PART 2

Exploring the Boundaries

News for Entertainment, Propaganda, and Satire

News of the Sussex Dragon*

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Although there were a number of claims that dragons populated ancient and modern Europe, there was only one recorded sighting of a dragon in early modern England.¹ This is the famous pamphlet, *True and Wonderful: A Discourse relating a strange and monstrous serpent (or dragon) lately discovered, and yet living, to the great annoyance and divers slaughters both of men and cattell, by his strong and violent poison, in Sussex two miles from Horsham, in a woode called S. Leonards Forrest, this present month of August, 1614. With the true generation of serpents.*² St. Leonards was not one of England's largest forests, and would seem to have been an unlikely place for a dragon to make its home, let alone a colony. Nevertheless, the forest commemorates the existence of the frightening beast, which has become a noted attraction, and the claim that "Dragons used to roam in St Leonard's Forest, or so the local legend goes" can be read in a number of places on the internet, which does not quite represent the pamphlet's claim that one beast terrorized Horsham's inhabitants.³

The reason for the persistence of this claim probably has a great deal to do with the pamphlet's particular publishing history, and the ways in which it has been reproduced since the early seventeenth century. In a rather sardonic account of West Sussex superstitions published in 1878 the Sussex folklorist Charlotte Latham commented on the credulity of that side of the county's rural inhabitants:

From time immemorial, snakes or serpents so big that they looked like dragons have terrified the population of our rural districts, and during the past year what is called in our expressive dialect 'an oudacious large

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- 1 Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Serpents. Or, The Second Booke of Liuing Creatures* (London, 1608), pp. 153–174. I am extremely grateful to Anne Lake Prescott and Hannibal Hamlin for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay which improved it significantly.
- 2 (London, 1614), STC 20569.
- 3 <http://roadsofstone.com/2009/05/12/209-a-dragon-slain-on-doomsday-horsham-10-km> (accessed 27 June 2012).

one' was said to be in this neighbourhood. Its lair was near a by-path, which it would not permit any one to traverse. It would rush out and drive back with a terrible hissing and a very bad smell any luckless wight who wandered in that direction. This audacious snake is doubtless a relation of the dragon serpent reported to have inhabited St. Leonard's forest in the seventeenth century, and which (says the author of the 'true and wonderful' account of it) was oftentimes seen 'at a place called Faygate, and it hath been seen within half a mile of Horsham, a wonder, no doubt, most terrible and noisome to the inhabitants thereabouts.'⁴

More recently Jeremy Harte surveyed early references to the serpent and concluded that the creature "had acquired a name and reputation which lasted nearly eighty years after its first media appearance." Like his predecessor, he could not resist a somewhat sarcastic comment on the persistence of the story:

It is a pity that the chapmen seem simply to have copied the original pamphlet instead of nosing out fresh reports, otherwise St Leonard's Forest might have become the Loch Ness of the south.⁵

In this chapter I will first uncover how the pamphlet has been published and read, before analysing what the original pamphlet, a relatively substantial work of twenty pages in black letter type, might have meant and how it might have been read in the early seventeenth century. In essence two traditions of interpretation have developed: one which asks whether the pamphlet refers to a real or mythical beast, based on the work as it appeared in print, and another which is interested in popular publishing and print in early modern England. The first takes what is in the popular public realm at face value; the second wants to think about popular print culture, and depends on access to research libraries as well as an academic mode of research. In the first type of analysis the key question is whether the dragon ever actually existed, whether the well-established folk tale has any real basis in fact; in the second, this truth/falsehood claim is effectively irrelevant and the real issue is why anyone would want to publish such an apparently absurd pamphlet, who read it, why they did, and whether the work had any substantial impact on the ways in which they thought about the human and animal worlds.

4 Charlotte Latham, "Some West Sussex Superstitions Lingered in 1868," *The Folklore Record*, 1 (1878), pp. 1–67, 15.

5 Jeremy Harte, "The Sussex Serpent," *Folklore*, 105 (1994), pp. 103–104.

Selective Evidence

Like so many early modern pamphlets, only one copy of *A Discourse relating a strange and monstrous serpent (or dragon) lately discovered* survives in the Bodleian Library. Until it became more straightforward to access such material with the advent of Pollard and Redgrave's STC in 1926, such works remained hidden to the public. However, the pamphlet did reach a wide audience after it was included in the extracts from the Earl of Oxford's library that made up the *Harleian Miscellany*, Volume 3, in 1745. The text was severely truncated and the second part of the work advertised in the title, "the true generation of serpents," was omitted, along with all other comments on the history of dragons which made up the largest part of the text. Instead we have the relatively short part of the pamphlet that describes the existence and sighting of the dragon, so that readers would have encountered the text as though it were an eyewitness account not embedded in a larger narrative.⁶ The description starts with "In Sussex, there is a pretty market-town called Horsham," proceeding to:

near unto it a forest, called St. Leonards forest, and there, in a vast and unfrequented place, healthie, vaulty, full of unwholesome shades, and overgrown hollows, where this serpent is thought to be bred: but, wheresoever bred, certain and too true it is that there it yet lives.

The style here should give us some pause for thought, given its self-conscious literariness, one that resembles the ironic mode of the two folklore articles rather than the anticipated style of the 'eye'/'I' witness account.⁷

We are told that a dragon's trail is like that of an especially dangerous and noxious snail, and can cause considerable harm to any humans exposed to its odours. The serpent itself is nine feet long and shaped "almost in the form of an axletree of a cart," thickest in the middle and smaller at each end. The head,

which he shoots forth as a neck, as it were, is supposed to be an ell long [about 18 inches], with a long white ring, as it were, of scales about it.

The scales on the serpent's back are "blackish," and those under its belly, red. Obviously, accurate descriptions are hard to make, given the danger of

⁶ Reprint copies on demand, such as the text by Bibliolife, are advertised as though they were the original pamphlet, but are taken from the *Harleian Miscellany* text.

⁷ Elaine Y.L. Ho, "The Rhetoric of the 'I' – Witness in Fulke Greville's *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney*," *Literature and History*, 2nd series, 2.1 (1991), pp. 17–26.

approaching the beast. Observers claim that it has two large feet, but the pamphleteer is not sure, as serpents do not usually have feet but glide on their stomachs. Whatever the case may be the serpent can move “as fast as a man can run,” which presumably causes his proud countenance and the arrogance with which he surveys the territory when men or cattle are around. Finally the author notes that the dragon/serpent has bunches on either side of him the size of footballs that may grow into wings, which would make him an especially terrifying and dangerous neighbour for the residents of Horsham.

For now the worst that the serpent/dragon can manage is to “cast his venom” 4 rods (some 25 yards):

as by woefull experience it was proved on the bodies of a man and a woman coming that way, who afterwards were found dead, being poisoned and very much swelled, but not preyed upon.

This sounds distinctly odd, as it would surely be impossible for the witness to have told the author that he knew that these dead bodies were hit from a distance of 25 yards. The evidence presented here bears a striking resemblance to the tales of cannibalism in the New World, when the bones left after an abandoned meal were cited as proof positive that man-eating had taken place.⁸ Fortunately there is rather better evidence to conclude this section: a man who chased the dragon with his mastiffs had to flee and the dogs were killed by the beast. Strangely, and counter-intuitively, they were not eaten and were left whole, the rather particular dragon preferring a diet of rabbits from the numerous local warrens.⁹ A number of witnesses testify to the truth of the story, having seen this serpent “beside divers others” (details of which are not mentioned). These include “the carrier [the postman] at Horsham, who lieth at the White Horse, in Southwark”; John Steele; Christopher Holder; “And a Widow Woman dwelling near Faygate.”

The fact that this particular extract has been reproduced has clearly had an impact on the ways in which the story has been understood, what it has been thought to mean, what it tells us, and on the nature of the text. The apparently precise nature of the description of the dragon and the reference to eye-witnesses has led a number of commentators to try to work out exactly what this mysterious beast can have been. Susan C. Djabri weighs up the evidence

8 Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492–1797* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 80–81.

9 Jeremy Knight and Jason Semmens (eds.), *Horsham's Dragon* (Horsham: Horsham Museum Society, 2007), introduction, pp. 17–18.

and concludes that the dragon was undoubtedly a cobra.¹⁰ She argues that there was no history of creatures that could have been mistaken for dragons living in the area, beasts which could have fuelled the legend, and that it is most likely that a very large cobra had somehow been brought back from the Far East and thrived in English conditions. The suggestion may not be as absurd as some readers might assume – obviously the wings are mistaken, as are the feet. There is a long-standing and often repeated story of a similar case of a misplaced exotic beast. A crocodile was apparently brought back from the Crusades by Richard the Lionheart and kept in the Tower of London before it escaped and started to breed in the Essex marshes. This has been cited as the origin of the story of another dragon in the Suffolk village of Bures in 1405, a descendant of Richard's pet, perhaps also represented in a wall-painting in nearby Wissington Church.¹¹

Scepticism and Cynicism

There is another way of reading the story. Evidence would suggest that the pamphlet was greeted by a certain amount of scepticism from early modern readers, perhaps even by most of them. Indeed, the publisher of the pamphlet, John Trundle, was notorious in the early seventeenth century for the wealth of dubious texts that he produced. Trundle mainly published ephemera and a large number of his products survive in only one edition or have been lost.¹² Indeed he became something of a byword for unreliable and exploitative publication.¹³ Trundle was attacked directly in a number of subsequent works, notably *Lachrymae Londinenses: Or Londons teares and lamentations, for Gods visitation of the plague of pestilence* (1626), a pious collection of writings responding to the latest outbreak of serious contagious disease in London,

10 Susan C. Djabri, "The 'Dragon' of St. Leonard's Forest," *Horsham Heritage*, 14 (Spring 2006), pp. 3–16.

11 Djabri, "Dragon," p. 12; <http://www.bures-online.co.uk/dragon/dragon.htm> (accessed 27 June 2012). How the crocodile bred unless already pregnant or not alone is not clear (I owe this point to Mary Yarnold).

12 Gerald D. Johnson, "John Trundle and the Book-Trade, 1603–1626," *Studies in Bibliography*, 39 (1986), pp. 178–199, 197–198. For details of Trundle's publications (1603–1629), see Katharine F. Pantzer (ed.), *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad: Vol. 3* (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1991), p. 171.

13 Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 45–74.

which concluded with a series of prayers for the new monarch, Charles I, and his family. The anonymous author sarcastically refuted the:

Spuriall pamphlets, which the presse hath of late spewed out, (broods of Barbican, Smithfield, and the Bridge, and Trundled, trolled and marshalled up and downe along the streets[...]

This was a palpable hit at the excesses of popular culture and a sharp reminder of this work's superior status as an appropriate response to the current crisis.¹⁴ Another pamphlet, *A True Report and Exact Description of a Mighty Sea-Monster, or Whale, cast upon Langar shore over against Harwich in Essex, this present moneth of Febrarie 1617* (1617), makes similar complaints about the sensational nature of other pamphlets, which also seems to target Trundle. The anonymous author of this pamphlet contrasts the verifiable nature of his observations with those that “busse and abuse” the “eies and eares” of readers,

with any fond fables of flying Serpents, or as fond delusions of devouring Dragons, of Men or women burned to death miraculously without fire, of dead men rising out of their graves [...] which is directly against the truth of the revealed will of God in the sacred Scriptures.

As the Sussex Dragon is the only pamphlet describing a dragon in early seventeenth-century England, then Trundle's work must be what this anonymous author has in mind.¹⁵ Just as the properly religious discourse of the anti-plague collection of prayers dismisses the excesses of Trundle, so does the true eyewitness account of a real monster.

These attacks against Trundle's sensational pamphlets – there were many others – are made on two grounds: first, that they are ungodly in style and substance.¹⁶ Second, that they are untrue, duplicitous, and are fundamentally lies, the two reasons being clearly connected in the minds of these critics and authors of true pamphlets. It should come as no surprise to learn that Trundle published work by Anthony Nixon, the notorious plagiarist, further indicating

14 Anon., *Lachrymae Londinenses* (1626), STC 16573, sigs B2^{r-v}; Johnson, “John Trundle,” p. 179.

15 (London, 1617), STC 20892.

16 For other attacks, see Johnson, “John Trundle,” p. 179; Julie Crawford, “Oral Culture and Popular Print” in Joad Raymond (ed.), *The Oxford History of Popular Print Culture: Volume 1: Cheap Print in Britain and Ireland to 1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 114–129, 123–124.

just how unscrupulous he could be in the pursuit of profit.¹⁷ In part, such attacks are a sign of how book traders kept a careful eye on what was taking place elsewhere within the profession, working out how best they could manoeuvre the market to their own advantage. In pushing the boundaries of what might be published Trundle was trying to open up spaces for his own works; his rivals were doing their best to restrict his opportunities.

But the argument cannot simply be reduced to market forces. There is, of course, a generic link between the godly prayers of *Lachrymae Londinenses*, the pamphlet about the sea-monster, and Trundle's account of the Sussex dragon, which all fit into a long tradition of attacks on the ungodly nature of the present manifested in a series of strange and troubling monstrosities which are a sign of God's displeasure at the transgression of mankind.¹⁸ The popular print world of early modern England was flooded with works that made quasi-theological sense of troubling, apparently inexplicable recent events, such as the earthquake of 6 April 1580, as part of an over-arching providential scheme.¹⁹ As Peter Lake and Michael Questier have pointed out, such messy, intermingled, and potentially contradictory discourses of fate, providence, God's judgement, and the desire to read the sensational, are characteristic of the style and substance of popular news pamphlets. Numerous pamphlets told tales of gory murders, which divine providence exposed, resulting in the brutal but justified punishment of the perpetrator, stories that enabled the reader to

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- 17 Johnson, "John Trundle," p. 197. On Nixon, see Lambert Ennis, "Anthony Nixon: Jacobean Plagiarist and Hack," *the Huntington Library Quarterly*, 3 (1940), pp. 377–401.
 - 18 See Rudolf Wittkower, "Marvels of the East: A Study in the History of Monsters," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5 (1942), pp. 159–197.
 - 19 Thomas Twyne, *A Shorte and Pithie Discourse, concerning the engendering, tokens, and effects of all Earthquakes in Generall* (London, 1580); Thomas Churchyard, *A warning for the wise, a feare to the fond, a bridle to the lewde, and a glasse to the good Written of the late earthquake chanced in London and other places, the. 6. of April 1580* (London, 1580); Arthur Golding, *A discourse vpon the earthquake that hapned throughe this realme of Englande, and other places of Christendom, the first of Aprill. 1580* (London, 1580); Abraham Fleming, *A bright burning beacon forewarning all wise virgins to trim their lampes against the comming of the Bridegroom. Containing a generall doctrine of sundrie signes and wonders, specially earthquakes both particular and generall: a discourse of the end of this world: a commemoration of our late earthquake, the 6. of April* (London, 1580); Anon., *The order of prayer, and other exercises, vpon Wednesdays and Frydayes, to auert and turne Gods wrath from vs, threatned by the late terrible earthquake: to be vsed in all parish churches and houtholdes throughout the realme* (London, 1580). Later works looked back to the event: see, for example, James Yates, *The castell of courtesie whereunto is adioyned the holde of humilitie: with the chariot of chastitie thereunto annexed* (London, 1582), sigs G3^{r-v}.

enjoy the prurient details of the reported crime, before understanding that such behaviour really did not pay.²⁰

A major part of Trundle's trade was in this kind of literary artefact. His other significant publication of 1614 was a combined pamphlet with another carefully directed title, *A miracle, of miracles As fearefull as euer was seene or heard of in the memorie of man. Which lately happened at Dicheat in Sommersetshire, and sent by diuers credible witnesses to be published in London. Also a prophesie reuealed by a poore countrey maide, who being dead the first of October last, 1613. 24. houres, reuiued againe, and lay fwe dayes weeping, and continued prophesying of strange euent to come, and so died the 5. day following. Witnessed by M. Nicholas Faber, parson of the towne, and diuers worthy gentlemen of the same countrey. 1613, withall, Lincolnshire teares. For a great deluge, in which fwe vil-lages were lamentably drovned this present month (1614).*²¹ The last of these three stories bears a close resemblance to the tale of the sea-monster and concerns an empirically verifiable event, linked to the familiar discourse of providence and God's displeasure with the sins of contemporary England. The second story, reprinted from a pamphlet of 1580 (with no acknowledgement),²² took place in Germany. It involves the saintly behaviour of a poor man's daughter who died, returned to life, and berated her family for their sins, warning them of God's wrath, before dying in earnest: another narrative that fits straightforwardly into the conflicted and confused mode of popular providential pamphlets. By far the most interesting story is the first one, which is appropriately illustrated on the front cover. This concerns an unfortunate event in Dicheat in the shadow of the Mendip Hills in Somerset, related by the village parson Nicholas Faber, and was also a revised and expanded version of an earlier work (again unacknowledged), this time a pamphlet originally published in 1584.²³ A woman in this village was tormented by the Devil who appeared beside her bed looking "much like unto a Beare, but it had no head nor tayle," as is shown in the woodcut published on the title page.²⁴ She is afflicted

20 Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists & Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pt. 2; Peter Lake, "Religion and Cheap Print" in Raymond (ed.), *Oxford History of Popular Print Culture: Volume 1*, pp. 217–241. See also Sandra Clark, *Women and Crime in the Street Literature of Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 444.

21 STC 14068.

22 Johnson, "John Trundle," p. 194.

23 Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 124.

24 Walsham, *Providence*, p. 188.

because of her sins, but she repents and God decides that she has suffered enough and banishes the Devil, a warning to all concerned to live lives free from blemish and to trust in God's providence.

Trundle obviously realized that there was a lucrative market for this sort of publication and the number of attacks on the Sussex Dragon pamphlet indicate that he succeeded in making his work widely known, even if not greatly admired. Whether he was a practical businessman, perhaps a cynical one, who simply saw the market potential of the material he published, or someone closely bound up with the intellectual ethos of what he published is hard to determine in the absence of further evidence. Trundle was certainly adept at combining different modes and styles of writing, mixing the godly with the sensational and making use of whatever printing resources he had to hand, notably other publishers' printing devices and blocks.²⁵ The fact that he was an active publisher of plays, seeing works by John Day, Thomas Dekker, Robert Greene, Thomas Rowley, William Shakespeare, and others into print, suggests that he was deeply immersed in the world of the theatre and probably understood what people who liked drama wanted to read.²⁶ But if one co-ordinate of such pamphlets was their sensational nature, appealing to an audience who wanted to see spectacle on stage, the other was a need for truth. The story of the woman and the headless bear-devil ends, as the Sussex Dragon pamphlet does, with a declaration and naming of local witnesses. Stephen Cooper, John Cooper, Alice Easton, John Thompson, John Anderton, Miles Foster, "with divers others," are cited to confirm that what has been narrated "is most true." In making such claims, which were extremely unlikely ever to be tested, these pamphlets were predicting the nature of the assaults that would be ranged against them and so attempting to nullify criticism. The issue and nature of truth is a central concern to which the pamphlets draw our attention, attempting in some way to overcome a predicted sceptical response, one that, as author and publisher predicted, the pamphlets received.

Dragons, Good and Bad

Even among the odd ephemera that make up the vast range of early popular printed pamphlets and books, the Sussex Dragon is an especially unusual

25 Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 227, *passim*; R. B. McKerrow, "Edward Aldee as a Typical Trade Printer," *The Library*, 4th series, 10 (1929–30), pp. 121–162.

26 Gerald D. Johnson, "John Busby and the Stationers' Trade, 1590–1612," *The Library*, 6th series, 7 (1985), pp. 1–15.

pamphlet which deserves further exploration. As has often been pointed out, it was written by an extremely learned writer who had a large classical library at his disposal as well as some expensive English books, although it also needs to be noted that a number of his stories are taken directly from Edward Topsell's *History of Serpents*, published six years earlier and clearly already popular as an encyclopaedia of exotic beasts.²⁷ The mysterious A.R., who may well have gone to Oxford, which had close links to Horsham in this period, cites a number of lines of Latin and Greek writers, all signalled in the margins. These include Plato, Macrobius, Plutarch, Suetonius, Aristotle, Lucan, Seneca, and Pliny, all common works in university libraries, as well as Holinshed and the Bible, indicating that he had received a standard university education. Moreover, in his disquisition on dragons that makes up the substance of the pamphlet he ranges more widely still. He refers to Irish history and topography, repeating the familiar legend from Gerald of Wales that the island was blessed with the absence of serpents (sig. B1^r); he describes and discusses the significance of a number of examples of dragons appearing throughout Europe in the middle ages (sigs B1^r–B2^r); and tells a story of Socrates looking through his optic glass and seeing two dragons infecting the air with their horrid breath (sig. B3^r). More salaciously, A.R. discusses how dragons copulate, a feature the pamphlet advertises on the title page, and an indication that the pamphlet should never really have been read as a simple eyewitness account that could be confirmed as true or dismissed as false. According to A.R. in his zoological mode, Serpents/dragons,

in this action [copulation], seme to be one body, and two heads: for they are so indivisibly united together and the frame of their body unapt for any other manner of copulation. And although like to fishes they want floure to elaborate the sperme, yet have they two open passages wherein lyeth their generation seed; which being spreade procureth their vene-real lustes; which seeded being circulated from the male, into cels and receptacles of the female, it is framed into an egge, which she hideth in the earthe (sigs A4^v–B1^r).

The text continues to an even more salacious section about the sexual relations between dragons and humans, notably a tale from Plutarch in which a woman has a dragon lover:

27 Knight and Semmens (eds), *Horsham's Dragon*, introduction, p. 11.

who came to her every night and did her no harme, but gently sliding over her playd with her till morning, departing away assone as light appeared, least he should be discovered[...] (sig. B2^r).

Obviously the plot went wrong at some point and Plutarch, or his source, found out. Then the work turns in a more moral direction, informing readers that dragons could act in rather more decent ways too, as A.R. repeats a tale from Suetonius about an impressively upright dragon who deliberately frightens an “incestuous son” who is having an affair with his mother, “and parted them asunder” in order to restore proper order (sig. B2^r). The moral of the story is simple enough: it is the fault of mankind that dragons have been transformed into malign creatures, as their nature is essentially friendly and co-operative:

Now as these hideous creatures are hurtfull to man, so also are they most inamoured of man: and if there be any trueth or veritie to be ascribed to histories: they haue been most passionately affected to man woman and child: which shoves that it is a worke of diuinitie as a iust punishment of our sinnes, to turne their affable natures to a most rauenous and deuouring crueltie (sig. B1^v).

The sentence could be read as a straightforward piece of credulous assumption, a logical deduction from an observation in line with that produced in *A True Report and Exact Description of a Mighty Sea-Monster, or Whale*. Or it could be read as a more knowing statement that implicitly acknowledges and encourages readers to either be credulous or to join the author in distancing themselves from other gullible readers. The hypothetical “if there be any trueth or veritie to be ascribed to histories,” could be read to undermine all that follows, making the assumption that dragons were once good and have now gone bad, a cutting parody of the sort of logic that abounds in other pamphlets of miraculous and strange natural phenomena.

However we read it, the mode of writing in the first section of *A Discourse relating a strange and monstrous serpent* is significantly different from that contained in the other works under discussion here, a further sign of the mixed and heterogeneous mode of the news pamphlet, but also one that might give us pause for thought about what is taking place in the work. Of course, as the tradition of the Sussex dragon was developing, all this was hidden from almost all readers, one reason why the pamphlet was read in the way that it was. The arch and mannered style of the opening section surely made readers wonder how to read the pamphlet. Was it actually considered a faithful account of a verified event by its unknown author, the mysterious, highly educated,

and perhaps thoroughly mischievous A.R.? Or was something else at stake? In the epistle to the reader, A.R., like his fellow pamphleteers – but at far greater length – draws attention to the truth/falsehood of what is to follow, in a notably and unusual self-conscious manner:

But passing by what's past let not our present truth blush for any former falsehood sake: The Countie is neere us, Sussex; The time present, August; The subject, a serpent; strange, yet now a neighbour to us; and it were more then impudence to forge a lie so neere home[...] (sigs A2^{r-v})

Perhaps the key word is “impudence,” which would appear to resonate more significantly than the ostensible references to truth and falsehood, which draw attention to the probability that we are about to witness something fake rather than real. The rhetoric here is surely as arch as anything in an extremely arch pamphlet and buries the supposedly factual nature of the case in a number of ironies.

As Jeremy Knight and Jason Semmens point out, it is likely that the source of the story is the un-named carrier, who brought the story to A.R.²⁸ Horsham had one carrier who was the principal link between that market town and the capital where A.R. probably lived, providing him with a convenient distance from events so he was able to write about the Sussex dragon from the perspective of one recounting the evidence without having to commit himself. Surely what we witness in this particular pamphlet is a self-conscious over-layering of stories and representations, which accounts for its unsettling and confusing tone and range of styles. We would appear to be reading an eyewitness account of the dragon, probably at one remove from its narrator, the carrier, which is then refigured by an urban sophisticate, A.R., who has produced a work that is as much about dragons and dragon lore as it is about the one sensational event. The truth or falsehood of the Horsham dragon becomes part of a game played out between author, publisher, and readers. Or rather, one that the pamphlet sidesteps and avoids, using the nature of the sensational news pamphlet to explore his own concerns.

Who was A.R.? He may, of course, have been John Trundle himself, cynically exploiting a story to make some money. Or he could have been a learned man in London laughing at the gullibility of his country cousins. A.R. = a rogue? However we read it, *A Discourse relating a strange and monstrous serpent* looks like a cony-catching pamphlet, one that fools and exploits its credulous readers, some of whom seem to have fallen for the trick. After all, Trundle did

28 Knight and Semmens (eds), *Horsham's Dragon*, introduction, p. 14.

publish John Cooke's play, *Greene's Tu Quoque*, in the same year, a play about a spendthrift prodigal son, which looks back to the work of the most celebrated author of cony-catching pamphlets of the Elizabethan era.²⁹

Did Trundle/A.R. ever imagine that the work would be taken at face value? Were they pushing a particular genre to its limit? Perhaps whoever wrote the pamphlet simply did not care what anyone believed. If so, this indifference to the truth may have been a cynical manoeuvre, or one that was deeply invested in morality and epistemological reflection, forcing readers to think about the nature of truth. However we read the pamphlet, it stands out as different from its counterparts and was clearly produced with an impressive amount of effort and sophistication, but to what end remains a little more obscure than one might wish. Clearly readers had an interest in dragons, perhaps inspired by Topsell's *Historie of Serpents*, from which the stories of Socrates viewing a dragon, the lady who slept with the affectionate dragon, and the moralistic dragon who separates the incestuous couple are taken. The most likely scenario is that 'A.R.' noted the interest in dragons and realized that he could exploit a story he obtained from a post carrier from Horsham to generate a tongue-in-cheek work for profit. The existence of only one surviving copy alongside a wealth of comment in other works would seem to indicate that the pamphlet was widely read and that copies were soon worn out. We can never be sure until more evidence appears, an extremely unlikely scenario. But, if my judgement is correct 'A.R.' would certainly have enjoyed the red herrings he produced for future generations to chase and would certainly have relished the bronze sculpture of the dragon that stands in Horsham Park.

29 John Cooke, *Greenes Tu Quoque, or, The cittie gallant* (London, 1614), STC 5673.