Mucedorus, written and first performed in London in the early 1590s, is a play about a prince who adopts a disguise and undertakes a journey to see if a princess is as beautiful as he has heard. Along the way he eliminates threats to himself and her, finally revealing his identity and proposing marriage. The result is the union of two kingdoms in an emphatically comic conclusion that playgoers would have found it easy to enjoy. But this simple play has an intriguing history that invites investigation. There are essentially two versions of Mucedorus, one printed in the first quarto of 1598 (hereafter Q1) and again in 1606 (Q2), and the other in the third quarto of 1610 (Q3) and a remarkable fifteen subsequent editions up to 1668. The differences between the two versions are the result of 215 lines, almost certainly not by the original author, added to the earlier version to create the version printed in Q3, which is advertised on its title page as “Amplified with new additions” (A1r). Q3 has a prologue not found in Q1, and the induction and epilogue are lengthened, but the principal effect of the additions is a significant change in the narrative. In the first two quartos Mucedorus is in disguise as a shepherd from his first appearance until late in the play, but in the third and subsequent editions he initially appears as the prince that he really is before donning his shepherd disguise. The result is a fundamentally different play. In what follows I summarize the treatment of Mucedorus’s disguise in each version, discuss the effects of the additions, and suggest some topical reasons for them; I then consider how these reasons might be relevant to the play’s longevity.
says that “In the 1598 version, the hero is understood to be a pastoral figure, a common man, which may well have appealed to audiences in the public theatres” (Idea of Apocrypha 101). At the same time, however, those playwrights familiar with Sidney’s Musidorus would probably have enjoyed feeling superior to those who saw only a shepherd, and as time went by word-of-mouth would have ensured that fewer and fewer were fooled by the disguise. In 1598, moreover, the printed quarto not only mentioned “Mucedorus the kings sonne of Valentia” (A1r) on its title page but also included a doubling chart that listed “Mucedorus the prince of Valentia” (A1v). Meanwhile, it is quite possible that this information was also given on the playbills that were posted in the streets to advertise performances (Stern, Documents 56-62). All this being so, I nevertheless wonder if a playwright’s advance knowledge of the truth would have significantly undercut the titillating experience of watching the disguise plot unfold. Indeed, one might argue that the possession of “secret” knowledge would have enhanced the fun of watching a shepherd win. Once the mind is attuned to this possibility of seeing Mucedorus two ways at once, examples are easy to find.

The stage direction that begins Act 1, scene 1 – “Enter Segasto running and Amadine after him, being pursued with a bear” (I.1.01-02, A3v) – conveys Segasto’s uncourtier-like cowardice, which is almost immediately contrasted with Mucedorus’s first, emblemized appearance: “Enter Mucedorus like a shepherd with a sword drawn and a bear’s head in his hand” (I.1.5.1-2, A3v). The use of “like a shepherd” in this stage direction does not necessarily signal a disguise; it merely describes the kind of costume Mucedorus is wearing. Nevertheless, once the play was printed in 1598, this direction would have provided an early clue for readers. When Mucedorus then gives Amadine the bear’s head, her response seems to emphasize his shepherdness, but her contrast of him with “a mighty prince” could be an ironic hint:

Thanks, worthy shepherd, thanks a thousand times,
This gift, assure thyself, contents me more,
Than greatest bounty of a mighty prince,
Although he were the monarch of the world. (I.1.17-20, A3v)

Mucedorus is referred to as shepherd over eighty times, almost always in ways that reinforce his shepherd identity and highlight the contrast between his noble actions and those of the ignoble courtier Segasto. For example, when a jealous Segasto enlists Tremilio to kill Mucedorus, he says “but now a shepherd / [is] Admired at in court for worthiness, / And Segasto’s honor laid aside”; and Tremilio boasts that he does not fear “the frowns of a shepherd” (2.2.62-3; 69; Bv4r). During the brief fight between Mucedorus and Tremilio, Segasto cries “Hold, shepherd, hold!” (2.2.79; Bv4v) and after Tremilio is dead Segasto tells Mouse that “the shepherd killed him” (2.2.105; C1r). Then when Segasto brings Mucedorus to the court for punishment, the king says “Shepherd, thou hast heard thine accusers” (2.4.1; C1v), and “Shepherd, thine own confession hath condemned thee” (2.4.10; C2r). When Amadine enters with the bear’s head, she intervenes to “crave the life of this condemned / shepherd” (2.4.20-1; C2r) who rescued her. The episode ends with the king telling Segasto “cease to accuse the shepherd; / His worthiness deserves a recompense; / All we are bound to do the shepherd good” (2.4.68-70; C3r). This repetition might be intended to assure players that this figure really is nothing but a shepherd; but if one knows or suspects that he is actually a prince, the reiterated “shepherd” would probably have an opposite, ironic effect.

That said, until the disguise is revealed there is nothing in the text – such as soliloquies or asides by Mucedorus – informing or reminding players that he is not what he seems. Moreover, this treatment of the shepherd disguise can be contrasted with how the playwright manages Mucedorus’s hermit disguise, because this time the audience is told of his plans and then watches him actually disguise himself. Mucedorus and Amadine plan to meet in the woods and escape together, but she arrives before him and is captured by the wild man Bremo. Ignorant of this, Mucedorus fears that Amadine has changed her mind and contemplates returning to Valencia. Hoping to see her again, however, he decides instead to “attire [himself] hermit-like” (4.1.19; Dv4) in what Mouse later describes as “a white gown and a white hat” (4.3.18; E3v). As he “Disguiseth himself”, Mucedorus calls attention to the nature of the change: “Come, habit, thou art fit for me / No shepherd now, a hermit I must be” (4.1.15-16; Dv4). In this second disguise he encounters Amadine and her captor, and once more shows his worth by killing Bremo and freeing her. Mucedorus’s disguise as hermit thus creates a plot-within-the-plot of his disguise as shepherd, so that for playgoers his defeat of Bremo in defence of Amadine echoes his earlier killing of the bear to save her when Segasto, her courtly suitor, has run away in fear. In this inventive use of the hermit disguise, the original playwright demonstrated his understanding of how the device could create dramatic irony. And while the playwrights’ knowledge of the hermit disguise allows them to feel superior, it also creates a context for references to the problem of “a stray king’s daughter run away with a shepherd” (4.1.33-5; C4v).
In the safe space between overt ignorance and implicit knowledge of the shepherd disguise that the play seems to create, questions about the relationship between social class and moral behaviour are implied. The simple fact of a romance between a shepherd and a king’s daughter might be another hint about Mucedorus’s true identity, but it also both acknowledges the rarity of such a pairing and addresses the difficulties it raises. At the start of Act 3, just after Mucedorus has been banished and Mouse has sung “Shepherd, begone; shepherd, begone” (3.1.38; C4r), Amadine and Mucedorus meet in the woods. Mucedorus says he wants to be her “servant” (3.1.64; C4v), and Amadine responds “I honor thee as sovereign with my heart” (3.1.67; C4v). He replies “A shepherd and a sovereign? Nothing like” (3.1.68; C4v). When he later joins Amadine as Bremo’s captive, she confesses to the “hermit”, “Of late a worthy shepherd I did love”, to which he replies “A shepherd, lady? Sure a man unfit to match with you” (5.1.28-9; E4r). Still in hermit disguise, after he has killed Bremo he asks Amadine “How if you find your shepherd in these woods?” and then “discovers himself”, asking “Say, lady, do you know your shepherd well?” (5.1.80, 81.1, 83; F1r). Here again the hermit disguise works to reinforce the belief that Mucedorus is a shepherd; it also leads to a discovery that returns him to his initial, secret disguise and sets the shepherd plot in motion again. When Mouse and Segasto try to force Amadine to return to court, Mucedorus tells her “to make thy choice of three; / There stands Segasto, here a shepherd stands, / There stands the third” (5.1.129-31; F1v). Emphasizing the class implications of Amadine’s choice, Mouse adds, “A lord at the least I am” (5.1.132; F2r), and when she quickly chooses Mucedorus, Segasto says sarcastically, “A worthy mate, no doubt, for such a wife” (5.1.134; F2r). Even Mucedorus reminds her that as a shepherd he has no lands and her life will be one of drudgery: “No princess then, but plain a shepherd’s wife” (5.1.144; F2r). But Amadine quickly dismisses his warning by announcing that as her husband he will be “crowned King of Aragon” (5.1.147; F2r). This finally brings Mucedorus to declare the truth:

Then know that which ne’re tofore was known:
I am no shepherd, no Aragonian I,
But born of royal blood. My father’s of Valencia
King, my mother Queen. (5.1.149-52; F2r)

As if to emphasize how Mucedorus’s disguise was being used to test the other characters (and perhaps the playgoers), Segasto immediately welcomes Mucedorus the prince and gives Amadine, and Aragon, to him.

Whether or not Mucedorus actually removes his shepherd disguise when he identifies himself to Amadine and Segasto in 5.1, he is wearing it when he returns to Aragon with them in the next scene. But now, of course, playgoers are no longer required to “see double” as it were. When her father refers to Mucedorus as an “accursed wretch” (5.2.42; F3r), he counters “I do deserve the daughter of a king” (5.2.46; F3v) and the King responds “Oh, impudent! a shepherd and so insolent!” (5.2.47; F3v). When Mucedorus then verbally reveals himself – “No shepherd I, but a worthy prince” (5.2.48; F3v) – the King, still seeing a shepherd, again rejects him: “In far conceit, not princely born” (5.2.49; F3v). Mucedorus replies, “Yes, princely born: my father is a king, / My mother queen, and of Valencia both” (5.2.50-1; F3v), and this time the king says: “What, Mucedorus, welcome to our court. / What cause hadst thou to come to me disguised?” (5.2.52-3; F3v). This change to immediate and surprised recognition suggests that as Mucedorus speaks he also physically discovers himself. The absence of a stage direction means little; indeed, it might indicate that here as in many other plays dialogue was considered sufficient to signal the action. In Shakespeare’s work alone, the self-discovers of Julia in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Hero in Much Ado about Nothing, Mariana in Measure for Measure, Coriolanus, Edgar in King Lear, and Polixenes in The Winter’s Tale are all signalled solely by dialogue. In Mucedorus the concluding events certainly imply that only when finally looks like a prince is Mucedorus recognized, accepted, and treated as one.

With these points in mind, I’ll now turn to the 1610, third quarto additions that redeploy the disguise so that it serves different purposes with different effects. Right at the start of Act 1 a lengthy insertion is clearly intended to establish Mucedorus’s true identity, his reason for adopting a disguise, and why he chooses the one he does. That is, whereas in Q1 Mucedorus first appears dressed as a shepherd, with sword and bear’s head, in Q3 his first appearance is as the Prince of Valencia – and therefore dressed as such. Moreover, at the start of Q3 playgoers are given the information that Q1 withholds until its denouement: Mucedorus tells Anselmo that he has heard praise of the beauty of Amadine, princess of Aragon, and wants to go there in disguise to see if it is true. Anselmo tries to dissuade Mucedorus by mentioning how his father, the king, will worry, but the prince refuses to change his plan and asks his friend to help him find a disguise. Anselmo suggests “a Florentine or mountebank”, but Mucedorus rejects both, preferring “an humbler stock” (Add.2.47; A4v). Anselmo then offers “a cassock”, saying “t was [sic] a shepherd’s / Which I presented in Lord Julio’s masque” (2.48-50; A4v). Rather than inviting playgoers to see a shepherd, as
the original treatment of the disguise does, this combination of discussion and action heightens the artificiality of the disguise and ensures playgoer detachment. In Peter Kirwan’s view “The 1610 additions establish Mucedorus’s character and pedigree from the start, making the audience complicit in his disguise and allowing the plot to proceed in a conventional way”. Moreover, “By removing the surprise of the prince’s disguise, Mucedorus is made safe” (Idea of Apocrypha 103). As this added segment ends, Mucedorus exits with the shepherd costume, soon to reappear “like a shepherd” – his first entrance in Q1. The additions in 4.1 and 5.1, on the other hand, emphasize the effect of Mucedorus’s departure on his father. In the addition at the start of Act 4 the King of Valencia laments “till Mucedorus I shall see again, / All joy is comfortless, all pleasure pain” and he is reassured by Anselmo, “Your son, my lord, is well” (Add.3.16–18; D3v). Then in Act 5 when the King of Aragon says to Mucedorus “Were but thy father... / Present in view of this combining knot” (Add.4.1–2; F2v), the King of Valencia enters for the happy father-son, king-prince reunion and the anticipation of a dynastic marriage.

Appearing at the beginning, middle, and end of the play, then, these additions constitute a kind of “overlay” superimposed on the original so as to subtly but fundamentally change it. In particular, although the shepherd disguise of the Q1 text remains, it is given a new context, so that each use of “shepherd” that might have been perceived as a challenge to the nobility is defused and reduced to a constant source of amusing dramatic irony. That is, in the revised version Mucedorus can never be mistaken for a shepherd who behaves like a prince: he is a prince, and worthy of a princess. Kirwan summarizes the effect:

In the revised 1610 text, Mucedorus’s true identity is explicit from the start. The Valencia scenes act to assert and remind audiences of his status as prince, and to state his dynastic marriage with Amadine as the object of his quest. Understood as a prince entering the forest, his taming of wild spaces enacts a reassertion of law-abiding society and a display of monarchical power. The prince, as the proxy of the state, colonizes and takes over the space of exclusion, restoring justice and liberating virtue. (“Mucedorus” 232)

Several critics have offered a range of opinions about the effect of the additions: Norman Rabkin says they “make it a better play” (463) but does not explain how, while for Arvin Jupin, “the additions do not invite ridicule of the old play, but supplement its effects, update its allusions, strengthen both its serious and comic sides” (54). More particularly, Kirwan puts the Q3 treatment of the disguise in the context of changing dramatic conventions:

By removing the surprise of the final revelation, much of the dramatic excitement and tension of the play is lost, the outcome now being clear from Mucedorus’s first explanation of his intentions to Anselmo. In its new form, the outdated Mucedorus could serve a fresh purpose. Considering the new vogue for pastoral themes, the revised play acted as a simple, palatable entertainment that catered to a newly popular trend while not being confused with the newer tragicomedies, which are in turn cast as innovative. (Idea of Apocrypha 105)

According to Kirwan, “Mucedorus was remade, both internally and externally, as a straightforward, unsophisticated folk play, popular but unfashionable, the state in which history continues to judge it” (Idea of Apocrypha 106). These and similar literary-aesthetic effects of the changes do not, however, explain why the play continued to be printed long after interest in straightforward romantic comedy on the stage had waned.”

For his part, George F. Reynolds says that “the change in [the play’s] fortune came with the performances in London by the King’s men, and the publication of the B [1610] text. Before these events the play was a badly worn antique; after them it became a unique success” (257). But he argues that the additions alone “are scarcely enough to stir popular interest very much, nor would the revelation at the beginning that the heroic shepherd is Mucedorus” (258). These points set up Reynolds’s premise “that something out of the ordinary must have happened to explain the subsequent popularity” (258). He dismisses the theories that a performance at court or the popularity of Mouse can explain it, then turns to evidence for his own theory. He says that “Something that would arouse surprise, cause general conversation, seems called for”. And he asks “Would not the use, perhaps in the London public performances, perhaps only in the one at court, of a real bear instead of a man disguised in a bear’s skin provide a possible explanation?” He acknowledges that the use of a real bear is not a new idea, but that “it has not been connected before with the change in fortune of Mucedorus” (259). Reynolds summarizes evidence for the existence in London of real bears and the work of other critics who share his theory, but concedes that there is no actual proof that a real bear was used. In support of Reynolds, Teresa Grant argues for the “docility” of young polar bears that might have been used on stage, but she provides no evidence that such a
risk was actually taken (312). Paul Kreuzer, on the other hand, discounts the use of a real bear, which “Elizabethan and Jacobean audiences would have recognized” as “a powerful threat”; he says that in the play, “Despite the threatening associations, real danger is not present, and the imitation ["by a man wearing a bear costume"] enables the audience to laugh, to celebrate Mucedorus’s slaying of the ‘bear’ as man’s victory over an accepted menace” (n. pag.). Similarly, Helen Cooper observes that “the risk incurred in loosing an unchurred bear in pursuit of a fleeing man within reach of several hundred spectators with nowhere to run, would make the use of real bears problematic” (n. pag.). And as Peter Hyland rightly asks, “Why would the appearance of a live bear on stage have made the play popular among readers?”. Noting that “There is, in fact, no firm evidence that a live bear was used”, Hyland observes that “even if one were available and employed in the 1610 staging, it is certain none would have been available for all performances of the play over the years” (204). The point is a good one, although it assumes that there were such performances, a matter to which I shall return.

II

In addition to “the Cittie of London” mentioned on its title page, the original play seems to have been performed at court. There is no official record of this event, but the 1598 quarto has a concluding epilogue with references to Queen Elizabeth that seem intended to be spoken when she was present. The triumphant Comedy instructs Envy,

stoop upon thy knee,  
Yield to a woman, though not to me,  
And pray we both together with our hearts,  
That she thrice Nestor’s years may with us rest,  
And from her foes high God defend her still,  
That they against her may never work their will.

Envy responds,  
Indeed, Comedy, thou hast overrun me now,  
And forces me stoop unto a woman’s sway,  
God grant her grace amongst us long may reign.

And Comedy’s final words invite general agreement:  
Long may she reign, in joy and great felicity,  
Each Christian heart do say Amen with me. (Epilogue.15–20, 23–25, 32–3; F4v)

We do not know how Elizabeth and her courtiers responded to the play’s depiction of Mucedorus. Referring to the delayed revelation of the disguise, Kirwan says “any play that kept a courtly audience in a state of social anxiety for three quarters of its length may have been taking a serious liberty” (Idea of Apocrypha 102). But among those who knew Sidney’s story of Musidorus, this group of courtiers would probably have known it best. It therefore seems more reasonable to suppose that they sat back and enjoyed anticipating the revelation they knew was coming – probably laughing at the many repetitions of shepherd and other elements that knowledge of the disguise would have made ironic. Certainly nothing suggests that Mucedorus fell out of favour after being performed at court. When it was printed again in 1606, the first epilogue reference to the queen had become “Yield to King James” (F4v) and the feminine pronouns referring to the monarch had been changed to masculine. These revisions might indicate a performance before James, but they might also have been done as a matter of course at any point between Elizabeth’s death in 1603 and publication in 1606. Martin Wiggins considers the possibility that the alterations might reflect a court performance, but says that “it is at least as likely that the update was made in the printing house” (85).

The revised version, however, was definitely performed for King James at court. The third quarto title page of 1610 says that the King’s Men performed the play “before the Kings Maiestie at White-hall on Shroue-sunday night” (A1r). This is the context for the added prologue, addressed to King James, and for the supplements to the untitled epilogue, which concludes by first referring to the king then speaking to him directly. More significantly, the result of the reviser’s early revelation of Mucedorus’s princely status is that what James and his courtiers would have seen in 1610 is a play about a prince in disguise as a shepherd who sets out on a mission and accomplishes it. Furthermore, by adding the King of Valencia as a character, the reviser made possible the concluding happy reunion of father and son, king and prince. The immediate purpose of these changes was presumably to flatter James and the rest of the courtly audience rather than risk offending, as the original version of the play might have done. But I would argue that the revisions also had more particular immediate pertinence that would acquire significance over time.

The Shrove Sunday to which the Q3 title page refers is generally agreed to have been in 1610, the year of publication. If so, the date was 18 February, which means that the Whitehall performance would have been the evening before the sixteenth birthday of Prince Henry. In this context,
that the revised *Mucedorus* is about a prince who acts heroically and pleases his anxious father by marrying a princess and uniting two kingdoms is surely significant. Roy Strong refers to 1610 as the year in which Henry “made his decisive entry onto the public stage” (11), beginning with the event that “inaugurated the Prince’s public career” (141) on Twelfth Night at Whitehall. This was the “presentation [of Henry] before the court in a chivalrous spectacle written by Ben Jonson” (11), *Prince Henry’s Barriers*, in which he participated as “chief challenger” (Jonson 4M3r–4N1v). J. W. Williamson says that in this contest Henry displayed a “warlike, chivalric persona” (66) and that this was part of the deliberate creation of a “myth of the conqueror” for Henry in 1610, the year of his investiture as Prince of Wales in June. Williamson notes how a 1612 depiction of Henry reflects and contributes to this image. He says “This was a face certainly older than sixteen, but a face difficult to place in time, the timeless quality much enhanced by the profile angle. The mighty Roman nose, the strong chin, and the serious eye all combined to render Prince Henry out of time and beyond it”; he adds that “here was a prince thrusting his lance of reenergized chivalry into the future where he would ever be the master, not the subject, of mutability” (66). Strong observes that “For the next three years [Henry] was never out of public consciousness as he gradually created around himself a dazzling court” (11). Whether by design or accident, during this time the revised play with its heroic protagonist prince might easily have been seen as alluding to the future king of England. This in turn might help to explain the publication of *Mucedorus* in 1610 and again in 1611 with a title page advertising its performance before the king on that particular Shrove Sunday. It would not be unusual for a publisher to capitalize on the cachet of a court performance, especially if the printed text were seen as a compliment to the king on the occasion of his popular son’s sixteenth birthday.

There can be no doubt that Prince Henry was popular: not only was he celebrated simply as an heir to the throne – something England had lacked for sixty years – he also enjoyed being in the public eye. In this he was different from his father who, according to Arthur Wilson’s 1653 history of James’s reign, “did not love to be looked on, and those formalities of State, which set a lustre upon Princes in the peoples eyes, were but so many burthens to him” (12). More particularly, Wilson says that “in [James’s] publick appearances (especially in his sports) the addresses of the people made him so impatient, that he often dispersed them with frowns” (13).

By contrast, Wilson describes the prince in 1610 as having been,

the prime branch of this Royal Cedar, now growing Manly (being the sixteenth year of his Age) put forth himself in a more Heroick manner than was usual with Princes of his Time, by Tiltings, Barriers, and other exercises on horseback, the Martial Discipline of gentle Peace, which caught the peoples eyes, and made their tongues the Messengers of their hearts, in daily extolling his hopeful and gallant towardliness to admiration. And now the King thought him full of ripeness for the honour of Knighthood . . . and (to add the more splendor to his sparkling youth) create him Prince of Wales . . . with all the pomp and solemnity that a great King could express to a hopeful Son, his first born; or the merit of a prince (that floated in the peoples affections) could possibly attain to. (52)

Even in 1606, when Henry was only twelve, he was already being celebrated by Robert Fletcher in *The nine English worthies: or, Famous and worthy princes of England being all of one name: beginning with King Henrie the first, and concluding with Prince Henry, eldest sonne to our Soueraigne Lord the King*. In the brief concluding section devoted to Henry, Fletcher conveys the admiration and optimism inspired by the young prince:

Then Britaine boast, that never any age
Brought the like Prince, a thousand yeares in space:
For birth, for vertue, and for expectation,
Prince of Great Britaine ouerpeer’s each Nation.
Ninth Worthie then, O Prince, possess in peace
That worthy Title, best befitting fame:
Let prudence, fortitude, and all increase
That vertue addes, and doth adorne your name. (K1v)

And more immediately, in 1610 the diplomat and politician Sir Thomas Edmonds observed that the Prince

now beginneth to take a great authority upon him. . . . He maketh himself already very much respected and even by our greatest men in authority, and many men out of the pregnancy of his spirit do make many descants of many things that may hereafter ensue. (qtd in Williamson 114)

When Henry died on 6 November 1612, therefore, more than just a life came to an end. According to Charles Carlton, “Few heirs to the English throne
have been as widely and deeply mourned as Prince Henry” (12). There were many commemorative publications. Strong says that “The flood of literature that attended his departure far exceeded that for Gloriana in quantity, and in theme it matched that which mourned the passing of another quintessential perfect Protestant Knight, Sir Philip Sidney” (220). Williamson emphasizes the quantity and variety of responses:

Prince Henry inspired a flood of elegiac display virtually unprecedented theretofore and certainly unequalled since in terms of sheer bulk. Close to fifty different volumes of memorial writing - including elegies, epicedia, epitaphs, emblems, impresa, devices, meditations, sermons - were occasioned by Henry’s death, many of those volumes being, in fact, anthologies representing the poetical offerings of dozens of men in all the learned languages, both ancient and modern. (171)

Another edition of Mucedorus was published in 1613, and while it might seem far-fetched to suggest that this was in response to the prince’s death, it was the third edition in four years. A desire to commemorate a much-loved heir to the throne while also capitalizing on his death might explain this latest quarto. But, of course, what became the remarkable publication history of this play had only just begun: thirteen editions would follow between 1615 and 1668 – six during James’s reign, five while Charles was on the throne, one during the Interregnum, and two after the Restoration. Hyland says “It is difficult to explain the proliferation of printed texts of a play that has so few literary aspirations” (206). But perhaps the aspirations and the reasons were not literary. Might the long sequence of editions have been in response to the continuing consequences of Henry’s death? As time went by and thoughts of what-might-have-been were repeatedly triggered by here and now events, the play could have become an artifact that fed or capitalized on nostalgia.

That is, even if the play was revised to flatter James on that Shrove Sunday in 1610, its unusual longevity could be attributable to the likeness between Mucedorus, a chivalric hero-prince, and the real Prince Henry, who embodied those qualities. Certainly the play includes sentiments that would have been heard differently but felt as strongly before and after Henry’s death. As Mucedorus departs on his journey in the first act addition, Anselmo speaks words that must have seemed a compliment to Henry before he died, but afterwards, sad reminders of the loss to king and country:

Prosperity forerun thee, awkward chance
Never be neighbor to thy wishes’ venture.
Content and fame advance thee, ever thrive,
And glory thy mortality survive. (Add.2.59-62; B1r)

In a later addition, the King of Valencia, missing his son, laments,

How can a father that hath lost his son,
A prince both wise, virtuous, and valiant,
Take pleasure in the idle acts of time?
No, no, till Mucedorus I shall see again,
All joy is comfortless, all pleasure pain. (Add.3.13-17; D3v)

The process of accepting Prince Henry’s death was a long one. Catherine MacLeod comments that “For many years, Henry remained in the collective memory as a paradigm of princely virtue” (161). Almost fifty years after the event, Arthur Wilson writes as if still in mourning of “A Prince as eminent in Nobleness as in Blood, and having a spirit too full of life and splendour to be long shrouded in a cloud of Flesh. If that which gave life to his life had been less, he might happily have lived longer” (62). This lament illustrates Williamson’s observation that “It was not Prince Henry they mourned; it was the sudden loss of a living national myth for which men cried out” (171). He adds that “A nation mourns its living symbols, those who stand more for possibility than for actuality, those who in their deaths frustrate a national goal which has seemed attainable but which has remained just beyond grasp” (173; original italics). One example of this is the first extensive biography of Prince Henry, The Life and Death of our Late most Incomparable and Heroique Prince, Henry Prince of Wales, written in 1613 by Sir Charles Cornwallis, who had been Prince Henry’s treasurer. This work, which circulated in manuscript before being printed in 1641, is subtitled A Prince (for Valour and Virtue) fit to be Imitated in Succeeding Times (A1r), and is dedicated to Henry’s nephew Prince Charles, the future Charles II. It “presents Henry as a paragon of virtuous living – as a warrior prince, endowed from infancy with a martial spirit”.

Williamson notes the contrasts between the idolized dead prince and his replacement:

If there was one continuing effect of Henry’s myth, it restedonerously on James’s second son, the weaking brother who now became the Prince of Wales. Henry and Charles had been worlds apart in temperament, personality,
and in personation, and if Protestant England looked for Charles to step into
the mytic robes of Henry - as surely they did - they were much disappointed
in an heir who drew his own sense of self from such different reservoirs . . .
The Conqueror Prince gave way to the Martyr King. (192)

It seems reasonable to speculate that an awareness of these differences
could have created a responsive market for the editions of Mucedorus printed
before Charles succeeded his father (1615, 1618, 1619, 1621) and afterward
when he was king (1626, 1631, 1634, 1639). As to the possibility that the three
subsequent editions were seen as reminders of what might have been,
according to E. C. Wilson,

As England drifted into civil war, Henry was more than ever remembered as
the perfect prince by many who naturally fancied that he might have steered
the ship of state past the dangerous rocks. Down through the century and into
the next he is always 'good Prince Henry.' About 1650 Bishop John Hacket
eulogized Henry: 'so much Light was extinguish'd, that a thick Darkness, next
to that of Hell, is upon our Land at this day. O matchless Worthy!' (174).

The popularity of Mucedorus is perhaps indicated by how few copies
remain. According to Richard Proudfoot, "Of the fourteen editions known to
STC 2 . . . none is known to survive in more than five copies, most in three or
fewer" (18). On the one hand, if the play was seen as a relic of a happier past,
it was evidently not considered worth preserving; but on the other hand,
there seems to have been a continuous demand for copies. Significant,
perhaps, and certainly very unusual, is that the title page wording never
changed; until 1668 each quarto continued to advertise the 1610 performance
by the King's Men "before the King's Majesty at Whitehall on Shrove-Sunday
night". More particularly, a search in Early English Books Online (EEBO)
reveals that play title pages mentioning Whitehall are rare: of all the fifty-two
title pages with Whitehall (or White-hall) dated between 1612 and 1629, five are
of Mucedorus and only two others are of plays. Between 1630 and 1642,
three title pages with Whitehall are of Mucedorus, five others are of plays, but only
one is a play written (like Mucedorus) before 1630. This is the 1633 quarto of
Christopher Marlowe's The Jew of Malta, of which, unlike Mucedorus, there is
no earlier edition. No other play has either as many editions as Mucedorus or
a title page that is repeated verbatim over such a long period.

Because new editions appeared so regularly, they inevitably coincided
with historical events, so it is difficult to argue cause from effect.

Nevertheless, there are some tantalizing juxtapositions, as I have already
suggested, and other coincidences of event and edition worth noting in the
years following Henry's death. Proudfoot refers to the "fourteen editions
known to STC 2" in his discussion of an edition that survives in five leaves
that were used to "make up deficiencies in a copy of a later quarto" (18). His
study of variants in these leaves in relation to other quartos leads him to
conclude that the five leaves must evidently belong to an unrecorded
edition, . . . of which no complete example is recorded" (19). More
specifically, he concludes that this previously unknown edition is the
seventh in the series. He says that it "can hardly be dated more exactly than
1615-18. Unless it was piratical it may be presumed to be either William
Jones's last edition of the play - or just imaginably . . . - John Wright's first
(though this would require him to have reprinted Mucedorus twice in the last
four months of 1618)" (20). This is another reason to think that Jones was
responsible for this edition and that he printed it in 1616, the year Charles
was made Prince of Wales. Other events in the royal family might also have
occasioned new editions, such as the death of Queen Anne in 1619 when
Henry's "death was mourned anew" (Arthur Wilson 169). Then came the
defate of King James in 1625, followed by Charles's succession in 1625 and
coronation in 1626; then the birth of an heir to the throne in 1630 and of
another prince in 1633. But the sequence of royal sons had actually begun in
1629, when Charles, Prince of Wales, was born and died on the same day. An
edition of Mucedorus without a title page has been dated 1629 for
bibliographical reasons (Greg, "On the editions" 103-04); perhaps it was
prompted by the death of this later prince. There is also an undated edition
published by Francis Coles some time between 1656 and 1663; it might have
been in response to the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, or to the
restoration of Charles II in 1660, the same year that saw the deaths of another
Prince Henry (b. 1640) and his sister Mary (b. 1631)?

Was the long publication history of Mucedorus matched by a similarly
regular series of performances, as some theatre historians have supposed?
Paul Whitfield White says that the play was "staged repeatedly at the Globe"
(199), but provides no evidence other than that it was "alluded to in other
works of the period". For this he cites C. F. Tucker Brooke's reference to "the
special popularity of Mucedorus with vulgar audiences in the seventeenth
century" (xxv). But as evidence Brooke offers Francis Beaumont's The Knight
of the Burning Pestle, which was written in 1607 and so must refer to
the original version. Another play that might allude to Mucedorus is Nathan
Field's Amends for Ladies, which mentions "the Beare in the play" (H1v); but
Amends was written in 1610–11, so this reference is almost certainly to the 1610 production of the revised Mucedorus at court or the Globe. Neither allusion is evidence that the play continued to be performed after 1610. Brooke also mentions the ill-fated 1652 amateur production at Witney, discussed below. The contemporary report of this event, together with the title page information about the 1610 Whitehall performance, constitute all the actual evidence we have of the revised play’s stage history. This sparse record does not explain sixteen editions over fifty-eight years. Possibly the play was staged regularly in London and/or in the provinces, but one would think that numerous performances of a popular play by a professional company would have left traces.

When considering the play’s “extraordinary popularity” in print, Proudfoot says “this seems likely to include its appeal to amateur performers” (20). More specifically, Kreuzer notes that “One reason that has been suggested for the number of editions of Mucedorus is that the distribution of parts listed in the dramatis personae enables small groups of players to present the work” (np). Certainly the minimal staging requirements of the play would have appealed to amateur players: it does not use either a trap or an upper stage – a simple platform and two doors would be sufficient. The most specific costume requirement is the bear’s suit (including a head), but once constructed or acquired it would have been easy to manage as would the other costumes, and all the necessary properties are hand-held and portable.

We know about the performance of Mucedorus at Witney on 3 February 1653 (mentioned above) by the parish players of Stanton Harcourt in Oxfordshire thanks to a report of “one of the only two known performances of a named play, secular or religious, by English parish players in the seventeenth century” (White 197). This rare record exists because the stage collapsed during the performance and several playgoers were killed with many more injured. A Puritan preacher, John Rowe, wrote a “Briefe Narrative” (¶4r) of the disaster, presenting it as a punishment for “such wanton sports” (¶¶2r). But he also provides considerable detail about the circumstances of this rural performance. He says that “This Play was an Old Play, and had been Acted by some of Stanton-Harcourt men many years since” (¶4v), and that before the Witney disaster these players had been performing the play in neighbouring towns. In his discussion of Rowe’s report, Thornton Graves refers to “the native English fondness for drama which survived in spite of Cromwell and his legislation” (150). The audience for the Witney performance numbered between three and four hundred and “others in the Yard pressed sorely to get in” (¶1r). Rowe tells us that it began “About seaven a Clock at Night” when the players “caused a Drum to beat, and a Trumpet to be sounded” (¶1r). We also learn that when the stage began to collapse they had been performing for about two hours and were two-thirds through the play (¶2r), so this was not a shortened version but the full text.

This performance is also noteworthy because it occurred during the Interregnum, and at the White Hart Inn where (perhaps not coincidentally) King Charles had stayed for three nights in 1644 (White 199). If Mucedorus was chosen not only because it had a small cast and few staging requirements but also because it was seen as a piece of “Royalist” nostalgia, that might also explain the undated edition of the play from this period (mentioned above). Two further editions were published in 1663 and 1668, evidence that the play continued to find a market in the years after the restoration of Charles II. Perhaps, with its long-obsolete but evocative title page, Mucedorus was a welcome relic of the pre-Interregnum past, and perhaps it was even performed in London after the theatres reopened in 1660.

Theatre historians and critics have long sought to explain the extraordinary publication history of Mucedorus by referring to internal elements, such as the bear or the “merrie conceites of Mouse” advertised on the title page. But perhaps, as I have argued, the primary cause of the revised play’s success was external and accidental – the combination of a timely performance at court and the untimely death of a popular prince. It is possible, indeed, that had it not been for these events the play might not have survived past the second quarto of 1606, leaving us without the considerable evidence about playwriting and performance that the revision provides. My purpose here has been to offer a new context for understanding its popularity and preservation.

Notes

1 For ease of reference, I assume a single playwright, but the original play could of course be collaborative.
2 Here and throughout I quote from Arvin Jupin’s modernized edition because it separates the additions of the third quarto from the first quarto text. I also provide signatures from the 1598 (STC 18230) or 1610 (STC 18232) quarto.
3 See Dessen and Thomson, entry for like.
4 Jupin provides a detailed discussion of the characterization and comic deflation of Segasto (40–4).
The 1598 text incorrectly has “disguiseth”; the error is corrected to “discloseth” in the 1615 quarto (E4v).

I am grateful to John Astington and Peter Blayney, both of whom have influenced my understanding and treatment of Mucedorus’s shepherd disguise in the original version.

The possibility that Shakespeare wrote the revisions has been widely dismissed (see Will Sharpe’s summary of the arguments in “Authorship and Attribution”); but in any case, there is no evidence that this might have been a reason for the play’s popularity through the seventeenth century.

Kirwan says that “The audience evaluates the protagonist’s actions as those of a prince, according to James’s own political theories that legitimise the use of disguise in maintaining order” (Idea of Apocrifa 103).

Wiggins (85) says the date of the court performance was 20 February, but in 1610 this was Shrove Tuesday.

There are several engravings of essentially the same image, based on a drawing by Isaac Oliver. One by William Hole is the frontispiece of Drayton’s Poly-Olbion (1612), which is dedicated to Henry: “Britaine, behold here portrayed to thy sight, / Henry, thy best hope, and the world’s delight: / Ordain’d to make thy eight Great Henries, nine:” etc. (IIIv). Another (Williamson’s figure 6) is by Simon van de Passe. See Wilks, “The Pike Charged” 183.

In “Notarre of Negativtity” Kevin Quarmby argues against this view of James, but he does not quote or cite Wilson.

Details about this biography are from the entry by C. A. M. (Catriona A. Murray) in The Lost Prince exhibition catalogue, page 176. The Life and Death frontispiece, engraved by W.[illiam] M.[arshall], is a version of the image of Henry holding a pike, discussed above.

For factors influencing survival see Blayney 36-9.

The name of Frances Coles in the imprint places it in or after his acquisition of the copy (17 June 1656), and textual evidence places it before the edition of 1663. See Greg, Bibliography 1, 251-2.

Works Cited

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Anon. A most pleasant comedic of Mucedorus the Kings sonne of Valentina, and Amadine the Kings daughter of Aragon With the merry conceites of Mouse. Amplified with new additions, as it was acted before the Kings Maistrie at White-hall on Shrowe-sunday night. London, 1610 (STC 18232).


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