to feel parallels state-supported, religious orthodoxy.

What is initiated, however, in *The Island of the Mighty* is a discussion of how Christianity and the politics of those who call themselves Christian can become a source of conflict and empowerment. The issue of orthodoxy is raised in *The Island of the Mighty*, perhaps as a sub-issue, but this would become more central to the Ardens’ important, later collaboration, *Whose is the Kingdom?*
Notes

The primary sources consulted by Arden for Island of the Mighty are as follows:


Works Cited


Chapter IV: Defining Orthodoxy: Power and Perspective in Whose is the Kingdom?

The Council [of Nicea] gave the orthodox church the Nicene creed, to the Arians it gave little mercy, and to the state it gave both a challenge and dangerous precedent. It is a legacy which will last as long as the Christian churches hold that the beliefs of individual teachers, however, gifted, are only valid if they conform to the truth that outshines brilliance. And whose is the authority to decide that truth? That kingdom is still in dispute (Gumley "The Road to Nicea" xiii).

Frances Gumley’s prefatory essay effectively ennunciates the issue and debate in John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy’s nine-part radio drama Whose is the Kingdom? As Gumley suggests, the Ardens are investigating the creation and enforcement of orthodoxy. Around this issue is woven a tapestry of related issues that support the narrow structure of orthodoxy. Definitions of the trinity (Father, Son, Spirit) and related doctrines involving sin, justification, and the sacraments were established with little room for variance by the fourth century church fathers. Prior to Whose is the Kingdom? the Ardens’ collaborations viewed "authority" as a given element in the Christian tradition. The Island of the Mighty, for example, explores the military
enforcement of a Christian banner over an ancient and pagan populace. Other Arden and D’Arcy plays are more specifically concerned with political dogma, specifically *The Little Gray Home in the West* and *Vandaleur’s Folly*. The political orthodoxy identified by the Ardens is one based in class warfare and misogynist deception. *Whose is the Kingdom?*, however, is precisely about religious orthodoxy, the defining of faith for millions of people for over two milinia. The Ardens start with a historical milieu characterized by a power vacuum. This period follows in the wake of Rome’s collapse (as it existed under the Caesars). The action in the nine-part radio drama begins in 305 A.D., prior to Constantine’s conversion, a period that follows the great Roman persecutions of Diocletian and Maximin Daza.¹

The work is a synthesis of historical detail and fictive recreation intended, apparently, to explore historical process and religious development (as much as to comment on resulting injustices).

As is the case with most Arden and D’Arcy collaborations, the resulting product is an intriguing blend of dissimilar voices— one thoughtful, reasoned, even timidly poetic, the other shrill, assaultive, and polemical. *Whose is the Kingdom?*, however, is a watershed in the collaborative careers of Arden and D’Arcy in that it blends their styles more effectively and presents a more unified
voice than in previous co-authored works. And yet, a marked difference exists between the tone of *Whose is the Kingdom?* and that of Arden's individual products. It seems that the subject of Christian doctrinal development, and its resultant political and social effects, made for a fruitful meeting ground, for D'Arcy's political discourse and Arden's moral introspection.

Arden's literary works are often concerned with why evil or injustice exists, not with evil's eradication. Arden's introductory essay to *Whose is the Kingdom?*, "The Pious Founders," announces this concern, and we find that it echoes his interests in *The Business of Good Government*. In writing *The Business of Good Government* Arden declared that he and his wife hoped to "look at the evil in the world, find out how evil it is, and who was mixed up in it" (Personal interview. August 1990). Arden seems to believe that the humans are prone to self-interested behavior. Individuals, for Arden, nonetheless present a paradox, for they are capable of acts equally civilized and base. Arden cites an example:

> Politically-speaking, it seemed that Diocletian, who was emperor at the end of the third century just before Constantine, had been "good." He was not debauched, he put his army and civil servants under very proper control, and his reforms in
general made it possible for Constantine to exert a "moderate and humane" rule. Diocletian had also been the most deadly determined persecutor of Christianity ("Pious Founders" xvii).

Arden then is fascinated with the dual nature of the human, whether emperor of Rome or servant to the emperor, who is capable of acts of generosity, justice, and good will, as well as acts of dire cruelty. The process of decision whereby the individual chooses good or evil is for Arden the subject of good theatre.

The paradoxes of the human condition and its history make for Arden fertile artistic ground. Christianity as an institution offers one of the most intriguing histories of human behavior. The diversity of opinion regarding the person of Jesus of Nazareth is virtually infinite and has engendered an endless variety of applications. Importantly, Arden views Constantine's situation and response as the seminal, shaping moment in the history of the faith.² Arden notes the significance of this time in the following:

When he tried to handle this strange phenomenon called Christianity he was even more at a loss than are modern Western governments trying to stop communism: just as the word "communism" can be used to cover all varieties of dissidence from liberal American film scriptwriters to black
nationalists in South Africa... so the Christian community at the beginning of the fourth century contained so many different schools of thought that to talk of "the Church" and "the heresies" totally begs the question ("Pious Founders" xx).

The "heresies" Arden here refers to are embodied as characters in *Whose is the Kingdom?* Arden imagines that each "heresy" was a school of political as well as theological thought (with potential economic and social ramifications). The Council of Nicea was convened in an effort to resolve the disparate positions in Christendom regarding the person of Christ, but the resultant Nicean Creed produced a political agenda that adversely affected women and other non-Caucasian male groups. In fact, the Council of Nicea, as Frances Gumley describes it, "arguably not only the first ecumenical council but the first democratic international forum the world had known" (*Whose is the Kingdom?* xiii). While the forum was convened on an initially democratic basis, the result—a set creed used to define who would be Christian—clearly reflected and narrowed the field of voices.

Arden explains that two general camps emerged in the days just prior to the Council of Nicea, with the various theo/political factions joining themselves to one camp or the other. Led by Eusebius, the camp that prevailed in the
Council of Nicea was Pauline in orientation. The theology of this group espoused a doctrine that differentiated between the governance of earthly things from that of things earthly and heavenly. Eusebius' interpretation of St. Paul thus ascribed to the Empire absolute authority over earthly conduct and affairs, while the Church was given dominion over matters eternal and spiritual. Arden claims that this Pauline strand, which was responsible for "the hierarchy of Bishops and Clergy, the subordination of Women, the deprecation of individual prophetic voices, and so forth," prevailed over a competing doctrine, which advocated that "the kingdom of God meant social revolution here-and-now, casting the mighty from their seats, exalting the humble and meek ("Pious Founders" xxiii).

This opposing camp is best exemplified for Arden by the Gnostics, whose writings were banned from canon literature as prescribed by the Council of Nicea. The Gnostics, in fact, rejected the entire premise of orthodoxy and argued instead for autonomy and independent investigation. For the Gnostics, salvation was attainable through a private pursuit of knowledge. Clearly, the political consequence of such a doctrine was the absolute rejection of hierarchical authority. The Gnostics, who called themselves Christian, and the Pauline followers of Eusebius who insisted that theirs was the divine revelation, could therefore not both
thrive in this emerging empire without conflict. For Arden, *Whose is the Kingdom?* examines the struggle between these two opposing doctrines. Their battle for power converges in the rise of one eminent historical figure: Constantine.

Arden takes a cause and effect approach to history, one that, we see, lends itself well to the writing of theatre if not to the fair appraisal of historical realities. C. Behan McCullogh notes the problems involved in this sort of historiography:

> It has been argued that causes are events or states of affairs which are at least contingently necessary for their effects. If this is so, then for any given event there is a very large number of causes, indeed an infinite number of indirect as well as direct causes are considered. . . . (194).

Arden agrees that "cause and effect history" is imprecise, even specious. He seems to believe all history is little more than fiction based loosely on the actual figures of a time. Arden defends his effort as an act that counter-balances the mixture of myth, legend, and doctrine that comprises Western orthodoxy. Arden states, "If heretics were censored and repressed, so, too, was official history. It is remarkable how hard it is to discover what really went on in the years covered by *Whose is the Kingdom?*" (xxiv). With causes infinite in number, effects nebulous,
Historical events and their interconnections remain beyond the verification of modern historians or authors. Historiography and its politically engendered fiction would thus seem a valid pursuit of inquiry; at least this appears to be Arden's final judgement:

For dramatists living and working some 1,650 years later, there is only one course: to invent. By and large, we have invented the areas of dissidence which church-and-state "magic" endeavored to "wish away" (xxiv).

Margaretta D'Arcy agrees that invention played a significant part in her collaboration with Arden. D'Arcy, however, regards the task of fictionalization not as a last resort in the absence of substantiated fact, but as a preferable alternative to any conventional interpretation. For D'Arcy, invention is inevitable in the writing of historical fiction. It is part of the process of interpretation (and political in nature). D'Arcy subscribes to the notion that orthodox history is rendered by "winners" and that the "losers'" story lies in the "unexplained gaps," the awkward "eddies and backwaters" of the accepted narrative (xxvii).

D'Arcy is polemic in her approach to this radio drama. She is unabashed in her advocacy of women's issues. Women are for D'Arcy the most obvious occupants of the "eddies and
"backwaters" that compose the losers' history. Until the lacunae are explored and the losers' version told, succeeding generations will view the conflicts of history (war, assassinations, rebellions, etc.) in an uninformed and ill-equipped manner (xxvi). *Whose is the Kingdom?* is thus a vehicle for exploring the history of women in an emerging orthodoxy. D'Arcy hopes to show the audience what has been missed as a result of Pauline supremacy.

Two primary characters further carry the "feminine" perspective in *Whose is the Kingdom?:* Fausta, the child bride of Constantine, and Oenothea, the priestess of the Babylonian Mother Goddess cult. These characters underscore life and birth, not death and after-life, in contrast to the views of Constantine, the king whose life is centered around creating his legacy, and Eumolpus, the secretary to the Bishop of Cordova (who finds the female sex evil by definition). In fact, Eumolpus' overriding suspicion of the female precludes any chance that he might accept any feminine traits in the divine.

Eumolpus

Did not Tertullian tell us that the secret parts of women are in truth the Gates of Hell? (179). Oenethea and Fausta are clear representations of divinity working in the flesh, a point that highlights Eumolpus' utter rejection of the flesh in favor of the spirit. This
tension bespeaks a fundamental, polar conflict within the broad heading of Christianity. A doctrine that emphasizes procreation cannot be accepted into the rigid framework of an orthodoxy, especially when that orthodoxy claims as a basic tenet that biological processes are inherently evil.

The writings of Joseph Campbell seem to support D'Arcy's argument that Western society has proceeded in an altered course (a course that rewards military strength and justifies imperialist motivations) due to its rejection of the female deity. In The Power of Myth, Campbell explains how the prevailing goddess-creator belief was uprooted in the fourth century B.C. by the Semite invaders (the people depicted in the Genesis account). The tribe of Jacob and racially similar groups were "animal-oriented" peoples, hunters and herders, with a predominant death-orientation. The god of the Semites was one of sword and death, a warrior-god, not a deity of the phallus and womb. The Mother Goddess gave way to the father/hunter/warrior. Campbell points out that the virgin birth appears in the gospels by way of the Greek tradition. Only Luke describes the virgin birth, and (of the canon gospel authors) only Luke was Greek. Greek mythology is replete with images of virgins (or chaste, pure vessels) bearing the divinities—Leda and the Swan, Persephone and the Serpent, etc. (Campbell 173). For D'Arcy the orthodoxy of the Council of
Nicea united two distinct, mythic traditions—Hebrew, which, according to Campbell, could never have imagined a man/god or a virgin birth, and the Greek, which deployed the pure woman as vessel for the male god. This synthesis displaces the tradition of the Mother Goddess in favor of the warrior-god. In D'Arcy's estimation this synthesis of traditions detoured history to a male-dominant agenda.

If history and its telling are agenda-driven, then the author must be unashamedly agenda-oriented as well. Objectivity for D'Arcy, the critic/author, may, in fact, be illusory. D'Arcy writes:

I feel strongly that the totality of Christian and post-Christian culture belongs to everyone — that the whole world, for good or ill, has been affected by it — and that in principle everyone should have an equal right and opportunity to voice opinions and to raise and develop issues implicit in our interpretation of the story ("Moon of the Dispossessed" xxxii).

Whose is the Kingdom? thus renounces "objectivity."

Instead, the work is a partnership that "come[s] to grips with our own experience, our own individual views [of Arden and D'Arcy] and allows the gaps in narrative to be filled in by other voices," ("Moon of the Dispossessed" xxxii).
It is evident that the authors approached the writing of this series in agreement as to the necessity and value of the project; however, each was motivated by somewhat different objectives. Arden appears to "fabricate" for the sake of reconstruction, in hopes of redefining the past: "When Acts of State are presented as a religious revelation to be accepted by an act of faith, the world is given one big lie and must learn to make the best of it" ("Pious Founders" xiv). D'Arcy invents for the direct, radical purpose of changing the present: "It was said to me, in joke, that I was 'writing a play, not making a revolution . . .'" D'Arcy clarifies her position:

I asserted it was impossible to understand the history of Nicea without first experiencing the various shifts and debates in modern feminism: and also the liberation theology in the Third World, which had revitalized so much of what Nicea had declared "heretical" - Christ - as human being involved with the struggles of subject - peoples of empire (xxvii). Reflecting their differences in stance, D'Arcy paints a picture of a militant Christ, a revolutionary who subverts imperial rule, while Arden sees Him as a rather shadowy figure (defined only by subsequent generations). The Ardens' co-authorship, which presents two opinions that are
occasionally dissimilar, has drawn sharp critical reaction. Martin Esslin has said that their writing partnership has harmed Arden’s career; "By letting his wife insert a very strong propaganda line which is very partisan, he takes away his essence as a dramatist, which is to give each character his proper weight" (Esslin, Personal interview, July 1990). Yet, unlike Island of the Mighty or Whose is the Kingdom? does not foray into extended political expression. Instead, the piece methodically develops characters and ideas and emerges as the crowning achievement of the couple’s writing partnership, allowing for a near complete synthesis of their two differing purposes.

The scope of the work is such that perhaps only the medium of radio, with its emphasis on language and imagination, could accommodate the effort. The sheer breadth of geography, politics, theology, and other intellectual considerations, not to mention the plethora of plots and subplots that comprise this narrative, would make the work untenable for film or stage. Whose is the Kingdom’s action covers thirty-two years, from Constantine’s consolidation of the Empire under one throne in 303 A.D. to his death in 335 A.D. The events are narrated by an epicurean philosopher named Kybele, a woman forced to flee the Empire to escape persecution by the Christians. Kybele recounts the events of her travels and the life of Constantine from Hibernia, a
site outside the Empire, where she is being tried by the Druids for practicing Christianity. If she cannot convince the Druids that she is, in fact, a philosopher, she will die. As well as carrying the narrative line, Kybele furthermore introduces other key figures and voices the revolutionary sentiments of D'Arcy herself.

In the first episode Constantine attempts to consolidate power. His design targets the parcel of Empire controlled by Maxentius. The Emperor Constantine is accompanied on his military maneuvers by his child-wife, Fausta, who has begun to dabble in the reading of the sacred Christian texts. Fausta is introduced by her hairdresser, Semiramis, to a sub-sect of Christianity called the House of the True Way. Fausta has a mysterious scroll which is interpreted by a woman described as Mary the Companion. The interpretation reveals that the House of the True Way practices a type of Mother Goddess theology, worshipping Mary the Virgin as the Mother of God the Father. Mary the Companion translates the Empress' text in exchange for her jewelry which can be sold to provide food for war refugees. Constantine meanwhile is confronted with a potentially critical dilemma; his army is in chaos as the Christians, now numerous among the ranks, refuse to fight the army of Maxentius, also peopled with a great many Christians. Fausta becomes the pivotal character in the episode
connecting the political storyline with the subtext line. Having insured the survival of Mary the Companion and her disciple, the African camp follower, Melantho (who gives birth to a magic child), Fausta then on the advice of Semiramis attends to her frightened husband. She rubs him with oil and listens to him relate his dilemma concerning the mutinous Christian soldiers. She then provides him with a plausible solution.

Fausta

The cross of light against the sky
Shall burn his head and dazzle out his eye
Let him but follow where it shall travel,
And there is an end to all his peril. . .(19)

With this verse prophecy Fausta implants in the mind of Constantine the idea of following the lead of the Christians. Constantine, who ironically has spurned Fausta to this point in their relationship, is skeptical of her mystic prophecy. In the sunrise he is dazzled by the sight of bright, white crosses painted across the helmets and shields of the Christian soldiers. Seeing a political opportunity, Constantine demands that the entire army paint crosses on their weaponry. The followers of Mithra willingly agree, accepting the cross as a symbol of the unconquered sun. The army of Maxentius is routed when the Christians refuse to stand against the sign of the cross.
Constantine, though victorious, seems confused and unable to discern whether his victory issued from trickery or mystic vision.

Constantine

Find out his power and use it. Make war in the name of Christ. Maximin Daza must go down. My life is his death: it was given me by this Christ. I alone received the vision of the Cross (23).

From this point, Constantine puts his success in the hands of his Christian advisor, Hosius, Bishop of Cordova. Hosius begins to plant the idea of an "official church" in the mind of Constantine.

The second episode of Whose is the Kingdom? illustrates the demise of the Eastern emperor, Maximin Daza, whose center of government is located in Antioch. Maximin Daza has been loyal to the policy of Diocletian—specifically, a methodical eradication of Christianity. Maximin Daza is introduced by way of the subplot concerning the followers of the House of the True Way. Melantho and her mysterious child, now called Helen-Fausta, arrive in Antioch, accompanied by the priestess, Mary. Melantho is in search of her mother Oenothea, the leader of a Babylonian Mother Earth cult. Oenothea has ingratiated herself with Maximin Daza and convinced him that by following her cult's rituals,
he can end the famine plaguing the Eastern empire. Also implied is a universal authority for Maximin Daza. The city of Antioch is near riot, mired in poverty and moral decay when Maximin Daza follows Oenothea into the subterranean sewers for a period of fasting and prayer. Amid the raw sewage the ministers of Maximin Daza's cabinet await word from the high priestess Oenothea of the Mother Earth's appeasement. Theotecnus, the priest of the cult of Zeus, fears he is losing his authority with the Emperor and discredits Oenothea by connecting her to the Christian House of the True Way. Theotecnus, sensing the collapse of Maximin Daza's government, encourages the Emperor to strike against the Emperor Licinius and force a confrontation with Constantine for unified authority. While the streets of Antioch are looted by rioters, Maximin Daza orders the death or imprisonment of all Christians and declares war on Licinius. Maximin Daza, seeing himself as the demi-god, heir to Diocletian, attempts to force marriage on Diocletian's daughter, Valeria (now a Christian), but is refused. Licinius, following the lead of Constantine, unites his army around the sign of the cross and defeats Maximin Daza. Maximin Daza, realizing his defeat, gives two final imperial orders.
Maximin Daza

First: Theotecnus and every other priest and soothsayer who urged me to this disastrous war shall immediately follow me, companions for my journey, my safe conduct through the miasmas of the River Styx. Second: As I drink - in two minutes, I am a god, with new wide understanding of the errors of humanity: therefore, all prisoners from minority cults are to be released, including the cult of Christ. For it is possible the Galilean is himself Immortal: he may wish to thank me when he meets me.

As if to confirm the declaration of Maximin Daza, the episode closes with revolutionaries declaring an end to earthly government:

Revolutionists

The Meek shall inherit the Earth! Ours is the Kingdom! Neither Constantine nor Rome shall Rule! No Rome, Christ Alone! (47).

Episodes three and four serve to distinguish the religious and political tensions involved in Constantine’s consolidation of power. Constantine makes a temporary peace with the elderly Licinius and marries his sister to Licinius as a sign of good faith. Constantine has, however, begun maneuvers to dislocate Licinius, secure his power, and gain
the final conquered portion of the Empire for Constantian rule. Episodes three and four also introduce the dowager Queen Helen, the mother of Constantine and first wife of Constantius. Helen is drawn to Christianity by the persuasive prophecy of Mary the companion and the mysterious precociousness of the angel child, Helen-Fausta. Helen is called to the court of Constantine to serve as a spiritual and political advisor to her son. On the long river journey, accompanied by Mary, Melantho, and the child, Helen is persuaded by Eumolpus that the women of the True Way cult are, in fact, witches. Eumolpus is the ambitious and synchophantic secretary to Hosius of Cordova. Helen banishes Melantho and Helen-Fausta from court but retains the services of Mary the Companion at the urging of Hosius.

As Constantine’s political rivals are eliminated, he begins to suspect the Christian of wishing to usurp his power. Constantine employs a secret service agent, who is loyal to Mithra and was formerly in the employment of Licinius, to investigate any plots against his authority. The agent Jaxartes is suspicious of Constantine’s eldest son Crispus, a successful and popular general, philosopher, and statesman. Jaxartes intercepts the mail of Crispus, particularly correspondence with his Christian mentor, and later purloins missives to philosopher Kybele. Jaxartes interprets Crispus’ independence of thought as treasonous to
the throne. Jaxartes is also suspicious of the Pauline Christians led by Hosius. He feels they are encroaching on imperial authority. The clergy has also begun plans for the Council of Nicea, the event that will clarify the outstanding differences of opinion and thus unofficially distinguish the orthodox from the heretical. Hosius is forceful in convincing Constantine that, once established, orthodoxy will solidify the Emperor’s authority, particularly if the orthodoxy follows Pauline teaching. Hosius identifies for Constantine those sects that could be subversive. Episodes Three and Four depict the building of allegiances and the construction of a political framework that will protect the established authority of Constantine. The Ardens use Episode Five to illuminate the rebellious forces who resist the entrenched authority.

In Episode Five Fausta and her servant, Semiramus, are confronted by the doctrine of male supremacy held by both the Pauline and the Arius bishops. A former slave, Physcon the Baker, freed and ascended to a position of some authority, has appealed to the Bishop of Nicomedia for the return of Semiramus as his rightful wife. Fausta defends Semiramus’ right to choose her own mate in the face of increasing political pressure. With the Council approaching and fearing a popular ground swell of support for Arian
doctrine, Hosius avoids the issue, thereby forcing Fausta to aid Semiramus in an escape.

Jaxartes locates writings that will secure the theological position of the Arians. Jaxartes is forced to decide upon a Christology. Arius' Christology suggests that Jesus was human; Pauline doctrine holds that Jesus was divine (as interpreted by Hosius). Fearing that Arius could parlay and popular support into the emperorship, Jaxartes uses the documents to Hosius' advantage, turning the Emperor toward Pauline doctrine.

Episode Six delineates the circumstances surrounding the Council of Nicea. Hosius and Eumolpus manage to regain a measure of imperial confidence and to wrestle doctrinal authority away from Arius and his followers, including the friend of the dowager Queen Helen and the Bishop of Nicomedia. While the theological destiny of the Empire is being decided, Nicea assumes a carnival-like atmosphere. Representatives of even the most extreme sects of Christianity find their way to Nicea. When the orthodoxy is announced and Arius is condemned as an anathema, a melee ensues. Street performers and peasants are driven by force from the city; some are killed. The sects, including the House of the True Way, are branded as heretical and face execution. Constantine is appointed thirteenth apostle by the Council, thus solidifying his political and religious
authority, in spite of the fact that he has yet to consent to baptism.

In the seventh episode Constantine’s agent, Jaxartes, witnesses a bizarre mystic ritual and orgy amidst the peasants fleeing Nicea. The angel child, Helen-Fausta, flies while her mother chants, drawing her audience into a mass hypnosis and apparently resurrecting the slave, Semiramus, from the dead. Jaxartes recognizes a veiled participant as the Empress Fausta. Jaxartes is now more firmly convinced that Crispus and the Empress are in league with Persia for the overthrow of Constantine. Helen, too, is convinced of Fausta’s designs on the throne and extracts a confession by torture from Mary the Companion.

In Episode Eight, Semiramus and Melantho have escaped to the neutral province of the Arabian desert. Semiramus is reunited with her true husband, Joachim, and Melantho locates her mother, Oenothea. Melantho is horrified to discover her mother has sold Helen-Fausta to an Indian caravan. Eumolpus exerts his authority to establish an increasingly misogynist hierarchy. The feminine leaders of the Christian churches are driven underground or subjugated under the official orthodoxy.

In the ninth and final episode the physically ill Constantine grapples with his own mind and is visited by a spectre he believes to be Paul of Tarsus. In conversation
with the spectral figure Paul, Constantine debates the person of Christ and the movement called Christianity. The spectre proposes a hypothesis. Paul suggests that Christ was no more than a man who found a niche among a House of David cult. His martyrdom opened a wider arena, one that allowed his followers to create a much more inclusive sect. In a strange twist Paul reminds Constantine that he (Paul) was the thirteenth apostle.

Constantine

You the thirteenth? Me?

Paul of Tarsus

In that case we are one and the same, we are part of each other? I told you I was a hypothesis (208).

Constantine is left with the realization that logic cannot prove what only faith can avow. While the Emperor on his deathbed struggles to find a faith in the Christ, Helen and Eutropa (Fausta’s mother) tour the Empire’s endangered eastern provinces in an effort to confirm the imperial authority. In a climactic, last-gasp moment vision of Christ, Constantine understands that only faith—not doctrine, logic, or political methodology—can be the criteria for his embracing Christianity. Constantine calls for baptism just before death. The Empire is left divided
again, this time in three parts, and the Nicean orthodoxy soon falls under attack.

The Ardens create a literary artifact that demonstrates how orthodoxy is born out of the marriage of sincere commitment and political expediency. The artwork is not factual, but its images abound in truth. Both Arden's moderating voice and D'Arcy's more militant voice are apparent.

It is significant that the Ardens' portrait of Constantine does not reveal a man of faith. Arden describes his characterization of Constantine as follows:

> It had, for instance, become apparent that Constantine was by no means the great decision-maker: nearly everything he did came upon him out of the blue, he spent his whole life trying desperately to keep up with forces that were swaying his empire, and he died without having secured any form of equilibrium ("Pious Founders" xix).

Constantine's initial alliance with Christianity is tentative and based more on a pseudo-mystical experience than on genuine conviction. Fausta is able to manipulate him with sexuality, maternal concern, and mystic imagery. Constantine attempts to balance the diverse opinion presented to him (by bishops and political advisors) but is
never wholly convinced. Consequently, the emperor declares his kingdom Christian, though he never himself embraces the deity he extols. Constantine's conversation with the mysterious St. Paul in the final episode epitomizes the Ardens' handling of Constantine. The character Constantine is unable to decide for himself what he believes and so conjures up the hallucination of Paul of Tarsus (only to discover again that he confronts only himself). The narrative of Paul's confrontation with the man called Jesus is left open-ended.

Paul

The coincidence of the name: the empty tomb: could it be the same man, he had come out of it alive? (206).

Constantine, like Paul, has to decide who Jesus really was. Was he divine? What was his purpose? Like Paul, only a personal leap of faith could prove the deciding factor. Constantine is confronted with the timeless dilemma of the believer: accepting by faith the unprovable. Constantine's conversion stems as much from a fear of the afterlife as from the evidences of Christ's ministry. The teachings of Christ ("love thy neighbor," etc.) have immediate, tangible implications but are open to individual application. The choice between eternal life and eternal death has a more galvanizing impact. In the characterization of Constantine,
Arden and D'Arcy make the point that the Christ is used for political expedience throughout history and throughout this individual's life, but the true worth of the Christ is evident only at the point of death. Awaiting his demise, Constantine, unable to decide about life, decides about death, declaring himself a believer.

The Ardens contrast the equivocal Constantine with Eumolpus, the secretary and advisor to the Bishop of Cordova. Eumolpus is single-minded and follows a clear agenda. On the surface Eumolpus appears ludicrously misogynistic:

Eumolpus

If your wife is a true Christian she will rejoice in her deliverance from fallen womanhood (134).

In fact, Eumolpus is a composite of the prevailing theology that emerged from the Council of Nicea (and which has been perpetuated for sixteen centuries). The great church father, Tertullian, evinced a fundamental distrust of women even to the point of defining them as spiritual others:

"Even natural beauty [referring to women] ought to be obliterated by concealment and neglect, since it is dangerous to those who look upon it" (Tannehill, Sex in History 148). Tertullian was supported by the teachings of Jerome and St. Augustine who in turn influenced modern
doctrine. The nineteenth century American Baptist theologian, James M. Pendleton, states the following:

Eve, though acting under a mistake and a delusion was by no means excusable, but Adam was far more inexcusable than she, for he acted intelligently as well as voluntarily. . . It is to be remembered too that the sin of Adam had a far more important connection with the human race than the sin of Eve. The man, not the woman, was to be head and representative of the race (Christian Doctrine 165).

Pendleton's idea that woman is less guilty of wrong doing supports the Tertullian myth that woman is simply a lesser being, unable to control her actions and thus spiritually inferior. Pendleton is representative of modern conservative Christian doctrine. The Ardens have not created an unnatural stereotype in the theocrat, Eumolpus; Eumolpus is a figure out of history but is indeed a type still with us in the present.

Interestingly, however, the Ardens were willing to present a culpable female character, a virtual antithesis to Eumolpus—Oenothea, the priestess of the Mother Goddess. Oenothea is a misomasculent whose wrath for the male gender spills over into contempt for Christianity, a religion that just happens to center around a male messiah. Oenothea is
as destructive to and distrusting of males as Eumolpus is of females:

Oenothea

The banner of a hanged man, an empty tale, an empty tomb, the empty hope of a eunuch carpenter who told his mother to get lost because the Son of Man alone - he said - is the one who will prevail against the abominable woman of Babylon (29).

The Ardens seem to imply that females are capable of the same imperialist motives and gendercentric doctrine as men, and, given an alternative set of circumstances, an orthodoxy based on a feminine-exclusive divinity could have emerged.

Aside from the major gender opposition, the Ardens seem quite concerned with the issue of freedom of thought. Jaxartes, acting as a devoted Roman and a non-Christian, leads Constantine to accept "thought control" and to limit spiritual investigation for the sake of centralized power. Jaxartes explains that the bishops who hold the Pauline doctrine represent the sect most likely to support a strong earthly authority. He thus encourages Constantine to suppress the Gnostics and the followers of Arius. This suppression of thought ultimately contributes to the reprehensible actions of Constantine, driving him to, as D'Arcy says, "murder" Fausta, his wife, and his son, Crispus. The entire drama emerges as a working model of how
thought control and political suppression emerge. We see compelling examples of the resulting suffering and human toil.

The Ardens create minor figures that dramatize the consequences of an unrelenting orthodoxy. The Druid pilgrim who comes to Nicea to offer the beautiful wolfhounds as presents is caught up in the conflict (between the prevailing theological parties and those that lost their representative voices) and is slaughtered. The Druid stands for those whose lives are not centered in Christian belief or Western politics (the disenfranchised) but are nonetheless victimized by the ravages of oppression.

Finally, the Ardens give special emphasis to Kybele, the poet, philosopher, idealist. Kybele attempts to assimilate all that she has seen and experienced. Kybele is sometimes unsure as to whether her memory recalls real events or the dreams of hallucination. In essence, Kybele represents the collective authorial presence of the Ardens and at times passes judgement within the drama:

Kybele

Kybele says: boo to the Emperor. Kybele says boo to the bishops. And boo to the freedom for the New Religion! Kybele beats her drum and says: let us have freedom from religion (124).
Frequently Kybele narrates; on other occasions she participates in the play’s action. Ultimately, Kybele expresses the balanced, sympathetic voice. Kybele comes to love the Hibernian Christian women who take her in. She grieves over their loss and recognizes in them the value of Christianity. She understands the hate in the Druid who hopes to have her killed. Kybele even looks beyond the present to comment on the future.

Kybele

The Council of Nicea has settled nothing. . . the end of the story but not the end of the Empire nor of Christianity (212).

Kybele unites the protesting voice of D’Arcy with the introspective, poetic voice of Arden. At times the function of Kybele is unclear: why, in fact, is she involved? Ultimately, however, the clarity of her function emerges: the history must be told by someone, even if the facts are insufficient and invention is inescapably partisan. Kybele embodies the wandering spirit like the chorus of old women in Medea of Euripides. Kybele, by telling her tale, exposes some truths and lies of Christianity, Western politics, and personal motivation. Finally, the Ardens have potentially engaged their audience and left them thinking about history and the accompanying drama of individual lives that are
affected by prevailing orthodoxies—religious, political, and artistic.
Notes

1 According to the introduction and compiled historical information included in Whose is the Kingdom?, Diocletian reigned as emperor of Rome from 284 A.D. to 305 A.D., and his reign was distinguished by a severe persecution of Christians from 303-305 A.D. "Aximin Daza reigned as co-emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire from 305-309 A.D.

2 Constantine reigned as emperor of Rome from 306 A.D. to 337 A.D. according to the background found in the historical supplement essay, "The Road to Nicea," by Frances Gumley, included in the preface to Whose is the Kingdom?

3 John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy include a glossary of important, historical terms and proper names in the preface to Whose is the Kingdom? The Council of Nicea is defined in the glossary as "the first ecumenical council convoked A.D. 325 to refute heresy and safeguard orthodoxy."

4 Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia (died circa 371 A.D.), was an Eastern Church statesman and friend of the emperor’s half-sister, Constantia. Eusebius was an influential force in the Council of Nicea and baptized Constantine in the year of the emperor’s death, 337 A.D. (Whose is the Kingdom? xvi).

5 The Ardens define "gnosticism as a "prechristian form of theosophy owing much to the dualism of 2oroaster."
Gnosticism taught that the created world was the world of an anti-god. Its tendency to ascetic rejection of the material world made it attractive to the Christians. . . They rejected the uniformity of orthodoxy, preferring independence; they rejected hierarchical authority, preferring freedom to look and to seek the secret knowledge essential for salvation" (Whose is the Kingdom? xvi).

Maxentius was a usurper to the Western imperial throne in 306 A.D. and was defeated by Constantine in his effort to unify the Empire in 312 A.D. (Whose is the Kingdom? viii).
Works Cited


Arden, John. "Pious Founders." *Whose is the Kingdom?:* xvii-xxiv.

---. Personal interview. August 1990.


Gumley, Frances. "The Road to Nicea." *Whose is the Kingdom?:* xii-xiii.


Chapter V - The Systems of Theology Affecting the Literary Landscape of John Arden’s The Books of Bale

John Arden and Margaretta D’Arcy have used the technique of historical invention (the weaving of historical figures and events into a fictional narrative) throughout their careers, both in collaboration and in their individual works. The Business of Good Government attempts to allegorize the historical Christ Child’s birth; Whose is the Kingdom? explores current political issues by filling in the gaps that appear in "official" history; with The Books of Bale (1988), John Arden again employs a fictionalized approach to historical events. And yet, the tone, demeanor, and thematic thrust of the work is decidedly different from that of Whose is the Kingdom? The Books of Bale is a sweeping, detailed novel examining the lives of multiple characters (some historical, some fictional) as they could have been lived in that turbulent time surrounding Tudor England. The work also speaks to the impact of faith and politics on the daily affairs of those lives. The issue of faith and politics clearly is not a new one for Arden, as previous chapters in this document demonstrate. What does emerge as new in The Books of Bale is the author’s fresh appreciation of the importance of grace and forgiveness in community.

Thematically, The Books of Bale could be said to be a return to the "equivocal" position of Serjeant Musgrave’s
Dance, Arden's work that drew such sharp derision from critics who decried the play's non-committal political stance. Critics such as Eric Keown failed to recognize Arden's contention that ideals, pacifism, liberty, etc. are difficult to achieve in a flawed, human environment ("At the Play" 380). In The Books of Bale, Arden returns to the subject of "ideals and human frailty" though with a patient, poetic, and greatly matured sensibility. He expresses vividly the age-old dilemma regarding idealist aims and human shortcomings. In the process, Arden reaffirms the value of community, grace, and hope (just as he did in Serjeant Musgrave's Dance and with D'Arcy in The Business of Good Government).

Arden's approach to issues in The Books of Bale is, on the whole, rather balanced. Arden seems to be saying with this book that individuals are highly complex, that human interaction cannot be reduced or explained in political or religious systems and symbols. Arden's emphasis is on process, both in the life of the individual and the workings of the community.

The pilgrimage of human life is, for Arden, one of steady refinement. In Arden's fictional history, people make discoveries, reach new plateaus, and then, because they are flawed creatures, forget, if only temporarily, what they have learned, returning to self-defeating actions. The
process is one of learning, failing, forgiving, and learning again. This occurs in a community, before a God they worship. Arden puts forth this formula in his author's forward:

On the one hand we have an important pioneer playwright of revolutionary zeal, on the other we find ourselves invited to wonder at the violent cultural colonialism of a tactless Bishop. Neither set of authorities seems in general to incorporate the insights of the other. . .(xi).

For Arden, the crux of community involves combining the understanding, grace, and compassion of the poet with the zeal and commitment of the reformer. This synthesis is seldom found in the individual; it rarely happens in the community. In the person of John Bale, Arden creates a hero in whom these two personae, poet and reformer, exist in potent tandem. Arden allows us to experience the hope and possibilities that appear when the poet and reformer work in consort; we too witness the grief and despair that can result when such cooperation does not occur.

The historical Bale (1495-1563) is in some respects well documented for a late medieval, English literary figure; this is in part, due to the fact that he kept prolific records of this period and its theological insurrection.³ Indeed, Bale produced three autobiographical
volumes, all of which tend to focus, perhaps self-consciously, on the deprivation he suffered in his systematic pursuit of reform. The recorded events that seem to have shaped Bale's theology play very prominent roles in Arden's narrative. Bale, for example, was a child of a very large family in central England (Happe, *The Complete Plays of John Bale I*) 3). Lacking the means to support all of their offspring, the parents sent John to a Carmelite monastery in the countryside of central England when he was twelve. In his telling of the story, Arden draws the logical assumption that the parents looked at the prospect of a child in the clergy in a medieval Romanist fashion, that is, that with a cleric in the family, other family members would be assured of indulgences at a reduced price. The issue of sold indulgences does figure heavily in the rhetorical prose of Bale himself, but a clear depiction of the parents' motives cannot be discerned.

Another issue involves Bale's sexual history. While in the Carmelite monastery, Bale was subjected to sexual abuse. Arden makes much of this point, developing the element as a subject for theological debate. In his autobiographical writings, Bale blames much of the abuse he received at the hands of Carmelite monks on the forced celibacy of the monastery (Happe 3). Arden's adult Bale conversely evinces paradoxical influences driven both by the need for feminine
companionship (as a sign of his normalcy) and by latent homosexual desires rooted in his Carmelite, adolescent experience.

Moreover, concerning Bale's Cambridge years, Arden takes rather free license. Peter Happe's introduction to the collected works of Bale indicates that his research shows little or no contact between Bale and reformers at Jesus College, Cambridge (The Complete Plays of John Bale I 3). Thomas Cranmer may have served as a tutor for Bale, but little from this era suggests Bale was anything other than an orthodox Romanist (3). Arden embellishes history by suggesting that, while at Cambridge, Bale was first exposed to the ideas of the German and Swiss reformers and to the English texts of scripture. Bale's connection to Thomas Lord Wentworth, a patron of reformers, is, however, verified in Bale's writing as is his running conflict with the causes, if not the person, of Thomas Cromwell (Happe 3). The travels of Bale, as described by Arden, are chronologically accurate; motivations are left unarticulated in Bale's account, and in these lacunae Arden weaves his own narrative suppositions. In Bale's witness we find a zealous reformer who was preoccupied with his office of rhetorician (Happe 3). Arden's "version" acknowledges this persona; in fact, it underscores the intensity of Bale's convictions and proposes a set of fictional circumstances under which such
an enigmatic figure could emerge. Arden's emphasis on Bale as playwright and sexual being furthermore gives a completeness to the historical figure. Arden's Bale well serves as a vehicle for discussion. The character is given a dimensionality of freedom in faith, one that very well highlights the issues of grace in the community.

The most important fictional element of Arden's narrative is the life and character of Bale's faithful wife, Dorothy. In actuality, little is known of Bale's wife save that she had at least one son when she and Bale married in 1536 and that she accompanied Bale in 1540 when he was forced to flee to the continent (Happe 5). Surprisingly, Dorothy is the central figure of Arden's novel. While Bale is the catalyst for a revolutionary event, Dorothy serves to gauge the consequences of the event and thus offers a point of view sympathetically assumed by the reader. Arden creates an entire history for Dorothy which is rich in color, contrast, and moral paradox. Arden's Dorothy is an orphan sold to a minstrel troupe and reared as a prostitute and erotic dancer. Conditioned by wretched circumstances, Arden's Dorothy nonetheless possesses the soul of an artist and expects life to be an ironic mixture of pleasure and pain. Arden's Dorothy is educated and refined by fate. For example, her skills as a musician are quite crude until she is sold into the service of a company that stages Italian
court masques. This resultant training and her own natural skills combine to create a new Dorothy, one who is refined and confident. Dorothy also discovers the power of sexual politics and advances monetarily and professionally by her affair with Lord Wentworth. In like manner, Dorothy's spiritual growth is attributable to her marriage to Bale. She finds in Bale’s theological world an avenue of expression for the political, moral, and professional discoveries she has made in her personal odyssey. Dorothy’s moral code is ambivalent, opposed to the black and white morality of Bale, the Romanists, and the Calvinists. For Dorothy, certain activities may carry negative consequences; and yet, in and of themselves, such acts (which Bale or the Calvinists might consider sin) are simply inevitabilities of human nature. Human nature for Dorothy is neither good nor evil, only subject to the consequences of destructive behavior. For example, Dorothy gives her affection (and body) to Lord Wentworth, a married man who will never leave his wife. For Dorothy, the sin of this act is not "expiated" by eternal grace, but is paid for by the grief she feels in the loss of Wentworth. Dorothy seems to believe that the loss of relationship with Wentworth mirrors God’s rejection of her as a result of her affair with a married man. This results in an alienation and scarring that cannot be absolved by priestly confession. Dorothy is
a more sensitive, forgiving, and inviting heroine than any Arden has previously created. She lacks the polemical feminism of Kybele, the heroine of *Whose is the Kingdom?*, and of Gwyhnevar (*The Island of the Mighty*). Nor is she consumed by self-pity and remorse as is Annie in *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance*. In contrast to these extreme personality types, Dorothy is a character who grows to understanding, expresses a rounded range of emotions, and represents a variety of human experiences. In short, Dorothy is Arden’s most complete female creation.

The narrative of *The Books of Bale* is presented in a fashion not unlike Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, revealing a chronological unfolding of events seen from a composite of varying voices and recollections. The result is a multi-faceted perspective, as the narrative of Bale and Dorothy is presented by friends, enemies, lovers, and the omniscient voice. Bale first appears in the story as a shadowy figure surrounded by rumor and menace. Dorothy is warned that he is a lecher, known to abduct and murder the young women of minstrel troupes and bawdy houses. Dorothy, however, is saved from death when Bale warns her that her minstrel troupe will be raided by Papists searching for an unauthorized English Bible. The relationship between Bale and Dorothy remains an uneasy one as Dorothy shows unwillingness to accept Bale’s help; unwittingly she
acquiesces, as he arranges for her employment and advancement. Finally, they marry: for Dorothy the marriage is initially one of convenience. After losing her place of business (a private performance room), she has no means of supporting her son, the illegitimate child of Lord Wentworth. Bale offers to provide for mother and son and to rear the child as his own. Arden grants Bale a gracious side in these events, an affability Bale himself does not reveal in his own writings. The marriage of Dorothy and Bale ultimately proves a fruitful alliance as Dorothy grows to love Bale, his work and poetic vision. Conflicts do, however, emerge. Dorothy wishes to maintain her own professional identity by continuing to perform in a theologically reformed minstrel troupe. And, a breach occurs in their relationship when Bale forsakes his commitment to his ideals in favor of service to the King. When Bale gains a bishopric in Ossory, Ireland, Dorothy views this as an act of hubris on Bale’s part, self-indulgent, and ill-conceived. Dorothy sees the sacrifices she is forced to make for Bale as futile, and she feels she has lost the man she married. Only in the last hours of Bale’s life does he understand her grief and she his mission. Only in this enlightenment, at the point of death, can the two extend to each other a measure of grace.
Arden’s narrative is a tapestry interwoven with strands of ideological and theological import, much like Whose is the Kingdom? Yet, Whose is the Kingdom? is peopled with extreme characters driven by malevolent obsessions—such as the misogynist, Eumolpus, who views women as soulless creatures of temptation and evil. No such extremes appear in The Books of Bale. Instead, Arden creates characters who are flawed but explicably motivated in the defense of their theology. The theologies become character as much as the individuals who embrace them. For example, the Lutheran Conrad discusses and defends his reformed position as though he speaks of a monarch or a country. Arden seems to validate the act of believing and the defense of belief. This emerges as a noble pursuit of life.

The core theological conflict of The Books of Bale concerns the emerging Anglican theology and its opposition to the Roman orthodoxy. For Bale, the "new guise" offers no easy transition. Indeed, as Anglicans broke reluctantly from Roman doctrine, the Tudor move to a monarchical head of church was marked by false steps and backsliding. Issues involving the Eucharist, sin, and verification by faith became centerpieces of national dispute. Much about Arden’s depiction of Bale shows the impact of symbol or ritual on life itself. The Roman belief in transubstantiation (a literal belief that the wine and bread of Communion become
the actual blood and body of Christ) within the Eucharist acted as an antidote against sins. The Mass was, in fact, understood as a representation of the sacrifice of the Cross, one that needed to be re-experienced by the believer in his ongoing effort for salvation (Drewery History of Christian Doctrine "The Council of Nicea" 408-9). The Anglicans were reluctant to dispose entirely of transubstantiation and so arrived at a compromised position (accomplished during the time covered in The Books of Bale), whereby the bread and wine of the Eucharist was the body and blood of Christ in a mystical sense, as a spiritual sign of Christ already received. Anglican reformer, Richard Hooker, argued that, "The real presence of the body and blood of Christ's most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought for in the sacraments, but in the receiver of the sacraments" (Woodhouse in "Sixteenth Century Anglican Theology" History of Christian Doctrine 422). The Anglican position was equivocal; it did not deny that Christ's reference was a literal one (bread is body, wine is blood), but suggested a more anatomically practical application, that is to say, that for all spiritual purposes, the elements are bread to body, wine to blood. The Anglican position on the Mass is likewise ambivalent. The acts of recurring sacrifice conducted in the Mass are condemned in Article 28 of the 1571 Thirty-Nine Articles (Woodhouse 422).
Yet, the baptism and worship experiences are more than the pure symbolic acts described by Ulrich Zwingli and the Anabaptists.

Arden's Bale grapples with the nature of the Eucharist and faces guilt over his intellectual rejection of the Mass. Most of all, Bale grapples with "justification by faith" and to its promised access of every person to God (without priestly intervention). Arden's Bale recounts his dilemma to his wife:

When I went to confession, I would number my sins mechanical, according to form, and never never express puzzlement as to how this or that complexity of motive and consequence could rightly be unravelled. Which was wise of me, my confessor preferred it so, it saved him so many heart-searchings. The difficulty came when I attempted to talk to God. Because He did not answer. Well, of course He did. But how to distinguish His answer from all the other turbulence in my spirit, heh? Hey, I am still struggling to find out the secret of that! No, all upon my own it CAN NOT BE SUFFICIENT! (132).

Bale suffers doubt, not in God, but in his own theological system. Logic, dialogue, scripture, even prayer have combined to convince Bale that believers do not need the
confessional to receive grace. Yet, experience, more directly his own childhood experience, has instilled in him an allegiance to the ritual, one that proves difficult to forsake.

Wentworth, the adamant reformer, is plagued by the same kind of irrational distrust of his faith. Wentworth condemns the Roman Church but fears more greatly the Anabaptists, whose doctrinal stance is radically individual in nature. Bale likens the theology of Lord Wentworth to Uldrych Zwingli, the Zurich reformer. Wentworth’s declaration of faith comes at a point in Arden’s narrative when Wentworth is least afraid of political consequences and most inclined to express his spiritual testimony. Wentworth declares to Bale, Dorothy, and the Lutheran extremist, Conrad:

I believe that Jesus Christ, being made man, crucified, risen, liveth in heaven and on earth amongst us all to this day (by virtue of the Holy Spirit) that He may bring us to His kingdom with no less simplicity, no less rational action, than that which he pursued through His thirty-three years of childhood, growth, manhood. . . Sometimes His earthly friends drank too much and He loved them, sometimes they whored themselves, and He loved them even better. He gave them bread and
wine and said, "This is Me," and no vested priest took the supper from His hands to pass it amongst them. Simon Peter had a wife: He did not tell him to put her away. Simon Peter had a sword, and He did not approve its use. . . .This is the Christ I seek, and I hope that we all seek (156-7).

This brief confession from Wentworth defines many issues of the novel and sets up the work's central theological conflicts. Wentworth's confession, in fact, reads like a Zwingli statement. First, Wentworth's entire confession of faith is based on Gospel account, the historical Christ, and is devoid of Church tradition--thus, no mention of the intercessory role of Mary to the saints. The Wentworth confession is centered in a once and still living Christ, dynamic and involved in the daily affairs of men. Importantly, Zwingli too rejected the spectacle aspect of worship. Zwingli shared this view with Luther. Zwingli's insistence on corporate and individual involvement in worship led to his rejection of the Mass on three grounds. First, Zwingli insisted that clergy and congregation participate on equal basis in the communion rite. Secondly, Zwingli (like Arden's Wentworth) thought that worship should be scripture-centered and dynamic, thus performed in the native tongue of the congregation.
Thirdly, Zwingli rejected the Mass as a "sacrifice" made to God. Zwingli found this blasphemous, for all sufficient sacrifice was made by Christ on the cross (Timothy George Theology of the Reformers 148-9).

The irony of Arden's depiction of the Wentworth confession comes from the fact that, even though Wentworth appears to believe wholly in what he is saying, he does not defend these doctrines (in practice). For example, in describing the Zwingli doctrine of sin, Wentworth contends that all are prone to sin but grace is sufficient for forgiveness. Yet, Wentworth cannot forgive his own carnal "sin" with Dorothy and does not believe his wife worthy for God's service. An aspect of Wentworth's confession goes beyond Zwingli and is clearly Anabaptist in orientation. This is his pacifist statement forbidding violence (which clearly moves beyond Zwingli's position). In actuality, Zwingli martyred great numbers of Anabaptists over the issue of infant baptism (George 137-8). Wentworth's confession thus reads more like the stance of the Zwinglian extremists --the Anabaptists, the sect most feared by Bale, Conrad, and Wentworth. This group voiced concern not for their doctrine, but for their utter rejection of established authority. In the Schleitheim document (a sixteenth century confession of faith) Anabaptists declared violence (they specifically use the word "sword") to be contrary to
Christ's example and, as such, called on the Christians to avoid any position of governmental leadership that would require armed coercion (Lumpkin 27-8).

Surely this Anabaptist doctrine is not lost on Arden; he has created in Wentworth a prototypical Western governmental figure. Arden presents, on the one hand, a sympathetic picture of a man devoted to faith, and on the other hand, a man who opportunistically seeks political, social, and economic advancement. Wentworth's glorious confession contrasts sharply with the work he pursues for King Henry VIII, who is quite literally bringing the sword to bear upon enemies and perceived enemies. Even Wentworth's marriage is loveless and expedient. His wife withholds conjugal relations because her priest has declared Wentworth a heretic. When she is assigned a new priest, one who follows the King's "new guise" theology, she is more than willing to restore conjugal rights. Wentworth despises this relationship and openly admits his preference for the passionate, committed Dorothy; however, divorce from a noble lady in favor of a professional erotic dancer would effectively ruin his career. Though he does not believe his marriage to be of God, he refuses to renounce it, less for reasons of faith than those of professional and political status.
Arden sets Bale up as a contrast to Wentworth, not as an ideal or perfect model, but rather as a portrait of the opposite extreme. Bale labors over his doctrinal disputations, never convinced of what he believes. On the one hand, he rejects the "old guise," or Roman orthodoxy, on the basis of scripture, but on the other hand, he is distrustful of human nature and is therefore cautious to expound any notion of free will (an Anabaptist tenet) for fear that man will reject faith altogether and return to pre-Christian, pagan chaos. But, Bale acts with passion in spite of his insecurity. He seems to be driven more by guilt than by faith, driven more by a need for forgiveness than any exultation of grace received. Arden's Bale offers a general portrait of the left-wing politics of the West (as Arden has observed it), a school of passionate individuals who are committed to action but are insecure in the basis of their beliefs; they nonetheless are convinced that existing structures are oppressive and must be overthrown at all costs. As a foil to Wentworth, Bale, for example, fearlessly marries Dorothy, defying the potential political and economic consequences of such an act. But Bale's passionate involvement overrides his ability to meet needs (emotional, spiritual, or physical) on an individual basis. When Bale is put in prison, he does not fear for his own health or for the safety of his family. Instead his worries
center upon the production of his anti-Papist play, *King John*. When Bale accepts the bishopric of Ossory in Ireland, he endangers his family and jeopardizes the lives of innocent Irish people; in exclusive fashion Bale sees only the need for change, for liberating the Irish from the tyranny of Rome. Bale even fails to recognize that by forcing the reformed English faith upon the Irish, he is imposing his own form of tyranny.

Arden thus seems to indict the extremist left as being as tyrannical as the conservative right. Arden makes this point alternately by defending Roman and Anglican faith, and by condemning both practices. Arden has the poet Wyatt (a figure portrayed as imperfect, but ultimately objective) defend the office of the Pope, citing how the tradition has shielded the Church from hostile authorities and invading forces. Wyatt notes the role of the Church in protecting literature, art, and all things civilized in the otherwise barbarous period following the fall of Rome (*The Books of Bale* 311). Arden likewise condemns the use of torture in the Anglican church, expressed in his subplot involving Lydia, the daughter of Bale and Dorothy. Lydia is lured to the torture room to see the rack and other devices used to extract confessions from suspected Papists. In a sense, Arden is making the point that no difference exists between the Roman church and the Anglican church—both are strong as
vehicles of faith; both fail when they become bodies of government. Wentworth and Bale are believers, but each fails Dorothy when his personal faith is superseded by the drive for personal power.

Dorothy, the victim, then becomes the centerpiece of The Books of Bale. Dorothy’s faith is described as pure and unspoiled by influence. She interrupts the discussion of finances and strategy being held by Bale, Wentworth, and Conrad with a penetrating inquiry, one that defines her faith and seems to echo Arden’s concerns about faith and the needs he perceives to exist for most human beings. The three reformers are caught up in a plan to enact reform when Dorothy interjects, "Why am I here?" (150)—a salient and pervasive question for all people seeking God. Dorothy adds:

I do not know at all whether or not I am concerned for reformation of anything, or at least to the extent of spending my hours upon it: You will reform, I’ll receive, if I like what you give me, I’ll be glad. But will I like it? I want—oh, I’ll tell you what I want. I want all this whole damned world turned upside-down, inside-out, and made into Paradise Garden. Can you do it? Can the King? Can I? I don’t believe it (150-1).
Dorothy's thoughts are basic; she cannot put her trust in human efforts. Absent from her equation is God. This absence of reference implies that Dorothy's only hope for a "Paradise Garden" lies in a God, pure and nonsectarian, outside the entanglements of partisan politics. Dorothy's art, her dance and her music, express her purity of vision and the exclusion of sectarian thought. Dorothy the artist can conjure a sense of the sublime, as a reflection of God's goodness. Her efforts approach the phenomenon described by Longinus:

For when men of different pursuits, lives, ambitions, ages, languages, hold identical views on one and the same subject then the verdict which results, so to speak, from a concert of discordent elements makes our faith in the object of admiration strong and unassailable (Dramatic Theory and Criticism 79).

To the sixteenth century Christians that people Arden's novel, this evocation of sublime beauty, evidenced in Dorothy's voice and dance, does bring about esteem for the heroine. Her art, moreover, brings about an admiration for Dorothy's creator. Wentworth describes Dorothy's effect on him in a letter to Wyatt, who in turn responds that Wentworth's experience is "in concert" with his own feelings. Wentworth declares, "But La Haut-jambeé (Dorothy)
by contrast was no wild provoker, except of laughter and sensual love. La Haut-jambeé made men glow toward the glowing future of reformed England" (299). In her art, Dorothy expresses a sort of faith that Arden appears to endorse. For Dorothy, and perhaps for Arden, faith, true faith, can only exist in freedom. As a corollary, since no one is truly and completely free, no one can express pure faith. Dorothy is most creative and vibrant in her most free state, enjoyed in the performance inn which is ironically called "The Birdcage." She is her own employer, working and living in the relatively ungoverned Southwark district on the Southbank. Only when Dorothy allows herself to be drawn into the governmental and ecclesiastical affairs of Wentworth and Bale does her freedom and the purity of her faith begin to erode. Finally, her home and livelihood in The Birdcage are taken away, not because of her art but because of the political activities that occur within the walls of the inn. The Irish poet, who comments upon Bale's mission to Ireland from the Erse (Irish Catholic) perspective, illustrates Arden's paradox of freedom and faith:

Freedom cannot be given: only taken, because the taking is in itself freedom, without which no freedom (neither of choice, nor of self-contentment, nor of ability from strength
experienced). Jewel of life being your own life: Give it away, you must needs be dead (421).

Both Dorothy and the Irish poet believe that Bale and the English reformers have good intentions. The Irish poet even says that "He (Bale) came to Ireland to do good" (421). And though, not comfortable with the move to Ireland, Dorothy agrees to go if Bale assures her that he is not going as an act of self-advancement but with the genuine intent to "do good." However, both Dorothy and the Irish poet indicate the paradox of faith and freedom. If Bale, on behalf of the King, forces the Irish to accept the "new guise," the anti-Roman doctrine, then their belief does not issue from free choice and is therefore not real. The same dilemma besets the Anabaptists. The reformers (Bale, Wentworth, etc.) and the Roman Catholics alike fear the Anabaptists above all because doctrinally they are the most liberal. They insist that the acceptance of peace depends upon free will and decision of the individual. They also argue that baptism must be freely chosen by the adult and is thus inappropriate for infants. The Anabaptists could choose to partake or not partake without affecting eternal consequences (George Theology of the Reformers 294-306). The Anabaptists even espoused a doctrine of free will even concerning the sacraments.
In Arden's novel, the Irish appear equally free; they have created a faith that is more Roman Catholic in name than practice. Much of the Irish faith is rooted in the pre-Christian tribal tradition. Bale fails to recognize this feature of native belief, which results in the massacre of innocent people.

The *Books of Bale* marks a watershed point in Arden's career as an artist, for in this work two aspects of Arden's poetic vision come to maturity. First, Arden has taken a sympathetic view toward those he clearly does not agree with politically, that is to say, the politically or religiously imperialist. This is not a new turn in and of itself; Arthur in *The Island of the Mighty* is to a degree portrayed with sympathy. But in no previous work has Arden gone to such effort to describe the thought processes of those whom he sees as imperialists or to argue for the worthiness of their lives. In fact, Arden has made such an effective case for those that he would previously have indicted as imperialists, that we now see glimpses of imperialism in Arden's own philosophy. That is to say, Arden and D'Arcy, in their most militant phase (when they were boycotting the R.S.C. and writing *To Present the Pretence*) were by force of will attempting to make others believe what they themselves believed; thus, they acted in a manner similar to that of Bale in Ireland. Secondly, Arden, by use of a collage of
viewpoints presents an insight into his doctrine of Christianity. This is in no way a suggestion that Arden is claiming to be a Christian; yet, he does present rather a sympathetic perspective on the Christian faith.

On the doctrine of sin, Arden employs a variety of characters to explore the many facets of the issue. A cross-section of characters reveals that though grace is available through God, when a person "sins," that person damages another person, and forgiveness, if forgiveness is to occur, must come from the injured party. "Sin," then for Arden, has to do with an individual’s relationship with the community. One attempts to avoid sin not because of a fear of God, but because of a love for one’s fellow. In the poignant moment when Bale goes to Dorothy only an hour before his death, Arden masterfully allows Dorothy (whose freedom has been taken by Bale) to forgive her husband even though Bale does not realize he is in need of forgiveness (523). Arden makes use of Christ’s seventy-times-seven command on forgiveness, asserting that one should forgive even the unrepentent.

While The Books of Bale shows a forgiving, sympathetic facet, more developed than in any previous work, the Arden of social activism does not disappear in this piece. Arden presents a position on the sacraments of the Church, particularly baptism, that is consistent with his philosophy.
in previous works. Arden has always given emphasis to freedom of choice. By representing a baptism as an involuntary servitude, Arden lectures to his readers and decries the hollowness of the act. No clearer example exists in the novel than when Dorothy asks her servant Belle-Savage: "Are you baptized Christian?" Belle-Savage’s response reflects Arden’s appraisal of any coerced faith: "You mean the pouring water, criss-cross-Jesus-love-me and all bad spirits gone? Damn my shite that made me do it on the Portugal ship" (104). Belle-Savage describes forceable baptism and torture attending her conversion to Christianity, and then she relates a lengthy string of curses and doubts concerning the faith. Arden drives home the point that when there is no freedom there is no true religion. For Arden, the formal denominations of Christianity in the Western world have been too active in the political process to nourish their followers’ faith in God or understanding of truth. Dorothy, the minstrel who resists political involvement, is in Arden’s narrative the genuine believer because she is, as she describes herself, "committed to truth" (337).

Finally, Arden’s doctrinal position places great emphasis on the strength of symbol (a physical representation of that which exists only by faith), not for mystical or supernatural reasons, but for the manner in
which ritual enactment draws together people of varied experience. The Eucharist and baptism are such symbols in The Books of Bale when they are voluntary acts of faith. For Arden, the stage is the strongest symbol of all, even stronger than baptism and Eucharist. In The Books of Bale's climactic scene, Lydia describes Bale's attempts to present his reformed theology play to the Irish; a riot breaks out and the players are assaulted. Three players, however, are left unmolested because they are costumed to represent God the Father, Christ, and John the Baptist. The Irish are plainly aware that these are just players representing figures of the faith, and yet their symbolic stature alone is strong enough to postpone violence. Ironically, the player dressed as God the Father is the young Deacon Richard, who is later murdered when out of costume and working in a hay field. Arden seems to suggest that the stage, as a symbolic arena purifies ideas, distills the ideas, and frees the audience to embrace the ideas or reject them without fear. Arden refers to the early Christian Arius, who was denounced as a heretic, and his use of the stage (341). The irony of Arius' inspiration for Bale (who is preoccupied with his own fear of being labeled heretic) is that the symbol of the stage made even Arius' message appear pure. While Arden at this point in his career clearly chooses the profession of the novelist, his
reverence for the stage gives the clear impression that his heart still lies with the theatre.

Ecclesiastical conflict, the lure of the stage, the power of the poet, and doctrinal dissension may be just part and parcel of the historical novel's period pastiche. But nothing in Arden's career indicates a casualness in his choice of subject matter. Arden has woven these elements and motifs together for a purpose, and this may be found in the chief subplot of The Books of Bale, a line of action that concerns the daughter of Bale and Dorothy, Lydia. Lydia marries a staunch Calvinist named Lowlyheart, who is headmaster of an authoritarian grammar school. Again we see irony at work in the depiction of Lydia. Dorothy, whose life was devoted to the pursuit of spiritual freedom, provides a sharp contrast to the man Lydia marries. Lowlyheart's doctrinal confession is rooted in servitude and involuntary obedience. Calvin's doctrine of election is described by theologian Timothy George as "absolute," in that the chosen are so "elect" due to the immutable will of God. Calvin claimed that salvation is "particular" in that selection was made of individuals, not genus groupings, and double in that to glorify his justice, God performs double election choosing that some should receive grace while others should perish (233). When asked why God has chosen some and rejected others, Calvin replied that the questioner
was seeking something greater and higher than God’s will, which could not be found (George 234). Calvinism, in its extreme, defines God by creating an established authoritarian portrait based on a given interpretation of scripture, defines the elect (using the same authoritative approach to scripture), and judges sin all without the intercession of the clergy, as found in the Roman church. And so, Lowlyheart lives his life in mortal fear of God, anxious as to whether his own sin is a sign of his rejection or election. Lowlyheart views acts of forgiveness as weakness and thus rejects them out of hand. Lydia lives passively with Lowlyheart’s guilt and dispassion until her own daughter, Lucretia, breaks away.

In hopes of pleasing her father, Lucretia learns Latin, Greek, and Hebrew from an elderly Roman Catholic priest. She is instead punished for knowing too much about God. Lucretia flees to London and takes up a life in the theatre, free from dogma and condemnation, a life that is creative, unfettered by Calvinist dictates. When Lowlyheart dies, Lydia travels to London to find her daughter, and upon their reunion, she encounters truths about herself and her parents that she had repressed in the Calvinist home of Lowlyheart.

Lydia discovers that faith is inexorably linked to freedom. Lydia also perceives London’s theatre community to be a microcosmic example of the fight for freedom Bale has
explored in religious reformation. The Southbank theatres described by Arden gave platform to the ideas and voices of such writers as Marlowe, Kyd, and Arden’s semi-fictive Anthony Munday. Munday figures prominently in Arden’s subplot. Munday is a sometime lover to Lucretia, a spy for the Queen’s Church, and a playwright committed to a drama of ideals. By Lydia’s arrival in London, however, the theatres have ceased to serve as an arena of ideas and instead have been given over to the pursuit of financial profit. Munday attacks Shakespeare as indicative of the theatre’s move away from plays with a message: “He (Shakespeare) divides his plays this way and that till no-one knows what they mean” (Bale, 396). Munday does not fear Shakespeare’s skill; he despises his lack of political commitment. While Munday is a flawed individual, a man unfaithful to his wife, a spy, and one responsible for the torture of supposed Catholics, Arden treats him with sympathy. This is not because of what he does or says, but because he has opinions and incorporates them freely into his work. In fact, Munday is a cruel and vindictive character, lacking the sympathetic objectivity of Arden himself. Arden’s affections, however, are evident for Munday in the same way they are evident for Bale. Munday is a man of ideas. For Arden, this is the chief function of the playwright.
Lydia, in the final scene of the novel, hurries to the theatre to warn Shakespeare that Munday wants him tortured; Munday has even given Shakespeare's name to the torture master, Topcliff. However, Lydia discovers in her conversation with Shakespeare that the world of ideas, commitment to political issues, and danger is past. Shakespeare confidently informs Lydia that the torture chamber is to be closed and Munday is the last of his breed (i.e., playwrights, theologians, politicians who fought for specific causes with passion and bravery). Shakespeare then pulls forth a volume of Bale's *King John*, which he refers to as a memento of a bygone age. At this point, Shakespeare exits to the stage where he will perform the spectacular and bloody *Titus Andronicus* for an adoring crowd. But Lydia steals away with the volume of Bale. In purloining the volume, Lydia's action suggests that as long as the poet's work exists, there is hope that future generations will once again take up the mantle of ideas.

The subplot concerning Lydia may intimate a veiled apology for the life and work of the sixty-two year old Arden. Clearly a novel such as *The Books of Bale*, which is dense with allegory, theology, and historical allusion, can never capture a wide commercial market. In a time when the obvious and the spectacular supplant the thoughtful and polemical, Arden hints that he and his wife Margaretta (his
Dorothy, perhaps?) are the last of a generation of opinionated, thought-provoking playwrights; they have been replaced by more palatable playwrights in London’s West End and the state-subsidized National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company. Arden’s image is sharp and poignant. He and his wife still bear resentment from the R.S.C. conflict over The Island of the Mighty in 1972, and perhaps they mourn their exclusion from the professional theatre community and self-dramatize their plight (Arden To Present the Pretence 159–172). John Arden, perhaps in the autumn of his career, looks back pensively on a life that has valued principle over popular success. Lydia attends a Shakespearean play and meets Arden’s Shakespeare who decries the drama by saying: "Plays that would prove history to be more than a maniac shamble are plumed untruth cocking and crowing on a dry-rot scaffold, every line of 'em brings a new murder" (531).

Shakespeare’s denunciation of a theater that aims to be a corrective to society is indicative of the current time. Arden finds the theatre today only nominally concerned with ideas, change, and social justice. Arden and Bale’s plays are polemic; they are religious and didactic. Arden’s Shakespeare describes playwrights of this type as wolves, predatory and aggressive. Drawn by Arden, the image of playwrights such as Shakespeare is that of the gliding
lizard, disappearing unnoticed into the environment, free from conflict, free from pursuit, harmless. Arden in The Books of Bale seems to be reflecting on his career, defining himself and Margaretta D'Arcy as "wolves" in such a season of "gliding lizards" (532). But there is hope in Arden's final paragraph. Lydia understands why her father's work was important and why it must be protected:

Whatever the faults of her father's truth, he had seen it most firmly and held to it: and this Shoreditch ambidexter could never have lived without him (532).

Arden's legacy is one that cherishes the pursuit of truth. At sixty-two, he perhaps realizes that he has not always championed everyone's truth, but he can be compensated by the fact that he has always sought the truth that is his own.
Notes

1 The Dictionary of National Biography (vol. I, London: Oxford University Press, 1938) provides a concise, general biographical sketch of John Bale, which includes his conversion to the Reformed Movement prior to 1534, the dates of his exiles to Germany, and details of Bale’s career both as a playwright and Bishop of Ossory in 1553.

2 John Bale’s autobiographical writings are collected in the volume The Vocacy of John Bale to the Bishopry of Ossorie in the Harlein Miscellany Collection, Volume VI. This study relies on the scholarship of Peter Happe due to the rarity of the Bale manuscript and because John Arden attributes his biographical knowledge of Bale to Peter Happe in the preface to The Books of Bale.

3 According to The Dictionary of National Biography, Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1534 to 1556. Cranmer’s work was marked by his loyalty to the doctrine of royal supremacy of the Church. He supported Henry VIII in his marital disputes with Rome as well as the Anglican Church’s break from Rome. Cranmer was executed in 1556 under the reign of Mary Tudor for his prior allegiance to the Anglican reform movements.

4 According to The Dictionary of National Biography, Thomas Lord Wentworth, Baron of Nettlested (1501-1551) served in the Reformation Parliament summoned in 1529 and on
the councils involved with the marital conflicts concerning Henry VIII and the Roman Catholic Church. He fathered sixteen children by his wife Margaret. Upon his death in 1551, Wentworth was buried with full honors in Westminster Abbey.

Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540) is best known for his role as council to Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey. He negotiated Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne of Cleves, and when the marriage became unsuitable for the king, Cromwell fell out of favor. He was accused of treason and beheaded on July 28, 1540 at the Tower of London.

"Anabaptists were recognized as a sect around 1521. They captured the German village of Munster in 1534. The Anabaptists opposed infant baptism and espoused a doctrine of adult baptism for professing believers. Bale’s play King John, written between 1538 and 1540, refers to the Anabaptists and the manner in which they "poisoneth scripture." See The Dramatic Writings of John Bale. (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1966), p. 291.

"The Dictionary of National Biography provides a concise but detailed account of the actual Anthony Munday (1553-1633). Munday’s work as a playwright was noteworthy and did include The True and Honourable History of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, which originally appeared in print in 1600 and was attributed to William Shakespeare. Arden’s
novel creates a rivalry between Munday and Shakespeare, but no such rivalry is referred to in the Munday entry. However, Munday did have a running conflict with Ben Jonson. Munday's political career was sketchy and limited according to this biographical source.
Works Cited


---. *To Present the Pretence.* London: Eyre Methuen, 1977.


Woodhouse, H. F. "Sixteen Century Anglican Theology."

Chapter VI: Conclusions: Arden and the Dichotomy of Christianity

John Arden's 1991 novel, Cogs Tyrannic, focuses on "the essential fallibility of human beings as tool-making, tool-using animals" (xi). Throughout his extraordinary literary and dramatic career, Arden has grappled with the seeming dichotomy of the predominately Western religious influence, Christianity. On the one hand, Christianity has been a tool, as described in Cogs Tyrannic, used to organize, control, negotiate, and repair the political structure. On the other hand, Arden finds in Christianity a mystical truth, a hope, and a shared experience that can link the underprivileged in solidarity. Christianity has been used as a mechanism for maintaining the status quo, as an inspiring force for insurrection, and as a beacon of hope by the non-aligned. In his essay, "Pious Founders (1988)," Arden describes the unique blend of the mystical and the historical that occurs in Christianity, a blend that for rationalists, politicians, and historians poses no end of difficulty:

If the Nazareth Carpenter was what the Christians said he was, instead of being merely an obscure rural philosopher who fell foul of the colonial police, then mythological magic was much more up-to-date and decisive in its operations than any
educated Roman of the early Empire would have
cared to acknowledge (Awkward Corners 239).

Arden finds Christianity difficult to refute on a
logical/historical basis:

... it was clear that these books (Scripture) did
contain real history, not necessarily more
erroneous than Herodotus (and everyone knew
Herodotus had made certain mistakes). ... It was as
though modern history had been retouched by Homer,
with Jerusalem and Galilee as his narrative
centres instead of Troy and Ithaca. Pontius
Pilate was a real Roman who could be looked up in
the archives: and he had signed the death-warrant
for the Immeasurable Infinite. ... (Awkward Corners
250).

However, for Arden, Christianity is most intriguing, most
beneficial when it is at its most enigmatic, in that
clouded, gray zone where the "infinite immeasurable" becomes
active or is reported to be active in the lives of the
quantifiable, the certifiable, the recorded lives of
humanity. These occurrences of the supernatural in the lives
of the natural (if they occur, Arden would surely feel
compelled to add) are, however, inevitably co-opted by the
spiritually disengaged, the politicos who rewrite or define
the experience in terms that will compel the purely

185
spiritual or the socially dispossessed to submit to a political authority.

John Arden has focused on Christianity as the predominant religious force in Western history. However, his work empathizes with pre-Christian religions (Druid, Egyptian, Greek) as well, suggesting that Arden’s real allegiance is with those who seek to believe in a force greater than the trilateral power struggle of history. Arden admires those who hope. He has, through the course of his literary career, examined the struggle for power and has created a logical model for how power structures have emerged and been maintained. He has attempted to explain the emotions, logic, and passions of the rulers and rebels as well as those of the victims of their violence. Arden has shown a prevailing empathy for each class at various points in his career. When his body of work is examined as a whole, Arden emerges as an objective, compassionate chronicler of human behavior. A major reason for his success in finding an objective view lies in his continued focus on that most passionate, most personal of motivations—religious faith. His examination of faith has indeed taken him on a journey of discovery.

The early Arden plays—*(Live Like Pigs* (1958), *Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance* (1960), *The Happy Haven* (1960)—are not contentious social statements. The Royal Court plays (1958—
1960) objectively explore the relationship between freedom and control, chaos and order (Brockett 580-81). In the 1970's and 1980's Arden's work became more polemic. Perhaps driven by his fear of and contempt for the Reagan and Thatcher governments, perhaps as a result of his collaboration with the politically aggressive Margareta D'Arcy, or perhaps due to other influences, Arden took to the offensive, making a case for the importance of freedom at all costs. Now in the 1990's, John Arden is again detached, perhaps even distanced in his evaluation of freedom and the human equation.

This dissertation examines Arden's use of Christianity as a focal point for his overriding concern: freedom versus control. Indeed, by examining his shift of perspective on Christianity, one can glimpse a view of Arden's overall career progression.

*Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, perhaps the most representative of Arden's early plays, explores that shadow region between freedom and control and the extent to which faith is incorporated in social conflict. Musgrave is not mentally ill; he is caught up in religious zeal. Musgrave desires to enact a paradox on behalf of God. Musgrave wants to free the workers from the oppression of war, but he knows only one method which can force them into revolt—the Gatling. Musgrave emerges as an allegory representative of
the problem (as Arden sees it) with Christianity. For Arden, Christianity works best in absolute freedom where the believer can individually communicate his faith. Yet, freedom has to be protected and enforced in a world of imperialist, political interlopers. However, the moment a governing authority (whether it be Black Jack Musgrave behind a Gatling gun, the Pope in Rome, or the President of the Southern Baptist Convention) attempts to enforce freedom, freedom ceases to exist and is supplanted by structure and control. Arden is not critical of Musgrave; if anything, Arden sympathizes with his anti-hero. Arden is, as he claims in his preface, a pacifist in theory, but in practice, how does one accomplish the ideal? (Plays One 13).

In the Royal Court years, Arden’s voice was one that bespoke objective observation. Characters such as the Constable, the Mayor, and the Parson in Serjeant Musgrave’s Dance are not stock figures. They are, however, effective enough as imperialist proponents of the accepted political structure to be menacing. They are also pitiable as they cower on the platform at the mercy of Musgrave. The Parson particularly is pathetic as a man who should believe in a pro-active God (that is, one who takes an active role in the lives of his creation), but instead believes only in the business interests of the town’s political establishment.
Arden's tone would not, however, remain sympathetic toward such characters in the 1970's and the 1980's.

The two works The Island of the Mighty (1972) and Whose is the Kingdom? (1987) perhaps best reflect the change in tone of Arden's writing during the following two decades. The plays exhibit skepticism and frustration. Arden became more wary of governmental authority and resistant to control, whether political or religious. These two plays reflect this suspicion and resentment.

The Island of the Mighty is less strident, the less polemical of the two works. The Island of the Mighty treats the Arthur legend as the working model for imperialism (in this case, Roman authority enforced by Arthur the general). The Romans co-opt the religious beliefs of the people and rewrite them, order them, and apply them to created political structure. Arthur uses both the Christian orthodoxy of Rome (an orthodoxy he appears to know little about) and the pre-Christian mythology of the Britains to control the British isles. Arden's tone is not venemous in this drama. While Arthur is made to look pitiable, vain, and foolish, the Ardens do not create an evil anti-hero. The message of The Island of the Mighty seems to suggest that the lumbering, ineffectual management skills of the greedy and imperialistic will eventually fail, giving way to
a new freedom (in *Island*, this appears in a new-found faith in the pre-Christian myths of Britain).

The *Island of the Mighty* and *Whose is the Kingdom?* introduced, for the first time in Arden’s works, characters consumed by hate and driven by prejudice. Perhaps the contribution of Margaretta D’Arcy accounts for this feature (this period marks the height of their collaborative writing). These characters lack the empathetic quality found in the early Arden plays or even the later prose pieces. However, the power-crazed Strathclyde from *The Island of the Mighty* and the misogynistic Eumolpus in *Whose is the Kingdom?* do serve to highlight the plight of the victims of social violence. In *The Island of the Mighty*, the poor are victimized by the struggle for power, and in *Whose is the Kingdom?*, women emerge as an endangered class. The tone becomes more strident, one notes, as the Ardens move from *The Island of the Mighty* to *Whose is the Kingdom?*

In *Whose is the Kingdom?*, the Ardens take a more somber, even fatalistic view of political operatives whose prime motivation is power. In *Whose is the Kingdom?*, a spiritually chaotic world with a diverse range of beliefs—all commonly claiming the name of Christianity—exists in tentative peace and harmony. The Ardens extend a version of history whereby a political figure driven by hate, misogyny, and power-lust imposes his own brand of orthodoxy on the
whole of Christendom. The tone of Whose is the Kingdom? conveys a sense of loss of innocence; freedom is given over for the sake of order. Eumolpus is in no way treated with sympathy in Whose is the Kingdom? As a spiritual advisor and political confidant, Eumolpus manipulates a weak Constantine, leading him to create a male-dominated orthodoxy that strips the people of their right to think, pray, and explore individual faith. Whose is the Kingdom? stands as the Ardens' most polemic work in the careers of Arden and D'Arcy, written either separately or in partnership. While Arden's prefatory essays do much to explain away the tone and to establish his objectivity, this work is not objective. The Ardens clearly assert in Whose is the Kingdom? that the history of the organized Church is a history of freedom denied and order enforced. Whose is the Kingdom? is a tragedy, not due to the death of Constantine or his wife, Fausta (the victim of the misogynist purge instituted in the Ardens' view by the Council of Nicea), but because freedom and faith have been sacrificed.

Constantine's institutionalization of Christianity, based on the tenets of the Nicean Council, worked to suppress freedom of thought and to limit the diversity of faith found in the early Christian movement. The Ardens are critical of the Pauline, male-centered doctrine, and yet,
St. Paul himself recognized the diversity in Christendom in I Corinthians, as he warns his reader not to take sides in the difference of opinion between him and the preacher, Apollos. The Ardens people Whose is the Kingdom? with angry characters, extreme in their prejudice and unrelenting in their pursuit of power. Those characters who are concerned less with power and more with comparison are crushed in the machinery of oppression. The radio series is all at once harsh, tragic, and passionate; clearly John Arden and Margareta D’Arcy were angry and emotionally volatile during this period of their artistic careers. However, one must be careful to understand the target of the Ardens’ anger. The Ardens never blame the figure of Christ or those whose simple faith gives them hope and community. The authors moreover resent governments that ignored Christian tenets while acting as sole executors of moral and religious values.

In 1984, while composing Whose is the Kingdom?, Arden wrote an essay entitled "Nicaraguan Comparisons" in which he compares the Ortega government’s resistance to American destabilization to the resilience of the Irish Nationalists in 1918. He also compares the Sandinistas to the English that resisted Hitler in 1940. Arden’s article was rejected by New Statesman (a periodical to which he has contributed on several occasions) and by Listener’s and Granta—
publications generally sympathetic to left-of-center thinkers. Finding no market for the essay, Arden included it in *Awkward Corners*, his co-authored (with D'Arcy) volume of essays (91). Arden's comparisons—invoking Ortega, Hitler, and the Irish—are, as he admits, "loose" and not all together exacting (97). Arden acknowledges that the Sandanistas were prone to authoritarian rule and were more likely to follow Cuba's model than that of a democratic state. And yet, Arden defends Nicaragua's right to the process, free from intervention, free from outside interpretation, and most of all, free from exploitation. Arden's anger shows through with an implicit challenge to his British readers. Hypothetically he proposes a scenario whereby left-wing leaders in Parliament would provoke an American invasion of Britain. Arden argues that right-wing extremists might welcome such an invasion, that "Reagan given his holy-roller world-view-forces of light vs. the Empire of Evil—would only be too pleased to recognize them (the right-wing extremists) as the real Britain" (*Awkward Corners* 101). The essay, "Nicaraguan Comparisons," serves to illustrate how Arden thought in 1984 about ruling authorities. He had begun to dehumanize them in his writing and to treat leaders such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher as institutional autocrats rather than complex human beings. His sympathy clearly lay with the
revolutionary class and, to a lesser extent, the victims of socio/political conflict.

With *The Books of Bale*, Arden embraces a new objectivity and once again creates fully human, if flawed, characters. Arden again finds Christianity to be a fertile ground for investigation. Like *Whose is the Kingdom?*, *The Books of Bale* explores Christianity's situation in the struggle between those who would institutionalize faith and those who would resist religion's co-option. *The Books of Bale* is marked by an affectionate regard for even those Arden clearly does not agree with on a political or ideological level. Bale was a man whose feverish pursuit of all things doctrinal led him to neglect his family, his health, and even his God. Arden is not apologetic for Bale, but he is sympathetic to his passions. Bale, through most of the novel, wants the very thing Arden has championed all through his career—the freedom to believe, regardless of belief's consequences. Nonetheless, Bale's attempt to force reformed theology on the Papist Catholics in Ireland is destructive to the spirit of the individual and to the harmony of the community. Bale himself is forced to flee, his marriage is scarred, and his career is brought to an end. The Irish village of Kilkenny is left in riot and disarray. Still, the novel ends with an affirmation, a warm
affection for those who choose to speak out against institutions, religious or political.

Arden clearly has no prescriptive balance the interplay of freedom and order; he never catechizes. His work has proven a consistent effort to investigate the tenuous interconnection and co-existence of the two. His plea is that if we err, we should err on the side of freedom, for a free people can regain order, but an orderly people may find it difficult to wrest freedom from tyranny.

In the summer of 1990, I traveled in England and Ireland and interviewed a number of figures associated with John Arden. The opinions expressed were wide-ranging. Oscar Lewenstein, past artistic director of the Royal Court, recalled Arden as a gentle, gracious man, quiet and self-effacing (July 1990). Max Stafford-Clark recounted a conference held by Methuen Books in the late 1980s while the Ardens were writing Whose is the Kingdom? which featured some of the publisher’s important authors. Held at the Royal Court Theatre during Stafford-Clarke’s tenure as artistic director, the conference was marred by a protest staged by D’Arcy and Arden. The couple voiced dissent concerning women’s voices in literature and further expressed resentment toward established theatre (i.e., The Royal Court, The National Theatre, and the Royal Shakespeare
Company). Stafford-Clarke admires Arden's legacy but found him angry and sullen.

On a drizzly evening in August of 1990, I sat down in an untidy flat in Galway City, Ireland and talked with John Arden. He was warm, gracious, and listened eagerly to my opinions even when they contradicted his own. His mind is razor sharp, and his wit is keen. John Arden was on no occasion condescending or dismissive; instead, he freely gave and took in conversation, leaving me with what I believe to be an accurate impression of his persona.

John Arden genuinely loves people, not the institutions, tools, or structures they create, but the people themselves. Perhaps this accounts for why he could leave Britain and settle (it appears permanently) in Ireland, for nations and governments are to Arden entities which we owe no fidelity (as we might to a human). Arden is above all an optimist, and his optimism springs from his love of people. In the introduction to Cogs Tyrannic, Arden emphasizes that his strong opinions, when he expresses them, are rooted in his concern for the well-being of the individuals and not their creations. Arden says, "I don't think I am a deeply cynical, crusted reactionary. I am as glad as anyone to see new things, to learn" (xii). But Arden also acknowledges another part of the human condition that is distinct from the creative drive. Arden recognizes
that man is prone to enslave, both himself and others. It is this proclivity of human nature that causes Arden greatest frustration. Man's urge to create is an urge spawned in freedom and diversity. The urge to enslave is rooted in an impulse toward order. This dualistic aspect of human existence is central in the the playwright's thoughts. In the introduction to Plays: One, the Ardens convey this situation quite succinctly: "Without knowledge there can be no freedom, without freedom, there can be no power" (xvi).

Throughout his career, Arden has attempted to impart knowledge, to extend the hope of freedom, and to create the potential for power. All the while, he has lived with the realization that power can, once attained, suppress knowledge and defeat freedom. However, because of his unswerving belief in the potential of the human, he persists and hopes for the best. John Arden perhaps best summarizes his curious mixture of skepticism and hope in the introduction to Cogs Tyrannic, "I just wish though, that the human race was not quite so often trapped by its own versatility" (xiii).
Works Cited


---. Personal interview. 3 August 1990.
Works Consulted

PLAYS:


RADIO DRAMA:

ESSAY COLLECTIONS:

--------------------------------------. *To Present the Pretence*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1977.
NOVELS:

INTERVIEWS:
Arden, John. Personal interview. 3 August 1990.
Esslin, Martin. Personal interview. 27 July 1990.

BOOKS:


Postlewaite, Thomas and Bruce A. McConachie, eds. *Interpreting the Theatrical Past.* Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1989.


Vince, Ronald. Ancient and Medieval Theatre: A Historio- 
graphical Handbook. West Port, Connecticut: Greenwood 

Wander, Michelene. Carry On, Understudies: Theatre and 

White, Hayden. Topics of Discourse. Baltimore: Johns 

White, T. H. The Once and Future King. New York: Berkeley 
Univ. Press, 1972.


Woodhouse, H. F. "Sixteenth Century Anglican Theology." A 
History of Christian Doctrine. Ed. Hubert Cunliffe-

Woodruff, H. The Index of Christian Art at Princeton 
Univ. Press, 1942.


Zwingli, Ulrich. The Library of Christian Classics: Volume 
Zwingli and Bullinger. Ed. by G. W. Bromiky. 
ARTICLES:
Times Literary Supplement 3 March 1878: 253.
Malick, Javed. "A Society and History in Arden Dramaturgy."

DISSERTATIONS:
Mack, Karin Eileen. "Freedom and Order: A Stylistic and


**APPENDIX**

**PLOT SUMMARIES FOR SELECTED REFERENCED WORKS**

*Sergeant Musgrave’s Dance* (Play by John Arden 1960)

This play is set in a mining town in the north of England during a cold winter in the late nineteenth century. Four soldiers arrive in the village with the implied authority to recruit new soldiers for a current military campaign. The group is led by the brooding, iron-fisted Musgrave who insists he is on a religious mission. Musgrave is accompanied by the rejected husband, Attercliff, an angry Hurst, and the buoyant, engaging Sparky. The soldiers are ferried to the town by the Bargee, a sinister figure who lurks on the fringe of action throughout the play.

The center of community life in the mining town is the inn which is run by Mrs. Hitchcock and a barmaid, Annie. The town’s striking coal miners gather in the inn, and Musgrave announces his recruitment intentions in the public gathering place. The town leaders, the Mayor, the Constable, and the Parson, hope to persuade Musgrave to recruit the stike leaders including the aggressive Walsh.

After the gathering in the inn, Annie comes to three of the soldiers and plans to run away with Sparky. Attercliff tries to stop them but accidentally kills Sparky. The next morning the remaining soldiers gather in the town marketplace. Musgrave explains that a boy from the village named Billy Hicks was killed in battle alongside Musgrave. Hicks had been Annie’s lover when he lived in the village.

In order to avenge Billy’s death, the surviving soldiers had rounded up innocent civilians and massacre them in the farawary village where they served. So Musgrave, appalled by the massacre, plans to end all war by threatening and cajoling the inhabitants of Billy’s coal mining town into a revolution. Musgrave turns a Gatling gun on the crowd of townspeople and hoists the skeleton of Billy high in the air.

Dragoons from a nearby town arrive on the scene and thwart Musgrave’s plans. The final scene is Musgrave and Attercliff in prison awaiting execution when Mrs. Hitchcock visits them and suggests that their message of peace may not be dead.

208
Armstrong's Last Goodnight (Play 1965)

Johnny Armstrong (Laird Gilnocke) is a semi-independent feudal, Scottish chieftain who is conducting raids from his Lowland Castle, which is on the Scottish-English border, on the English farmers. The Scottish king sends his envoy, Lindsay, to persuade Armstrong to stop the raids. As an act of good faith, the king imprisons Armstrong's rival and promises Armstrong a title. The king's promise of a title does not come to pass, however, as a lower ranking official denies Armstrong the boon. Armstrong then resumes his raids.

Finally, Lindsay arranges a hunting trip for Armstrong and the king. Armstrong is tricked into the meeting, captured, and hanged.

The Bagman (Radio Play 1970)

The narrator (John Arden) is taking a walk down Muswell Hill, Broadway in search of an Evening Standard when he meets a gypsy woman who sells him a canvas bag. The narrator then slips into a dream-state where he is attacked by starving women and forced to entertain the people of a strange town with the wooden soldiers in his canvas bag. With the narrator's poetic utterances, the wooden soldiers reveal the true nature of the townspeople, who are attentive and appreciative. Later the narrator meets a rebel band who is angered by the narrator's revelations of their true nature. The soldiers scuttle back into the little bag. The narrator says in the last line of the play, "All I can do is look at what I see."
Vita

Donald Travis Sandley is the director of theatre at Oklahoma Baptist University. He received his master’s degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Communication Arts, specializing in Christian theatre. His undergraduate degree is from East Texas Baptist University. Sandley is active in the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival and the Southwest Theatre Conference. He created a touring company in 1991 that produced original works by young Christian playwrights.

Sandley is married to Lynette Moore Sandley. They have one daughter, Caitlin Joy.
Candidate: Donald Sandley

Major Field: Theatre

Title of Dissertation: Christianity and Social Power in the Works of John Arden, British Dramatist

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman

Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination: 4.1.93