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Roman walls in English Renaissance Writing

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Roman walls in English renaissance writing

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Abstract

In 1587, an anonymous author proposed to Queen Elizabeth I that Hadrian's Wall should be reconstructed. Elizabeth did not adopt this proposal, but it testifies to a growing interest in the Wall on the part of writers such as Camden, Spenser, Drayton and William Warner. This essay examines ideas about Roman walls in these and other texts, including plays by Christopher Marlowe and Shakespeare's *King John*, where the city walls of Angers, originally built to protect the city against Germanic invasion in 275 AD and still partially visible, provide an ironic backdrop for the play's animus against Roman Catholicism.

Keywords

William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, walls, Roman, maps, Catholicism

Résumé

En 1587, un auteur anonyme a proposé à la reine Élisabeth Iᵉ que le mur d'Hadrien devrait être reconstruit. Élisabeth n'a pas retenu cette suggestion, qui témoigne néanmoins de l'intérêt croissant que portent au mur des auteurs comme Camden, Spenser, Drayton ou William Warner. Cet article examine l'évocation de murs romains dans ces textes, ainsi que dans des pièces de Christopher Marlowe, ou *Le Roi Jean* de Shakespeare, où les murs d'Anger, construits à l'origine pour protéger la ville contre les invasions germaniques en 275 de l'ère chrétienne, et encore partiellement visibles, offrent un arrière-plan ironique de l'esprit hostile au catholicisme romain de la pièce.

Mots clés

William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, murs, romain, cartes, catholicisme

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I n 1587, the year before the Armada, an anonymous author proposed to Queen Elizabeth I that Hadrian's Wall should be rebuilt.[1] The writer estimated that construction of the Wall would have originally cost around £19,000 and that Elizabeth would need to spend £30,000 but was confident that local gentlemen would help her to maintain and patrol it. Elizabeth did not adopt this particular proposal, but it testifies to a growing interest in the Wall in writing of the period. William Camden wrote evocatively in *Britannia* (in Philemon Holland's translation) that 'Verily I have seene the tract of it over the high pitches and steepe descents of hilles, wonderfully rising and falling', and it is mentioned by Edmund Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*, Michael Drayton in *Poly-Olbion*, and William Warner in *Albions England*. This essay examines ideas about Roman walls in these and other texts, paying particular attention to the plays of Christopher Marlowe and to William Shakespeare's *King John*, where the city walls of Angers provide an ironic backdrop for the play's animus against Roman Catholicism. First, though, I want to think about some of the implications of that 1587 proposal that Hadrian's Wall should be rebuilt because it helps alert us to some of the ways in which Roman walls were political structures as well as physical ones.

In 1587, two things were considered likely to happen in the foreseeable future. First, the Spanish Armada was expected (although it did not in fact arrive until 1588, it was only bad weather that prevented it from sailing a year earlier). In March, the Privy Council forbade Sir Richard Grenville to sail to the relief of the Roanoke colony on the grounds that all ships would be needed against the Spanish, and England was in a state of high alert throughout the summer. Second, the queen was getting old, at least in Elizabethan terms: she was 54. Even if she did not die soon, she was clearly past child-bearing age, and speculation about her successor was rife. James VI of Scotland was one obvious possibility, and if the threat of the Armada gave rise to a general nervousness about England's borders in general, the possibility of a Scottish succession focused some minds on the country's northern border in particular. It was in this context that '"The Epystle" … proposed the building of a new version of Hadrian's Wall from Berwick to Carlisle as "a perpetualle defence of the Englysshe border againste either incurssyone or Invasyone of the Skottes"'.[2]

There was not much to separate the English from the Scots. In the west, there was Scots Dyke, but in the east, there was not even that: in 1561 it was proposed 'to cut "a dike of force" from Harbottle to Ridingburn' because of the worry that 'the East Marches were a "dry march"',[3] i.e. that there was no natural water border. There was, however, a strongly developed awareness that the Border was a distinctive region that even had its own law, with a special category of 'March treason'. For an area of such sensitivity, the preferred solution was always going to be a wall. Walls had symbolic as well as strategic value: the walls of the castle built by Edward I at Caernarfon were designed by his architect Master James of St George to evoke those of Constantinople and thus to speak of imperial power and the transmission of cultural heritage from classical Rome; the wall of Flint Castle from which Richard II descends becomes an emblem of both the rank which he is about to forfeit and the power which is about to be taken from him. Elizabeth I spent what was for her a quite astonishing amount of money on the

walls of Berwick-upon-Tweed, and the Border warden Robert Carey, whose father was the first patron of Shakespeare's acting company, operated on a similar principle when, as he notes in his *Memoirs*, he 'built a pretty fort' which he used as a stronghold against the Scots.[4]

In such a context, it is hardly surprising that there should have been a renewed interest in Hadrian's Wall, which in any case loomed literally larger for early moderns than for us. John Leland observed of Netherby that '[t]he surviving ruined walls prove that there were remarkable buildings here, and within living memory, there were rings and staples in the walls, which appear to have been moorings for ships' and spoke of 'the great ruined castle of Carvoran';[5] in both cases, nothing now survives of the ruins that Leland saw. However, there was also confusion about what the Wall was, who had built it, and even where it lay. John Speed, for instance, is wildly mistaken in both his description and his depiction of the wall, since he shows it as being many miles south of Gilsland, which is in fact virtually bisected by it, and writes of it in the inset cartouche '[r]unning through vast montanes, for the most part in a straight lyne',[6] which is wrong on both counts. John Stow declared that the Romans, 'setting the Britons at liberty, counselled them to make a wall, extending all along between the two seas, which might be of force to keep out their evil neighbours, and then returned home with great triumph. The Britons, wanting masons, built that wall not of stone as they advised, but made it of turf'.[7] For Stow, the wall is a post-Roman structure, and he also seems not to realise that it was in fact built of stone.

Such confusion arose because little scholarly attention was paid to Hadrian's Wall until the latter half of the sixteenth century. Hector Boece and Polydore Vergil both knew what and where it was, but neither went there.[8] In 1599, the Appleby schoolmaster Reginald Bainbridge offered a detailed description of the important Roman remains at Birdoswald,[9] where there is a good stretch of wall still visible today. Bainbridge, however, had the advantage of being a local man; others found the terrain more difficult to negotiate. As late as the mid-seventeenth century the Armstrongs, descendants of some of the most notorious of the old Border Reivers, were using the remains of the infantry fort at Housesteads as a hide-out,[10] and did not look kindly on visiting antiquarians. Even Camden was beaten back by them: he complained that he 'could not survey the Roman Wall as closely as he wished "for the rank robbers thereabout"'.[11]

It is in this context of inaccessibility and nervousness that the Wall was described in *The Faerie Queene* by Spenser, whose distant cousin and dedicatee Elizabeth Carey was married to George Carey, the eldest son of the Border warden Lord Hunsdon, and the elder brother of Robert:

Next these came Tyne, along whose stony bancke

That Romaine Monarch built a brasen wall,

Which mote the feebled Britons strongly flancke

Against the Picts, that swarmed ouer all,

Which yet thereof Gaulseuer they doe call.[12]

There are a number of surprising things about this description. In the first place, Spenser seems to think the wall was made of brass. In fact, he was not alone in this. Drayton also remarks on the presence of 'Mines of Brasse' near the wall and alleges that the Romans used brass pipes to communicate along the length of the wall, an idea also found in Warner's *Albions England*.[13] Perhaps the idea was based on the fact that Ovid's House of Fame has brass pipes symbolising rumour, or on the idea that King Lud had built a brass tower.[14] It could also, though, be related to a common cultural fantasy about the feasibility and desirability of walls made of brass. Todd Borlik, noting that 'The Roman poet Horace speaks of Troy as protected by *murus aeneus*, or brazen walls'[15] and that both *The Faerie Queene* and *Poly-Olbion* have Merlin planning to surround Carmarthen with a brass wall, explains that in early modern usage the word 'brass' encompassed what we now call bronze, and the two were only differentiated in the mid-eighteenth century. Both are copper alloys, and brass simply includes zinc whereas bronze is mingled with tin. In the sixteenth century, Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth and the Lord Admiral Howard invested heavily in cannons made of both iron and bronze (then called brass), and the latter was increasingly preferred due, in part, to the havoc the iron industry wrought on England's woodlands. In a speech delivered before Parliament in 1593, John Fortescue praised the queen for outfitting the navy with brazen ordnance: 'She did find in her navy all iron pieces, but she hath furnished it with artillery of brass'. The extensive renovations to the castle at Berwick-upon-Tweed in the Elizabethan period included the creation of a 'brass bastion', so-called because it housed brass (bronze) cannons.[16]

It is thus not surprising that Marlowe's Doctor Faustus dreams of surrounding Germany with a wall of brass (1.1.89), and Anthony Brewer's play *The Love-sick King*, which has a long account of the building of Newcastle city walls, has King Canute lament that 'In vain I shoot against a wall of brass, that sends mine own shafts back upon my self'.[17] In the anonymous play *Wily beguilde*, we hear of 'the brasen walls of Plutoes court';[18] Elysium in *The Spanish Tragedy* has a tower with 'walls of brass';[19] and Richard II's image of immortality is 'As if this flesh which walls about our life / Were brass impregnable'.[20] In Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Burden has heard that Bacon intends 'To compass England with a wall of brass',[21] which Bacon himself confirms will 'rin[g] the English strand / From Dover to the market-place of Rye' (1.2.65–6). By calling Hadrian's Wall 'brasen', Spenser is implicitly figuring it as strong.

Spenser's odd-seeming name for the wall, 'Gaulseuer', was also not without foundation. It derives from the idea that it had been built by the Emperor Severus, to whom it is attributed in Camden's *Britannia*,[22] and also in William Warner's *Albions England*,[23] where Hadrian is mentioned but Severus given the lion's share of the credit. Speed says that the wall was started by Hadrian but completed by Severus, and it is Severus alone who is shown in the accompanying illustration. This uncertainty about who built the wall is coupled with uncertainty about what it was for. In Speed's map, the wall is labelled 'The Picts Wall', and Michael Neill notes that it is given particular attention

'as a barrier against the barbarians of the north'.[24] The assumption that the wall was connected with the Picts is also found in Leland, where it is 'the Pictish Wall'.[25] Picts are rare in early modern English drama, but there is an exception in the shape of the two parts of Lodowick Carlell's *Arviragus and Philicia* (1639), where *Cymbeline*'s Arviragus and Guiderius are repurposed as princes of Pictland (with the king's son Guimantes as something of a Cloten figure) who are rather surprisingly fighting the Danes. *Cymbeline* may be set mainly in Wales, but for Carlell, it can apparently also help tell a story about England's borders more generally, with the plot invoking both the historic Danelaw and the contemporary Bishops' Wars which by 1639 were making the Scottish Border an active frontier again, this time with the conflict driven by religious as well as political differences.

Another later playwright who connects Shakespeare to the area of the Wall is Richard Brome, and Brome's play too has political force. Speed says of Northumberland that

> Many memorable antiquities are found in this Country along the wall, and in other places: As pieces of Coyne, Inscriptions, broken and unperfect Altars, & c. (the ruines of the wall yet to be seene: but none that deserues more to be remembred then Wall-Towne (by Bede called Ad Muram) for that Segebert King of the East-Saxons was in it baptized in the Christian Faith by the hands of Paulinus.[26]

Here, the Romans do not figure at all; the Wall and its environs are suddenly all about the Saxons and the English, in the shape of Bede and Segebert, who despite being king of the East Saxons seems rather improbably to have found himself in Walltown at the time of his baptism. Segebert also features in Richard Brome's play *The Queen's Exchange*, and although here he is neither a king nor an East Saxon, he does have an interest in Northumbria.[27] The play opens at the court of the *West* Saxons, whose queen, the fictional Bertha, is proposing to marry Osric, the king of Northumbria. The marriage is opposed by her father's favourite counsellor Segebert on the grounds that there are fundamental and irreconcilable differences between Northumbria and Wessex:

> I know, and you, if you knew anything,
>
> Might know the difference twixt the Northumbrian laws
>
> And ours. And sooner will their king pervert
>
> Your privileges and your government,
>
> Than reduce his to yours.[28]

Segebert implicitly connects Osric to Tamburlaine, who also uses 'reduce' of his project of world domination ('and with this pen reduce them to a map');[29] moreover, Segebert himself recalls Lear, since he has three children, except that in this case there are two sons, Anthynus and Offa, and one daughter, Mildred. Anthynus is the eldest, but the least favoured, and when Segebert conducts a love test, Anthynus, like Cordelia, is the last to take it and fails miserably. Segebert disinherits him, but Anthynus loyally

follows his father into exile in Northumbria, where the Lear plot crops up again: Osric, the king of Northumbria, has a fool called Jeffrey who wants to stay with him during his self-imposed absence from court. Ultimately everything is resolved when, in a Gothic turn, the West Saxon lord Anthynus and the Northumbrian king Osric turn out to be absolutely identical, for no particular reason that the play ever troubles to give us. Their interchangeable bodies lead to an ending that keeps the two kingdoms technically separate when the West Saxon queen Bertha marries the West Saxon lord Anthynus, but since the Northumbrian king, Osric marries Anthynus's sister Mildred a marriage alliance has been forged which will presumably lead to much closer ties between the two lands. The play thus ends by evoking both separation and unity in ways that suggest that it, like *King Lear*, is anxious not only about the relationship between England and its neighbours but also about the extent to which different parts of England might be dangerously different from each other.

The favoured son in *The Queen's Exchange* is called Offa. In Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, the section on Hadrian's Wall comes immediately after a description of Offa's Dyke, which Drayton sees as both aggrandising and defining the limits of England:

Beyond the Seuerne, much the English Offa took,

To shut the Britans vp, within a little nooke.

Drayton then moves on to describe Northumberland:

From whence, by Merseyes Banks, the rest a kingdome made:

Where, in the Britanes Rule (before) the Brigants sway'd;

The powerfull English there establisht were to stand:

Which, North from Humber set, they tearm'd North-humberland;

Two Kingdomes which had been, with seuerall thrones install'd.

Bernitia hight the one; Diera th'other call'd.

Drayton's enterprise, which he describes as chorographical, always entails describing history as well as geography, but that does not always produce quite so much ideological tension as it does here, because whereas Northumberland is presented as one monolithic geographical area, defined by the fact that all of it lies north of the Humber, it is fissured not only into the two different kingdoms but into two separate national identities, the Britons who used to rule there once and the English who rule there now. Further questions are introduced by Drayton's unusual rendering of the name of the Brigantes, which makes them sound like brigands, and contributes to a sense of a wild and unstable region of uncertain identity.

Drayton proceeds to describe these two kingdoms more particularly:

The first from Humber stretcht vnto the Bank of Tine:

Which Riuer and the Frith the other did confine.

Bernitia beareth through the spacious Yorkish bounds,

From Durham down along to the Lancastrian Sounds,

With Mersey and cleere Tine continuing to their fall,

To England-ward within the Pict's renowned Wall,

And did the greater part of Cumberland containe:

With whom the Britans name for euer shall remaine;

Who there amongst the rocks and mountaines liued long,

When they Loegria left, inforc't through powerfull wrong.

Diera ouer Tine, into Albania lay,

To where the Frith falls out into the German Sea.[30]

Although the Wall is barely mentioned here and not described at all, the context in which it appears does allow us to deduce certain things about what Drayton thought about it. The passage is rich in names which work to make England seem not a unified entity, but one imperilled, divided and multiply estranged from itself. First, we hear of Yorkshire and Lancashire, which bring with them memories of the trauma of the Wars of the Roses. We are also offered the slightly surprising information that Bernitia (and by implication Cumberland) is somehow not part of England at all, since the Britons lived there after they left Loegria. The name of Loegria itself introduces further instability, as does that of Albania, since both derive from the Galfridian history, the fantasy of Britain's pre-Roman past concocted in the twelfth century by Geoffrey of Monmouth, which told of how Brutus, great-grandson of the Trojan exile Aeneas, named Britain after himself before dividing it among his three sons Locrine, Albanact and Camber. Finally, what we would now call the North Sea is here the German Sea, as if England did not even fully possess its own coastal waters. In this context, Drayton's laconic description of the Wall suddenly makes sense: what counts about it is that it is another boundary marker of a fragile and imperilled England. Drayton does not even trouble to note that it was built by the Romans, though his close association with antiquarians means he must certainly have known this; instead, he is content to let an ambiguous grammatical construction hint at the possibility that the Wall might actually be *of* the Picts rather than *against* the Picts, making it speak of a potent and threatening neighbour in the same way that the 'German Sea' does.

Overall, then, these writers' descriptions of Hadrian's Wall misrepresent it as much as they present it. Spenser thinks the wall was made of brass and built by Severus; Drayton connects it to the Picts. Moreover, its function is uncertain: does it promise security, is it a reminder of the threat posed by troublesome neighbours, or is it a tacit admission that

even the Roman Empire had limits? For the author of 'The Epystle to the Queen's Majestie', a wall was a source of security, but in his book *Walls: A History of Civilization* David Frye argues that walls are weakening: for Frye, once the Gauls had started to build walls they ceased to be warlike and Caesar was able to defeat them because 'Who's afraid of Gauls with walls?'.[31] Hadrian's Wall too is clearly perceived as potentially connoting weakness and vulnerability as well as strength.

Christopher Marlowe certainly suggests that walls are dangerous. In *Tamburlaine the Great* Cosroe, king of Persia, takes his name from Khosrow I, whose name became a generic term for the Sasanian kings of Persia. Frye notes that 'Tradition attributes the new Persian border walls to Shah Koshrow I (r. 531–79)' who 'is said to have constructed more than twenty new walls throughout the Caucasus and several more east of the Caspian', but 'Khosrow had walled the wrong borders ... The Empire, with its dozens of north-facing walls, was taken from the south'.[32] It is thus ironic that the Cosroe of Marlowe's play should lament that the inhabitants of Persepolis are no longer valiant because they are 'Now living idle in the walled towns' (1.1.146), and he is right to be nervous because Tamburlaine's boast that 'Those wallèd garrisons I will subdue' (3.3.244) proves entirely justified. Ultimately, walls serve only to display the dead bodies of the Virgins of Damascus in Part One (5.1.129–31) and of the Governor of Babylon in Part Two, while not only does Tamburlaine promise to teach his three sons 'to scale a castle wall' (Part Two, 3.2.59) but the Turks are able to threaten the walls of Rome itself (Part Two, 2.1.9).

It used to be said that this reference to the walls of Rome must have been an error on Marlowe's part and that he must really have meant Constantinople. However, Mark Hutchings has persuasively argued that the mention of Rome is a direct reflection of the ambitions of the sixteenth-century Ottoman Turks:[33] Roger Crowley notes that according to François Ier 'Sultan Suleiman always says "To Rome! To Rome!"'.[34] In any case, Marlowe was fascinated by Rome; as Roy Eriksen remarks, 'the city itself, as a setting for drama and multiple references to Rome in terms of political power, policy and religion, occur in several of his plays'.[35] Marlowe is particularly interested in Roman walls, but he is also aware that they are even more problematic than ordinary walls. In his translation of the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia*, he makes an interesting lexical choice:

Rome's infant walls were steeped in brother's blood;

Nor then was land, or sea, to breed such hate,
A town with one poor church set them at odds.[36]

The decision to translate Lucan's 'exiguum dominos commisit asylum' as 'A town with one poor church set them at odds' imposes an anachronistic Catholic identity on the classical city, underscored by the description of Ariminum as having 'walls unfortunate, too near to France, / Predestinate to ruin!' (ll. 250–1), which has a Calvinist ring.

In *Doctor Faustus* too, Roman walls speak of both classical glory and Christian doubt. The magnificent ruins of Trier are the first things noticed by Faustus on his journey to Rome,[37] and they connote both the glory and the fall of the empire: Thomas Cooper in his *Thesaurus linguae Romae et Britannicae* knows that Trier was once Augusta Treuirorum,[38] but Johannes Carion notes that the Goths captured it.[39] Moreover, Trier was Roman in both senses, for it was notorious as a place of relics as well as of ruins. John Bale speaks of 'gadders to Compostell, Rome, Tryer and Tholose, with all their straunge worshippinges not commaunded of God',[40] and Calvin identifies numerous relics at Trier, including one of two heads of St Anne and 'The knife wherewith the pascal lambe was cut'.[41] The next sight noted by Faustus, the supposed tomb of Virgil (a grotto at Pozzuoli) was also associated with wonder-working: Gervase of Tilbury said Virgil had created the Grotto by miraculous means, though when King Robert of Naples asked Petrarch if he believed this, Petrarch replied that 'he had nowhere read that Vergil was a sorcerer and he had discerned the marks of edged tools on the sides of the cavern'.[42] (In fact, J. B. Trapp notes that the Grotto 'was pierced during the Civil War or the early Augustan period' and was well known to be Roman.)[43] Sebastian Brant's edition of Vergil includes a picture of the tomb which showed it as having the inscription 'HIC MARO DOCTE IACES';[44] this looks like Marlowe's source, since 'learned Maro' is a near-translation of the vocative 'Maro docte'.[45] Despite its fame, however, the tomb was surprisingly elusive: Trapp notes that 'about 1453, when the great Flavio Biondo, founder of Roman archaeology, searched for a tomb that would be identified as Vergil's by the epitaph, he failed to find it'; in 1550, Leandro Alberti also declared himself unable to identify its location; and 'Paolo Giovio … concluded that since Vergil's sepulchre was no longer to be found, it must have been destroyed by the Goths'.[46] Like Trier, 'learned Maro's golden tomb' thus speaks simultaneously of past splendours and present decay and was also an emblem of something that appeared to be miraculous but was in fact susceptible of rational explanation. Finally, Mephistopheles directs Faustus's attention to two particular sites in Rome itself, the Castel Sant'Angelo and 'the gates and high pyramides / Which Julius Caesar brought from Africa' (3.1.42–3). The note in Mark Thornton Burnett's Everyman edition identifies 'high pyramides' as the obelisk which now stands in Piazza San Pietro, while Castel Sant'Angelo, originally the mausoleum of the Emperor Hadrian, had been repurposed as a papal fortress. Both thus speak of the inseparability of Rome's classical past from its Catholic present, and both the pyramid and the mausoleum of a deified emperor also remind us that not only is Christianity divided, but it is not even the only faith.

King John, famously a play in which the king resolves that 'no Italian priest / Shall tithe or toll in our dominions',[47] echoes *Doctor Faustus* in staging an ex-communication scene, and also like *Doctor Faustus* it glances directly at the Armada. E. A. J. Honigmann, editing the play for the Arden 2 series, noted that 'Previous writers … have … championed every year between 1591 and 1598 as the date of composition', but himself favoured 1590, partly on the grounds that 'Armada idiom and allusions are more frequent in *John* than has been suspected':[48] King Philip speaks of 'A whole armado of convicted sail' (3.3.2) and Honigmann also identifies 5.1.65–73 as 'Armada rhetoric'. *King John* is certainly

obsessed with water boundaries in the way that one would expect of a text influenced by the Armada. Austria speaks of 'that England, hedg'd in with the main, / That water-walled bulwark' (2.1.26–7), and Hubert figures the marriage of Lewis and Blanche in riparian terms:

> O, two such silver currents, when they join,
>
> Do glorify the banks that bound them in;
>
> And two such shores, to two such streams made one,
>
> Two such controlling bounds shall you be, kings,
>
> To these two princes, if you marry them. (2.1.441–5)

In both cases, the emphasis is on the difference between land and water, and the same logic informs Constance's question to Salisbury, 'Why holds thine eye that lamentable rheum, / Like a proud river peering o'er his bounds?' (2.2.23–4). It is therefore perhaps not surprising that the play also remembers the first seaborne invaders of Britain, the Romans.

The memory of the Romans is introduced early in the play when Chatillon speaks of John 'land[ing] his legions' (2.1.59) in France, and *King John* seems to show us three major fortresses with Roman origins. John's confrontation with King Philip takes place outside Angers, whose original city wall, part of which is still visible, was built to protect the city against Germanic invasion in 275 AD. The city's walls are insistently evoked from the moment that King Philip says 'Some trumpet summon hither to the walls / These men of Angiers' (2.1.198–9), and they seem to be imagined as almost an entity in themselves. King John speaks of

> … your city's eyes, your winking gates;
>
> And but for our approach those sleeping stones,
>
> That as a waist doth girdle you about,
>
> By the compulsion of their ordinance
>
> By this time from their fixed bed of lime
>
> Had been dishabited (2.1.215–20)

The walls are anthropomorphised by the idea of eyes and a waist, and the terms 'girdle' and 'dishabited' even smuggle in a suggestion that they are clothed like a human as well as taking a human form. The idea is developed when John offers to allow the inhabitants 'To save unscratch'd your city's threat'ned cheeks' (2.1.225), though if they refuse his terms he threatens 'To make a shaking fever in your walls' (2.1.228), while the Bastard speaks of 'The flinty ribs of this contemptuous city' (2.1.384) and 'these saucy walls' (2.1.404). The inhabitants too subscribe to such tropes: Hubert promises

that 'The mouth of passage shall we fling wide ope' (2.1.449). As well as being figured as quasi-sentient, the walls are also clearly understood as ancient: King Philip refers to 'the roundure of your old-fac'd walls' (2.1.259) and 'their rude circumference' (2.1.262). It is true that Lewis says of John 'What he hath won, that hath he fortified' (3.3.10) and castles at Odiham and in Limerick are both known as King John's Castle, but although John did historically do some wall-building at Angers, the play clearly acknowledges that the city's walls as much older than that, and have such status that they are almost an entity in their own right.

We cannot be quite so sure about the second potential set of Roman walls in the play. Holinshed has Arthur die in the early medieval castle at Falaise, but *King John* moves the scene to England. The play does not specify where the young prince meets his end: the only clue is his resolve that 'The wall is high, and yet will I leap down' (4.3.1), which could apply to almost anywhere, and Honigmann notes that 'Various locations have been proposed – Northampton (Capell), Dover (Halliwell), Canterbury (White), Tower of London (Wilson). But Shakespeare probably gave no thought to this'.[49] The lack of specificity may perhaps be deliberate, since John's attitude to Arthur parallels that of Elizabeth I to Mary, Queen of Scots, so the name of Fotheringhay Castle, where Mary was executed, may be a loud silence here just as Mary herself is in *Macbeth*; but the equally obvious parallel with the story of the Princes in the Tower means that we are at least as likely to think of the Tower, which was, as John Dover Wilson notes, where royal prisoners were usually sent (Elizabeth herself, when a princess, being the most recent), and which is said in *Richard III* to have been built by Julius Caesar.[50] Finally, the Dauphin's invasion plan centred historically on Dover Castle, and the play confirms that 'All Kent hath yielded: nothing there holds out / But Dover Castle' (5.1.30–1), where a Roman lighthouse still stands. The play thus certainly shows us a city and a castle which both have Roman walls, and we may well be invited to think of a third fortification of Roman origin in the shape of the Tower. Even more than *Doctor Faustus*, *King John* thus forcibly juxtaposes the impressive walls of classical Rome with the much more troubling religious practices of Catholic Rome. For early modern chorographers and mapmakers, Hadrian's Wall was seen as having offered powerful protection but was also a reminder of the vulnerability of England's borders. For Marlowe and Shakespeare, all Roman walls were potentially Roman Catholic walls, and spoke of dangerous ideas as well as dangerous places.

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Notes

1. Marcus Merriman suggests Christopher Dacre as the author: Marcus Merriman, '"The Epystle to the Queen's Majestie" and Its "Platte"', *Architectural History*, 27, 1984, pp. 25–32, 31.
2. Merriman, '"The Epystle …', p. 26.
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