Poly-Olbion (1612–1622), the collaborative work of the poet Michael Drayton, the legal scholar John Selden, and the engraver William Hole, ranks among the most remarkable literary productions of early modern England, and arguably among the most important. An ambitious and idiosyncratic survey of the history, topography, and ecology of England and Wales – ranging in its preoccupations from the supernatural conception of Merlin to the curious habits of beavers, and from celebrations of martial glory to laments over the diminishment of woodlands – the book seems determined to pack all of national and natural history between its covers. In the course of thirty songs, Drayton’s Muse traverses a varying landscape in which personified rivers, hills, and forests sing of past glories and disasters, pursuing local and regional rivalries whilst propounding a heterogeneous vision of Britain. However, perhaps because of its very uniqueness, it has received relatively little critical attention.

This is the first ever volume of essays on Poly-Olbion, and a reflection of the work’s increasing prominence in scholarship on the literature and culture of early modern England. The poem has long been central to critical studies of early modern nationhood and nationalism, but this century it has also assumed a key place in discussions of pre-modern approaches to ecology and the environment. The contributors here address questions about the form and purpose of Poly-Olbion, as well as engaging with these dominant critical debates, reflecting the extent to which the preoccupations of Drayton and his collaborators have become our own.

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POLY-OLBION
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POLY-OLBION
NEW PERSPECTIVES

Edited by
Andrew McRae and Philip Schwyzer

D. S. BREWER
Frontispiece to Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612), engraved by William Hole. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
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PREFATORY NOTE

Except where noted and in Chapter 2, all references to Poly-Olbion are to The Works of Michael Drayton, ed. J. William Hebel, volume 4 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1933). Quotations have been checked against the text of a new scholarly edition forthcoming from Oxford University Press, edited by Andrew McRae, Philip Schwyzer, Daniel Cattell, and Sjoerd Levelt. Where Hebel's text or line-numbering has been corrected, the change is noted in the footnotes.
INTRODUCTION
Philip Schwyzer and Andrew McRae

*Poly-Olbion* (1612/22), the collaborative work of the poet Michael Drayton, the legal scholar John Selden, and the engraver William Hole, ranks among the most remarkable literary productions of early modern England, and arguably among the most important. An ambitious and idiosyncratic survey of the history, topography, and ecology of England and Wales – ranging in its preoccupations from the supernatural conception of Merlin to the curious habits of beavers, and from celebrations of martial glory to laments over the diminishment of woodlands – the book seems determined to pack all of national and natural history between its covers. In the course of thirty songs, Drayton’s Muse traverses a varying landscape in which personified rivers, hills, and forests sing of past glories and disasters, pursuing local and regional rivalries whilst propounding – implicitly and explicitly – an idiosyncratic and heterogeneous vision of Britain. For all its variety, the poem is as remarkable for what it leaves out as for what it contains; among its notable omissions are the name of King James I, the entire country of Scotland, and any concession to the tastes of a Jacobean reading public whose ignorance Drayton never tires of lambasting.

This is the first ever volume of essays on *Poly-Olbion*, and a reflection of the work’s increasing prominence in scholarship on the literature and culture of early modern England. With its dual focus on England and Wales and its British rhetoric and ambitions, the poem has long been central to critical studies of early modern nationhood and nationalism. In the last decade it has also assumed a central place in discussions of pre-modern approaches to ecological sustainability and environmental degradation. Recent scholarship on the history of the book and early modern paratexts has provided the ground for a fresh appreciation of *Poly-Olbion’s* busy, multivocal *mise-en-page*. This collection of essays on *Poly-Olbion* reflects the extent to which Drayton’s preoccupations have become our own.
However much it may seem to speak to twenty-first-century concerns, Poly-Olbion, like any literary work, is a product of its time. Yet the ‘time’ of the poem is unusually difficult to pin down. Drayton’s pursuit of what he ultimately came to describe as ‘This strange Herculean toyle’ (30.342) extended over a period of at least twenty-five years, possibly a good deal longer. The stretch of time in which he devoted himself (wholly or partially) to this one poem equals or exceeds that of Shakespeare’s entire career as a dramatist. The lengthy span of its composition was punctuated by brief periods of intensive collaboration which fundamentally shaped the final form of the work. Situating Poly-Olbion in its historical context must involve grappling with Drayton’s long investment in the project, its place in his poetic career, the shifting tides of English literary and political culture from the 1590s to the 1620s, and those crucial moments of productive interaction with Selden and Hole. In various ways, the chapters in this volume seek to do all this.

Poly-Olbion has often been described as a belated work, a quintessentially Elizabethan project that had the misfortune of being born into the more critical and cynical literary culture of Jacobean England.¹ There is a certain amount of truth in this perception. Drayton had definitely conceived and probably begun to write the poem by the mid-1590s. In 1598, Francis Meres recorded in Palladis Tamia that ‘Michael Drayton is now in penning in English verse a Poem called Polu-olbion Geographical and Hydrographical of all the forests, woods, mountaine, fountains, rivers, lakes, flouds, bathes and springs that be in England.’² Described in these terms, Drayton’s project would seem to fit squarely within the broad cultural movement sometimes celebrated as the Elizabethan discovery of England.³ A literary culture that had recently absorbed William Harrison’s Description of England (1577, 1587), William Camden’s Britannia (1586, 1587, 1590, 1594), and John Norden’s Speculum Britanniae (1593–8), not to mention Edmund Spenser’s Faerie Queene (1590, 1593) and William Shakespeare’s Henriad (1595–9), was surely ripe for a poem like Poly-Olbion.


As a fledgling poet in the 1590s, Drayton was primarily interested in love, England, and the dead, sometimes separately but most often in combination. He specialized in many of the fashionable genres of the period, including pastoral (Idea: The Shepheards Garland, 1593), the sonnet (Ideas Mirrour, 1594), historical complaint (the ‘legends’ of Piers Gaveston, Matilda, and Robert, Duke of Normandy, 1593–6), and dynastic epic (Mortimeriados, 1596). Often in this period Drayton seems to tread almost embarrassingly closely in the footsteps of Samuel Daniel, yet he invested each genre he worked in with his distinctive preoccupations and tone. In Englands Heroicall Epistles (1597), a series of versified letters between lovers drawn from English history, the fusion of amorous and national-historical matter is particularly close and successful. The work preforges Poly-Olbion in a number of respects, including the use of prose annotations to illuminate historical and geographical references, a fervent yet flexible nationalism that embraces the history and legends of Wales as well as England, and the careful crafting of poetic personae whose ventriloquized voices allow historical events to be recounted by those who witnessed them first-hand.

References to geography and landscape are not particularly prominent in these Elizabethan productions, yet clues to the poet’s growing interest in matters ‘Geographcall and Hydrographcall’ can be detected. As early as 1594, Drayton had published a sonnet which in retrospect might be taken for a Poly-Olbion in miniature, offering a catalogue of English rivers and their outstanding qualities:

Our Flouds-Queen Thames, for Ships & Swans is crowned,
And stately Severne for her Shoare is praysed,
The Crystall Trent, for Foords and Fish renowned,
And Avons Fame, to Albions Cliffies is raysed,
Carlegion Chester vaunts her holy Dee,
Yorke many Wonders of her Owse can tell,
The Peake her Doue, whose Bankes so fertile be,
And Kent will say, her Medway doth excell,
Cotswold commends her Isis to the Tame,
Our Northerne Borders boast of Tweeds faire Floud,
Our Westerne Parts extoll their Wilis Fame,
And the old Lea brags of the Danish Bloud;
Ardens sweet Ankor, let thy glory bee,
That faire Idea onely lives by thee.\(^4\)

Ranging from the ‘Northern borders’ to ‘Our Westerne parts’, the sonnet accomplishes a fluvial survey of England, locating the essence of each

Philip Schwyzer and Andrew McRae

region in its natural features, and the essence of Englishness in friendly regional competition.

Although Drayton was clearly working on or towards a long poem of national description from the mid-1590s, neither the early sonnet nor Meres's description of the ‘Poem called Polu-ulbion’ are fully predictive of the work as it was eventually published (in part) in 1612. To note one crucial difference, in the sonnet the regions of England boast of their rivers, but in Poly-Olbion it is the rivers themselves (alongside hills, forests, and plains) that celebrate the histories and marvels of their respective regions, or of the nation as a whole. The poem is thus not only a ‘Geographicall and Hydrographical’ survey, but a compendium of cultural and historical lore mediated through topographical description. Moreover, the matter of the poem is not confined, as Meres suggests, to ‘England’. A third of the songs in the first edition are in fact devoted to Wales, and Drayton in his dedication of the poem to Prince Henry signalled his intention to describe the ‘whole British Empire’, as far north as the Orkneys. The poem also engages with the surrounding ocean, and celebrates British achievements on the continent, in Ireland, and the New World. In both the expansiveness of its national vision and its mingled success in fulfilling its ambitions, Poly-Olbion can be regarded as thoroughly Jacobean.

There is no question that Drayton was profoundly influenced by the chorographical traditions of the later sixteenth century. The poem’s key sources include Camden's Britannia and Humphrey Llwyd’s Breviary of Britain (as acknowledged in Drayton’s opening epistle to his ‘friends, the Cambro-Britons’ [p. vii*]). Like both of these predecessors in prose, Drayton begins his survey in a southern corner of the island (commencing like Camden in the south west, where Llwyd had begun in the south east) and moves progressively across the map, more or less county by county. Unlike Llwyd and Camden, Drayton does not allot separate sections to the nations of Britain, but moves easily between England and Wales in the course of the first ten songs. Drayton was also influenced by the distinctive Tudor genre of river poetry, as exemplified in works such as John Leland’s Cygnea Cantio, William Vallans’ Tale of Two Swannes, Spenser’s Marriage of Thames and Medway in The Faerie Queene (perhaps only a shadow of his projected Epithalaminion Thamesis) and Camden’s Connubio de Tamae et Isis (parts of which would appear piecemeal in Britannia). As the mixed success of Spenser’s and Camden’s projects indicates, the prospect of describing the nation through the adventures of its personified rivers was attractive to some of the greatest literary talents of the Elizabethan period,

yet presented significant if not unsurmountable challenges. Drayton, who places much of the land’s history and geography in the mouths of rivers, grapples with the same challenges and, if he does not fully resolve them, is at least able to carry on.

The thirty songs of Poly-Olbion incorporate a remarkable amount of ancient, medieval, and more recent history, but within the poem history is always rooted in specific places and features of the landscape. The past for Drayton is anything but a foreign country – rather it is as essential to the nation’s geography as the fish that stock its rivers or the quality of the soil. Drayton’s approach exemplifies the historian Richard Amato’s dictum that ‘All history is local.’ At times this point is inevitably stretched, as when the Medway in Song 18 sings a long catalogue of conquerors who set forth from English ports (not all of them in Kent). In the twenty-second song, the Great Ouse is charged with recounting the battles of England’s various civil wars, not because they all literally took place on her banks, but because through a miraculous withdrawing of her waters the river was said to have foretold the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses. Such manoeuvres testify to Drayton’s determination to give the national past a local habitation, adapting chronicle matter to conform to the protocols of chorography.

Whereas in Englands Heroicall Epistles Drayton had provided his own ‘notes of the chronicle historie’, in Poly-Olbion he turned for this purpose to the young scholar John Selden, who provided detailed annotations or ‘illustrations’ for each of the eighteen songs published in 1612. Selden was still near the outset of his career, twenty-one years Drayton’s junior, yet had begun to establish a reputation as a brilliant legal historian. Although he is named in the volume only as ‘this learned Gentleman, my friend’ (p. vi*), and as ‘the Author of the Illustrations’ (p. viii*), a number of early readers wrote his name in the volume, a name that would in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries eclipse Drayton’s in fame and esteem. Drayton also enlisted the aid of the engraver William Hole, who had produced the frontispiece and various maps for the 1607 edition of Britannia. Hole provided a map to accompany each of the songs, based on the county maps in Saxton’s Atlas but adorned with nymphs and other figures personifying the rivers, hills, and cities of the region, often in postures denoting their attitude or action in the poem.

Although in 1612 Drayton, Selden, and Hole might have congratulated themselves on producing a work that reflected the political, scholarly, and cartographic preoccupations of the moment, the timing of Poly-Olbion’s publication proved less than auspicious. Prince Henry, to whom the first
edition was dedicated, and in whom Drayton seems to have placed many of his hopes, died within months of the poem's printing. *Poly-Olbion* was reissued in 1613, with some additional prefatory matter, but the book's poor sales indicate that Drayton had missed his moment. By 1618 he had completed a further twelve songs, yet, as he wrote to William Drummond of Hawthornden, 'it lieth by me, for the booksellers and I are in terms. They are a company of base knaves whom I both scorn and kick at.' When Drayton finally succeeded in having these songs published in 1622, the new pages were simply stitched together with unsold copies of the first edition, without the need for reprinting. In the preface to the 1622 edition, Drayton laments that his work had been met with 'barbarous Ignorance, and base Detraction' by 'our outlandish, unnaturall English' who find 'nothing in this Island worthy studying for' (p. 391). From Drayton's point of view, the unworthy English reading public had effectively exiled itself from the nation he took such pains to describe.

Even in the disgruntled frontmatter of 1622, Drayton takes care to reaffirm his intention to carry his poetic project across the border into Scotland, and ultimately 'arrive at the Orcades'. Whether he took any steps toward fulfilling this promise is unclear. As Angus Vine notes in this volume, Drummond was convinced that drafts or fragments of the Scottish section of the poem existed, and sought to gather them after Drayton's death. Yet no such drafts survive, and in the years after 1622 we find Drayton venturing instead into the realms of military history (*The Battaille of Agincourt*, 1627) and fairy fantasy (*Nymphidia*, 1627). At last, in *The Muses Elizium* (1630), he found occasion to glance back and recapitulate both a central thematic concern of *Poly-Olbion* and what he perceived as the chief reason for its failure. Figuring himself as an aged satyr who has escaped from the misery and folly of Felicia (England) into Elysium, Drayton draws a link between the contemporary despoliation of English woodlands and the contempt shown for poets who celebrate the nation.8

The Land thus rob'd, of all her rich Attyre,
Naked and bare her selfe to heaven doth show,
Begging from thence that Jove would dart his fire
Upon those wretches that disrob'd her so;
This beastly Brood by no meanes may abide


The name of their brave Ancestors to heare,
By whom their sordid slavery is descry’d,
So unlike them as though not theirs they were,
Nor yet they sense, nor understanding have,
Of those brave Muses that their Country song,
But with false Lips ignobly doe deprave
The right and honour that to them belong.  

In the satyr’s account, the twin problems of deforestation and Poly-Olbion’s commercial failure have a common source in the English public’s disregard for national tradition and antiquity. Like many passages in Poly-Olbion itself, these lines from The Muses Elizium underscore the point that Drayton’s ecological and historical concerns, which critics have tended to treat separately, are indissolubly linked.

Drayton’s supporters sought to console him that his great work was not belated, but rather premature and prophetic. George Wither, in a prefatory poem for the 1622 edition, looked forward to Poly-Olbion’s future vindication, forecasting that ‘Those that succeeds us, DRAYTONS Name shall love’ (p. 395, l. 61). Wither predicted that in a coming era of drastic environmental change (‘when the Seas shall eat away the Shore,/ Great Woods spring up, where Plaines were heretofore’), this long-neglected poem would come into its own:

And our great-Grandsonnes Childrens-children may,
(Yea shall) as in a Glasse, this ISLE survay,
As wee now see it: And as those did to,
Who lived many hundred yeares agoe. (p. 395, ll. 65–8)

As Wither’s verses suggest, Poly-Olbion points us forward as well as backward, setting alongside its nostalgic image of the British past the vision of a future Britain that will at last be capable of taking the poem to its heart. Although it would be hyperbolic to suggest that in the first quarter of the twenty-first century Poly-Olbion’s moment has finally arrived, a recent resurgence in critical and popular interest in the poem makes this collection of essays timely.

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10 Those] ‘Shose’ in Hebel.
FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF CRITICISM

Throughout the four hundred years since it was first published, Poly-Olbion has only rarely concentrated critical minds. Indeed, as Angus Vine demonstrates in his chapter below, many people have ventured opinions on it on the basis of only slender acquaintance, as evident in often wildly incorrect claims about the poem’s length. Yet it has been republished at least once in every century since the seventeenth, and has always claimed a place in narratives of English literary history. Whatever its faults, it is acknowledged as a unique literary achievement. In advance of the essays that follow in this volume, it is worth reviewing this patchy, uncertain history of reception. Across the centuries, critics have differed on fundamental questions: why one might want to read this idiosyncratic masterwork, how it might be positioned in relation to generic and literary traditions, and how it might enable readers to reflect on the literary and cultural concerns of its time.

Criticism of Poly-Olbion is not simply something supplementary to the text that can be traced through the years after its publication; it is rather embedded in the text itself. In the first part of the poem, as printed in 1612, this effect of internal reflection is achieved through John Selden’s illustrations. As demonstrated in chapters below, particularly those by Sjoerd Levelt and Philip Schwyzer, Selden is engaged in an earnest, occasionally edgy dialogue with Drayton. His notes provide explanation, but also criticism. Most famously, Selden takes issue with Drayton’s adherence to the narratives of the ‘British history’, derived largely from Geoffrey of Monmouth. There is no reason to think that Drayton did not welcome such debate; indeed he had acknowledged, in a poem written to welcome King James to the English throne in 1603, the pertinence of debates over the veracity of his favoured myths of national origin. For the publication of the second and final part of the poem, Drayton lost Selden’s input but included an expanded range of prefatory material. The author’s own grumpy preface, headed ‘To any that will read it’, reflects ruefully on the tastes of the reading public, purportedly drawn to ‘beastly and abominable Trash’ in preference to ambitious works

13 Complete editions of Poly-Olbion have been published in 1753, 1793, 1876, and finally as one volume of J. W. Hebel’s edition of Drayton’s *Works* in 1933.
Introduction

such as *Poly-Olbion* (p. 391). It recalls the more confident preface of 1612, with its bold defence of learned and public poetry, documenting as a result Drayton’s sense that he was operating now in the face of a hostile and unprepared readership. The 1622 volume also includes commendatory poems by William Browne, George Wither, and John Reynolds. These fellow poets not only echo Drayton’s own complaints, but reflect on his place in literary history, comparing him to the great Elizabethan writers Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney. There are also political undertones to their commendations; Browne, Wither, and Reynolds were becoming at this time agitated by the Jacobean regime’s efforts to centralize authority within the court. Wither’s comment that if he had attempted the journeys of Drayton’s Muse he might have ‘been [im]pounded on the Kings hye way’ thus reflects tersely upon poetic ambition in Stuart Britain (p. 395, l. 46). Wither himself was familiar with James’s prisons.

In the period of roughly one hundred and fifty years after the publication of the second and final part of the poem, *Poly-Olbion* assumed a position as an awkward yet unavoidable landmark of British literary history. Against the prevailing neoclassical standards of taste, Drayton’s reputation suffered. Indeed, as Levelt shows, the book’s standing was sustained in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as much by the towering reputation of Selden as by proponents of Drayton’s poem. Alexander Pope surely spoke for many eighteenth-century readers when he declared, only a little facetiously, that ‘a very mediocre Poet, one Drayton, is yet taken some notice of, because Selden writ a … few Notes on one of his Poems.’ In particular, many readers took exception to Drayton’s use of the six-footed Alexandrine line. Unusual even in Drayton’s time, the Alexandrine was derided as ‘antiquated’ by the standards of the latter half of the seventeenth century. Other readers derided the encyclopaedic nature of the poem, perceived as hopelessly ambitious and set at odds with years in which poetry and history-writing were more often seen as separate kinds of enterprise. Rather than standing as his masterpiece, in these years *Poly-Olbion* weighed down Drayton’s reputation within the English canon.

In the Romantic era, however, the poem found some fresh supporters. Notably, Charles Lamb responded with enthusiasm to Drayton’s capacity

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to ‘[animate] hills and streams with life and passion beyond the dreams of old mythology’.\(^{20}\) William Hazlitt, though essentially ambivalent about the poem’s quality, also acknowledged its ‘unabated freshness and vigour’, while Samuel Taylor Coleridge identified ‘instances of sublimity’ in Drayton’s work.\(^{21}\) William Wordsworth was also familiar with \textit{Poly-Olbion}, particularly the passages on the Lake District in Song 30. This distinct renewal of appreciation for Drayton and his longest work was in due course marked also in works of literary history. Alexander Chalmers, in his 1810 additions to Samuel Johnson’s \textit{Works of the English Poets}, commented that Drayton was ‘not destitute of genius’.\(^{22}\) A generation later, Isaac D’Israeli concluded that while the poet’s ‘volume’ of writing had undermined his standing – ‘in reaching excellence he too often declined into mediocrity’ – his body of work nonetheless included material of true quality.\(^{23}\)

In the hundred years or so straddling the turn of the twentieth century, a period in which the modern academic discipline of literary studies gradually took shape, readers found new ways to approach \textit{Poly-Olbion}. On the one hand, some seized upon it as a document of national identity, which offered access to an idea of England and Wales from an increasingly distant, pre-industrial past. This perception is underscored by references to the poem in novels. Thomas Hardy mentions \textit{Poly-Olbion} in \textit{Jude the Obscure}, while E. M. Forster famously expands upon the significance of Drayton’s poem in \textit{Howards End}.\(^{24}\) As Margaret Schlegel is whisked, somewhat against her will, through the landscape in a motor car, the narrative reflects upon the quieter pleasures of the local landscape:

If Drayton were with us again to write a new edition of his incomparable poem, he would sing the nymphs of Hertfordshire as indeterminate of feature, with hair obfuscated by the London smoke. Their eyes would be sad, and averted from their fate towards the northern flats, their leader not Isis or Sabrina, but the slowly flowing Lea.\(^{25}\)


\(^{24}\) Trevisan, ‘Michael Drayton’s \textit{Poly-Olbion}’, p. 112.

For Forster, as for his protagonist, something is being lost in the headlong rush towards modernity, and *Poly-Olbion*, nostalgic even in the moment of its conception, suits the desire for a timeless, mythologized sense of place. On the other hand, the search for more scholarly approaches to literary texts underpinned a number of detailed studies of particular aspects of the poem. Interestingly, the editor of the 1876 edition of Drayton’s works counselled against such detailed research. In words that might prompt the poem’s twenty-first-century editors to reflect upon their endeavour, he declared that to annotate *Poly-Olbion*, adequately covering ‘history, topography, antiquities and objects of natural history’, would be ‘a work of immense labour’. Almost immediately, however, others decided that such efforts would be worthwhile. For example, a series of articles was published in the 1880s on ‘The Folk-Lore of Drayton’. Several decades later, R. R. Cawley looked to Drayton’s source material, examining first his description of England’s great voyagers in Song 19, and subsequently his Welsh history. Meanwhile, V. E. Hull was the first to devote a PhD dissertation to Drayton’s sources, focusing especially on the subject of topography.

The publication of J. William Hebel’s edition of Drayton’s works in five volumes between 1931 and 1941 heralded new approaches. Some of these were formalist, in accord with the predominant kinds of literary criticism in the middle decades of the twentieth century. For example, one article reassessed Drayton’s Alexandrine line, whereas others considered questions of genre, looking variously to traditions of topographical poetry, river poetry, or georgic. Other scholars, such as G. G. Hiller, examined Drayton’s literary models in order to consider afresh the question of what the poet thought he was doing: or, more specifically, how he was presenting himself...
as a poet in this text.\textsuperscript{31} Literary history also progressed in this period. The valuable category of ‘Spenserian’ poets, first proposed by Joan Grundy, has proved a useful way of understanding a loose grouping of poets writing mainly in the generation after Spenser, but who looked to the great Elizabethan as their greatest source of literary and cultural authority.\textsuperscript{32} This made sense of Drayton’s self-consciously archaic style, and perhaps also of his characteristic nostalgia, and uncertain, often antagonistic, attitude towards King James and his court. Subsequent generations of literary historians have taken this line of analysis a step further, by examining the politics of writers such as the three men – Browne, Wither, and Reynolds – who wrote commendatory verses for Drayton in 1622.\textsuperscript{33} While \textit{Poly-Olbion} itself does not necessarily emerge from these narratives as an overtly political text, this narrative at least helps to contextualize the author’s unease in the face of centralizing and increasingly absolutist structures of power in the years across which Drayton was writing.

The emergence of the new historicism in literary studies in the 1980s prompted a fresh wave of interest in Drayton’s poem, which has continued to shape the field up to the present day. The new historicism was distinctive in part for its methodological commitment to situating canonical texts within rich cultural contexts, and in part for its fascination with the politics of literature within authoritarian power structures. New historicists have thus been drawn, in particular, to the relation between \textit{Poly-Olbion} and the cartography and chorography produced in such volume in the reigns of Elizabeth and James. For Richard Helgerson, in one of the most influential of all interpretations of Drayton’s work, this wave of textual production may help us to understand a period in which English men and women were weighing up competing loyalties to their monarch and their land, and gradually turning away from ‘dynastic loyalty’ in favour of identities rooted in locality. Patriotism in \textit{Poly-Olbion} is articulated without dependence upon the enabling figure of the monarch.\textsuperscript{34} Subsequent scholars have modified or challenged Helgerson’s position, consistently returning to the power-dynamic between the local and the national. This approach, informed further by the influence on literary studies of spatial theory, has prompted some readers to look afresh at some of the poem’s more distinctive features, such

\textsuperscript{31} “Sacred Bards” and “Wise Druids”: Drayton and his Archetype of the Poet’, \textit{English Literary History} 51 (1984), 1–15.
\textsuperscript{34} Helgerson, \textit{Forms of Nationhood}, pp. 107–46 (p. 114).