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British Cultural Narrative in Winston Churchill's Political Communication

Andres L. Faza
University of South Florida, faza.andy@gmail.com

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British Cultural Narrative in Winston Churchill’s Political Communication

by

Andres L. Faza

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a concentration in Strategic Communication Management Department of Mass Communication College of Arts & Sciences University of South Florida

Major Professor: Roxanne Watson, Ph.D. Justin Brown, Ph.D. Scott Liu, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

This study uses Winston Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” speech, delivered to the House of Commons following the evacuation of Dunkirk, France in June 1940, as a source text by which to examine Churchill’s use of British cultural narratives in political communication. Narrative and heuristic theories are proposed as means by which listeners process such messages. A number of rhetorical devices are defined, in order to inform a discussion of the narratives identified, particularly the means by which those narratives were rhetorically embedded in the text. After a careful examination of the source text, the narratives of knighthood and chivalric values, as well as King Arthur and the Arthurian legend, specifically as presented in Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, were identified as primary cultural narratives from which Churchill draws much meaning. A thorough critical history of each of these narratives is undertaken, revealing sentiments of oath-bound civic duty tracing back to Britain’s historical founding as a culture and a nation, following the fall of Rome in the fifth century, and persisting up until Churchill’s use of those sentiments in his historic 1940 speech.
CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

An analysis of historical political communication furnishes the scholar with an understanding of the essence of communication as it occurred in the period studied, broadening in a single stroke the scholar’s knowledge of rhetorical strategy, societal behavior and political consequence. Additionally, bringing contextual insight to bear on historic political communication hones the scholar’s ability to parse contextual data at any given moment in time, so that nothing is endeavored in an analysis of historic communication that is not ultimately “for the present’s sake” and “on the present’s terms” (Connell-Smith & Lloyd, 1972, p. 73).

Charteris-Black (2005) writes in his book, *Politicians and Rhetoric*, that a substantial portion of political success throughout history can be attributed to the extent of politicians’ ability to legitimize themselves and the ideologies they represent. This appeal to legitimacy is undertaken through the employment of various persuasive strategies, all of which are firmly couched in historical context. The use of cultural narratives in political communication presents an audience with just such a persuasive, historical invitation to identify with those narratives, and so inform future events. Few political communicators have so effectively leveraged the use of cultural narrative to inform action going forward as Winston Churchill at the start of the Second World War, when Britain alone among all European nations withstood the overwhelmingly successful advance of Adolf Hitler’s German military force.
The summer months of 1940 are unique in that mass communication was the only means by which national defense and defiance could be sustained; before partnering with the United States in 1941, Britain lacked the natural resources, industry and military strength necessary to withstand a direct German offensive (Manchester & Reid, 2012).

The purpose of this study is to explore the British cultural narratives present in one of Churchill’s critically celebrated speeches, delivered during a historically significant period in European history, through rhetorical analysis. The history and relevance of these cultural narratives, as well as the means by which Churchill embeds the narratives into the address, will be examined through narrative paradigm theory and more recent scholarship on heuristic processing.

“We Shall Fight on the Beaches” was delivered by Winston Churchill as prime minister to the House of Commons on June 4, 1940, after the French Republic had all but capitulated to Germany, and the British Expeditionary Force (the British army) had been made to retreat by precarious cross-channel evacuation maneuvers from Dunkirk, France, suffering the loss of all their weapons and matériel. Charteris-Brown (2005) recognizes this period as most urgently requiring effective persuasive communication to sustain public morale in all the war; creating a sense of strategy and confidence throughout the nation was integral if wartime production and civilian rationing were to be successfully maintained. Churchill himself perceived as much, writing of Dunkirk and “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” in his 1949 memoirs, “it was imperative to explain not only to our own people but to the world that our resolve to fight was based on serious grounds, and was no mere despairing effort” (p. 115).

The researcher is a Southern Hispanic-American with an abiding interest in literature and myth, but recognizes the bias present in all historical analysis. The researcher considers this
awareness a benefit to scholarship, however, and enjoys having brought to bear his unique cultural insight on this issue.

In the coming chapters, the foundation will be laid for an analysis by exploring relevant literature to provide historical context for the events surrounding the speech, as well as a description of the character of the speaker himself, taking into account both historical and contemporary criticism of his words and actions. Rhetorical devices, narrative theory and recent scholarship on heuristic processing will then be examined. Following a thorough examination of theory, the researcher will conduct a qualitative rhetorical analysis of Winston Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” speech as the source material, identifying British cultural narratives embedded therein, and considering their rhetorical implications as well as the means by which they were embedded. The researcher will conclude with a discussion of the implications of this study in particular and of historical political communication analysis in general.

“Historical analogies are continually being drawn, with varying degrees of validity,” Connell-Smith and Lloyd (1972) write, in The Relevance of History (p. 81). There is no better means by which to recognize and judge the validity of persuasive communication in our society than to study its usage, effectiveness and consequence throughout history. A study exploring the use of cultural narratives in Churchill’s wartime address will help inform identification and understanding of narrative in political communication in similar circumstances throughout the course of our history, and continuing into the future.
CHAPTER TWO:
LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Studies

An immense quantity of scholarship has been produced in the study of the life and times of Sir Winston Churchill. Due to the unprecedented and historic nature of his tenure as prime minister, his character and role in Western culture became almost immediately mythic, despite the reality of his relative political ineffectiveness in the years immediately following the war (Stewart, 1957; Wheeler-Bennett & Colville, 1969).

The timbre of scholarship continues to reflect the history in which the scholars lived, as a sampling of notable works from Churchill’s death in 1965 till present day reveals: the popularity of character studies (Moran, 1966) gave way to explorations of his psychological stability (Storr, 1988), which were followed by discussions of the long-term effects of his imperialist administration (Toye, 2010), and punctuated throughout with revised, comprehensive biographies (Randolph Churchill, 1966; Pelling, 1974; Charmley, 1993; Best, 2001; Manchester and Reid, 2012). The cycle has continued remarkably into the twenty-first century. Beneath this application of varied world-views, however, there runs a continual stream of scholarship encouraged by Churchill himself and continued till fairly recently: the analysis of his rhetoric (Churchill, 1948).
Rhetorical Studies

The category of rhetorical studies, to which this present study belongs, has dealt primarily with the method and quality of Churchill’s rhetoric by conducting multifaceted analyses of the type and meaning of rhetorical devices present in Churchill’s speeches and writing (cf. Stewart, 1957; Weidhorn, 1987; Kemper, 1996; Charteris-Black, 2005; Lukacs, 2008). Most recently Lukacs (2008) mined Churchill’s “Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat” speech for rhetorical signifiers to support a proposal that Churchill believed Germany would at any moment achieve imminent victory. This proposal, interwoven with compelling historical context, presents an alternative historical narrative of Churchill and Britain in the early days of the war. In a similar marriage of rhetorical analysis and historical context, Fowler (1985) presents Churchill as theorist, analyzing rhetoric and providing anecdotes throughout Churchill’s political career to support this proposal. Wiedhorn (1987) seeks to explain the remarkable quality of Churchill’s rhetoric by examining the prime minister’s personal history, particularly in regard to Churchill’s endeavors as a historical biographer. Wheeler-Bennett (1969) concurrently analyses the rhetoric and administrative actions of the prime minister throughout his political career, claiming that Churchill, indeed, lost no power of eloquence or leadership until very near to his retirement. This compilation of analysis and journal entries, written by various administrative personnel through Churchill’s political career, was undertaken with the self-described intent to challenge the existing narrative in the British popular mind, that Churchill’s faculties were drastically inhibited by age and mental exhaustion before the end of the Second World War (Wheeler-Bennett, 1969). Interestingly, as these examples illustrate, rhetorical analyses of Winston Churchill frequently focus on Churchill’s rhetoric and his personal narrative, or the narrative of Winston Churchill in history, as opposed to the narratives contained within his speeches.
More recently and notable for its scope and detail, Charteris-Black (2005) identified the type and theme of metaphors within a 50,000-word corpus drawn from twenty-five of Churchill’s major wartime speeches. The contemporary uniqueness and utility of such a study on a figure so often analyzed inspired this researcher to examine a facet of Churchill’s rhetoric that elicits little mention in either literary or political analyses of Churchill’s work; namely, the great volume of British cultural narratives embedded in Churchill’s political communication.

While there are passing mentions of Churchill’s ability to paint a compelling narrative of events through rhetoric, and his use of reoccurring themes and myth, for example the examination of light and darkness in Charteris-Black’s 2005 study, no previous studies focusing on the presence of British cultural narratives in Churchill’s wartime rhetoric could be found by this researcher, making this study unique within the expansive canon of Churchill rhetorical analysis.

Exploring British cultural narratives in “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” provides insight into British cultural history and Churchill’s political and persuasive intent. Additionally, cultural narratives offer an opportunity to explore the means by which a speaker might embed meaning through rhetoric, as well as contribute to an ongoing discussion on the role narrative plays in heuristic processing, particularly as regards political communication. With these concepts in mind, prior to an analysis of the cultural narratives embedded in the source material, a review of relevant literature will commence.
Cultural Narratives

This study will concern itself with the identification and discussion of British cultural narratives rhetorically embedded in Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” address. It will be necessary, therefore, to define what is meant by the phrase “cultural narrative.”

Gomez-Estern and De La Mata Benitez (2013) define narrative as “any act of telling and exposing one’s own subjective experience to others,” always “an interpretation of events, rather than an explanation” (p. 352). Socially, narratives allow people to identify with one another, and provide sought-after causal relationships among sequences of historical events. The ability of a narrative to provide causal explanations for historical events is significant because these explanations are a fundamental aspect of community and culture-building: nations require cultural narratives because they provide “the means for members in a community to recognize that, broadly, they share a mindset” (Hosking & Schöpflin, 1997, p. 20). Cultural narratives are not less real for being symbolic in nature, rather, they are “the agency by which anything real,” such as historical events and cultural identity, “becomes an object for intellectual apprehension and thus made visible to the community” (p. 23). Many national cultural narratives celebrate the greatness of past leaders, an appropriate example from this present study being the British cultural narrative of King Arthur and the Arthurian legend. Barczewski (2000) provides three explanations for this phenomenon:

By pointing to ancestral heroes from whom the nation’s present inhabitants are purportedly descended, it suggests a degree of continuity between generations. By reminding the members of the community of its past greatness, it instills them with a sense of inner worth and collective dignity. And finally, by displaying the past as a mirror of the future, it points the community toward a glorious destiny. (p. 46)
Gomez-Estern and De La Mata Benitez (2013) further describe cultural narratives as meaningful stories by which people better understand themselves, citing narratives as having a “capacity for tracing a bridge between cultural and personal dimensions of identity” (p. 349). The means by which people cognitively assimilate these narratives into their identities will be discussed in the theory section. Before exploring the reception and usage of British cultural narratives, a brief survey of Churchill’s own well-covered historical narrative will commence.

**Winston Churchill**

Winston Spencer Churchill was elected prime minister of an emergency coalition government on May 10, 1940, the day Germany’s armed forces, referred to by all in the war as the Wehrmacht (distinctly Nazi in nature and existing only from 1935 to 1945) attacked Belgium, Luxembourg, and Holland. “Nowhere did they encounter formidable resistance,” writes historian H.L. Stewart (1954, p. 143). Churchill recalls in his memoirs hosting Dutch ministers the day of his election, they standing in his room just arrived by plane from Amsterdam in a baffled despondency brought on by the unprovoked and irresistible German offensive (Churchill, 1948). Cabinet Secretary Lord Normanbrook notes that Churchill accepted his position with something more than certainty, quoting Churchill himself in recalling that the prime minister could be trusted to fulfill his duties zealously and “not altogether without relish” (Wheeler-Bennett & Normanbrook, 1969, p. 17). Of that period, Churchill (1948) writes, “at last I had the authority to give directions over the whole scene. I felt as if I were walking with Destiny, and that all my past life had been but a preparation for this hour and for this trial” (p. 667). Historians William Manchester and Paul Reid (2012) note that war “exhilarated” him: “[Churchill’s] first four
hundred days in office – from early May 1940 to mid-June 1941, a ghastly time for millions of Europeans – were, for him, the supreme chapter in his life” (p. 31).

**Mode of Composition**

Churchill composed his speeches himself (Manchester & Reid, 2012). John Colville, Churchill’s private secretary during the war, notes that the poetry prompted by the danger of Britain’s current circumstance would have been considered heavily melodramatic before or after the conflict occurred (Wheeler-Bennett & Colville, 1969). H. L. Stewart (1954) goes a step further in observing that Churchill’s administrative capacity in peacetime was, “in the public estimate, suspected or disliked” (p. 145). Writing speeches addressed to the House of Commons during the war, however, Churchill found at last circumstances equal to the urgency of his rhetoric. Charteris-Black (2005) writes that during this period Churchill strove for legitimacy primarily through the creation of heroic myth in his communication, where Hitler’s *Wehrmacht* represented all that was darkness, and Britain all that was light. It should be noted here that Churchill pointedly recognized German’s civilian population as innocent and deserving of reparative treatment after the war, an attitude that did not prevent him from approving air raids on townships possessed of little military significance for the sake of British morale during London’s fiercest bombardments (Manchester & Reid, 2012).

Charteris-Black (2005) writes that the most effective political rhetoric is a combination of cognitive and emotional appeals. In the summer of 1940 Churchill exercised both in force, promoting the simple ideology that Britain occupied the moral high ground in the current struggle through various persuasive devices. Churchill’s composition of this period takes on added dimensions of urgency when it is remembered that the United States in 1940 was strictly
isolationist, the majority considering the European continent to be eternally embroiled in unnecessary conflict, and wondering in the press whether Hitler might provide the order the continent lacked (Manchester & Reid, 2012). Roosevelt would not be able to guide American opinion toward conflict until Pearl Harbor the next year, and even then Americans only desired action in the Pacific, against Japan: the British spent much of 1942 emphasizing the threat posed by Hitler’s Germany, and trying at all costs to “avoid a full American tilt toward the Pacific” (Manchester & Reid, 2012, p. 681). Thus, in summer 1940, Churchill considered persuading the United States of Britain’s legitimacy a continuing priority (Churchill, 1950).

The literary universality of his thematic content struck deeply into the heart of the British people, familiar as they were with the Authorised Version of the Bible and the works of William Shakespeare, texts studied regularly at that time in the British school system (Best, 2001). For a man so consciously determined to make an impact on his nation and its history through persuasive communication, it is notable that his rhetoric inspired actions directly opposed to other of his goals: Ghanaian nationalist Kwame Nkrumah writes, “All the brave, fair words spoken about freedom that had been broadcast to the four corners of the earth took seed and grew where they had not been intended” (Toye, 2011, p. 262).

**Imperialism**

Churchill’s imperialism is the error upon which his legacy turns, and for which history has quietly relegated him to its back halls and pre-enlightenment montages. His bust in the White House was quietly returned to Britain upon Barack Obama’s election to the presidency, Obama’s Kenyan grandfather having been imprisoned and tortured without trial for two years during Churchill’s time in office (Hari, 2010).
Justice in this regard came swiftly; Churchill closes *The Gathering Storm*, book one of his six-volume wartime memoir, with his election to the office of prime minister, “for five years and three months of world war, at the end of which time, all our enemies having surrendered unconditionally or being about to do so, I was immediately dismissed by the British electorate from all further conduct of their affairs” (1948, p. 667). He closes the final of these six volumes, *Triumph and Tragedy*, with an account of his waking in the pre-dawn hours before results of the ministerial elections, the heretofore-motivating pressure of the great events of the war losing its polish and thrill, instead stirring in him unrest that “the power to shape the future would be denied me. The knowledge and experience I had gathered, the authority and goodwill I had gained in so many countries, would vanish” (1953, p. 675). Later that morning the results were published, revealing an overwhelming majority against his reelection.

Jamaican novelist Roger Mais’ 1944 essay, “Now We Know,” for which he was jailed for six months, noted that Churchill spoke bravely but condoned colonial oppression directly opposed to his inspirational rhetoric (Watson, 2012). Manchester and Reid (2012) write that Churchill intentionally omitted his opinions about British empire from his addresses in order to maintain positive relations with the United States government. This tactic was successful only to an extent: despite Churchill’s intentional magnanimity, Roosevelt spent most of the war assisting his British counterpart with one hand while attempting to dismantle the empire with the other. When the subject rose to a position of prominence between the two allies, as it did during Gandhi’s nonviolent revolution, tensions increased quickly and dramatically, and all talk of the matter was hastily put away on grounds of victory before postwar discussion.

H.L. Stewart (1954), writing relatively close to the period in question and considering Churchill’s leadership and rhetoric a source of national pride, echoes the reservation of the
British people at the time: “Gratitude for his war-leadership does not require that one should omit to note and to remember for the future how tragically wide of the mark” were Churchill’s opinions about India, in particular, and empire in general (p. 136). Geoffrey Best (2001) recalls that Churchill famously called Gandhi a “seditious Middle Temple lawyer” posing as a religious ascetic, and that, despite his other achievements, he remained stubbornly unwilling to amend his racial prejudices throughout his life (p. 135).

During the war Churchill chose his words more carefully, yet as Manchester and Reid (2012) observe, in his address on June 18, 1940, “he had not said that a thousand years hence, people would say this was England’s finest hour, but that it was the British Empire’s finest hour” (italics Manchester & Reid, p. 114).

United States Civil Rights leader Richard Moore considers Churchill’s universally inspiring rhetoric in the early years of the war occurred “due to a most rare and fortunate coincidence in life and history,” namely, that the survival of the empire in which Churchill so ardently believed coincided in those moments with the defense of the heart and spirit of “the great overwhelming majority of mankind” (Moore & Turner, 1988, p. 246). It is an apt observation, for following the evacuation of Dunkirk, Churchill’s most pressing concern was not the preservation of the British empire but the bolstering of national morale and the physical survival of the island of Britain itself, in the face of an apparently imminent cross-channel invasion of German armed forces from the newly-conquered coast of France.
The Evacuation of Dunkirk

The events leading up to Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” address were exceedingly bleak, holding in themselves no promise of hope or relief against the German offensive for the foreseeable future. The British Expeditionary Force (Britain’s army, referred to in the following correspondence as the BEF) had been left exposed by the sudden and unannounced surrender of the Belgian Army in the pre-dawn hours of May 28. The surrender and loss of the 400,000-soldier British army, stranded and surrounded on the coast at Dunkirk, appeared a bygone conclusion. Plans for a cross-channel evacuation were hastily drawn together. It was considered at this time that the successful evacuation of 45,000 men would be cause for relief (Churchill, 1949).

Churchill met with his Cabinet members the morning of the 28th. “The House,” he said, “Should prepare itself for hard and heavy tidings” (Churchill, 1949, p. 99). The evacuation plan essentially mandated that all available British sea craft, from yachts to fishing-boats to barges, run continuously across the English Channel, sustain constant aerial bombardment from the *Luftwaffe* (Germany’s air force), load the soldiers to capacity, and ferry them home. The first attempts by Britain’s larger warships met with drastic failure, and the boats coming in had not only to navigate the weather and the bombs, but the sunken hulls of the great ships as well (Manchester & Reid, 2012). In *Their Finest Hour*, the second book of his six-volume wartime memoir, Churchill (1949) describes the scene in these words:

To and fro between the shore and the ships plied the little boats, gathering the men from the beaches as they waded out or picking them from the water, with total indifference to the air bombardment, which often claimed its victims. (p. 105)
To the incoming crews it appeared as if scores of fireflies hovered just over the water in the deep blue of the late evening; these were the lighted cigarettes of the men wading off shore, waiting for rescue (Manchester & Reid, 2012).

The Royal Air Force engaged the *Luftwaffe* above the evacuation in an attempt to ease the bombardment. The morning of the 29th Churchill sent word to General Edward Spears, the British liaison in Paris: “We have evacuated 50,000 from Dunkirk and the beaches, and hope another 30,000 tonight. Front may be beaten in at any time” (1949, p. 106). The morning of the 30th found the number of troops rescued had risen to 120,000. Churchill flew to Paris May 31st to meet with the prime minister of France, Paul Reynaud, reporting, “If present hopes were confirmed, 200,000 able-bodied troops might be got away. This would be almost a miracle” (1949, p. 110). Churchill and his chiefs of staff were met with French unease, and the implication that a separate peace with Germany would have to be considered if the course of events continued accordingly. Churchill returned to Britain to be informed that 338,226 men had been evacuated from Dunkirk, all told (1949). Thus was the state of affairs when Parliament assembled on June 4, 1940.
CHAPTER THREE:
THEORY

Persuasion

Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* (trans. 1954), one of the earliest recorded sources identifying persuasive communication, notes that any study of rhetoric necessarily focuses on modes of persuasion, persuasion itself being a sort of rhetorical demonstration wherein recipients of a message are more receptive based on whether they feel the point in question has been properly demonstrated. O’Keefe (1990) adds to this definition the necessary prerequisite of freedom: the hearer must possess some measure of autonomy for the speaker to attempt influence. Charteris-Black (2005) proposes that persuasion rarely breaks ideological precedent; rather, it is ever seeking to “confirm or challenge existing beliefs, attitudes and behaviors” (p. 10).

In terms of successfully achieving this end, Aristotle held that there are three means of persuasion. *Ethos* relies upon the personal character or credibility of the speaker, *pathos* involves the emotions or frame of mind of the audience, and *logos* employs an appeal to the logical faculties of the audience. The most effective rhetoric is therefore delivered by a speaker who the audience holds to be morally upright, who is able to engage the imaginative capacity of the audience through various rhetorical methods, and who provides enough factual information to appear logically judicial.
Logic and Narrative

Persuasion scholarship has historically derived from this Aristotelian framework, but Walter Fisher in *Human Communication as Narration* (1987) notes that prior to Aristotle, logos had been inextricably intertwined with mythos, and only after Plato and Aristotle did logic appeal become a specific aspect to be analyzed outside its existence in narrative. Fisher’s (1987) narrative paradigm predates this separation for the sake of analysis and considers humans to be essentially storytellers. Any information presented to a person is processed in terms of narrative: the information will be accepted or rejected based on whether it possesses narrative rationality. Hearers will participate in decision making using what Fisher calls “good reasons,” elements ranging from measurable data to poetic allegory, based on the historical, cultural and personal context of the communication. With the narrative paradigm, Fisher (1987) proposes “no matter how strictly a case is argued—scientifically, philosophically, or legally—it will always be a story, an interpretation of some aspect of the world that is historically and culturally grounded and shaped by human personality” and the “narrative capacities we all share” (pp. 49, 66).

Persuasion, data, experiences and outcomes are subsumed under personal narrative.

Theoretical Terms

Narrative rationality is the probability and coherence of a story when tested against what a listener knows to be true (Fisher, 1987). This differs from the traditional rational-world paradigm set up by Aristotle and subsequent scholars wherein humans are essentially rational problem solvers. Fisher (1987) contends that humans do use this rational process, but “the operative principle of narrative rationality is *identification* rather than deliberation” (p. 66). Human rationality, then, is conducted primarily in search of a means with which to identify
relatable truth in an argument. In other words, a person can only access his or her consciousness upon which to base an analysis of persuasive communication; no matter the intellectual rigor involved in determining the truth of the argument, the act of a listener’s acceptance only reflects the identification of that listener with that message, and not the objective truth of the message itself.

Narrative fidelity in communication is the proximity with which components in a story reflect the social reality as the listener understands it (Fisher, 1987). If these components, ranging from measurable data to rhetorical abstraction according to genre and media appropriateness, align with a listener’s understanding of a given reality, the listener will consider a message to possess narrative fidelity. Listeners are then much more likely to identify that message as a true narrative in which they have some degree of vested interest. To illustrate, Fisher (1987) presents Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* as an example of communication ultimately lacking narrative fidelity; the information contained therein subverts “the truths humanity shares in regard to reason, justice, veracity,” and conflict resolution (p. 76). To compare, Fisher cites Christ, Buddha, Homer, Shakespeare, Lincoln and Gandhi as figures across cultures and disciplines that have historically elicited respect from “persons committed to traditional rationality”- not on the grounds of their claims to logic, but because people “recognized and responded to the values fostered” by such communication (1987, pp. 76-77). Charteris-Black (2005) observes, “legitimisation is not therefore a rational process,” but rather, political leaders often employ language as “the basis for an emotional invitation to share a perception of what is right and wrong” (p. 22).

Churchill’s appeal in June 1940 that British citizens consider themselves and the British nation as a force of justice and morality would elicit just such a narrative identification from
citizens, given the menacing advance of an oppressive regime throughout the continent (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989).

The components that provide an argument with rationality and fidelity combine to form what Fisher calls “good reasons.” Good reasons can “appear in and through arguments, metaphors, myths, gestures, and other means of creative communicative relationships” (Fisher, 1987, p. 143). Information considered a good reason within the context of any given persuasive communication by no means vouchsafes its logical soundness, political correctness or factual accuracy; the term simply designates the usage of a number of devices that seemingly invest a narrative with rationality and fidelity. Fisher (1987) identifies five characteristics generally present in good reasons, regardless of the genre or media through which they are communicated: fact, relevance, consequence, consistency and transcendent issue, or the “ultimate value” a good reason is concerned with affirming (p. 109). In the rhetorical analysis to follow, good reasons proposed by Churchill in his “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” address will be identified and examined utilizing Fisher’s (1987) parameters.

**Judgmental Heuristics**

The narrative paradigm builds on the presumption that listeners to persuasive communication engage in what scholars Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman (1982) call “the subjective assessment of probability,” or judgmental heuristics (p. 3). Heuristics are simplified inferences drawn from a combination of previous experience, present context and intuition that listeners tend to rely on without actually applying themselves to any given problem. Chaiken et al. (1989) explain that relying on heuristics to process information requires “minimal amounts” of cognitive effort, owing to the reliance on inference rather than analysis (p. 213). An example
of this tendency occurs in Rolf Zwaan’s *Situation Models: The Mental Leap Into Imagined Worlds*, where people are observed to generally favor interpreting event sequences as causal sequences, having experienced most events in their own lives as causal (1999).

Kahneman et al. (1982) include a caveat to the analysis of judgmental heuristics:

For judged probabilities to be considered adequate, or rational, internal consistency is not enough. The judgments must be compatible with the entire web of beliefs held by the individual. Unfortunately, there can be no simple formal procedure for assessing the compatibility of a set of probability judgments with the judge’s total system of beliefs.

(p. 20)

Barring mathematical probability, all referential judgments by all persons are theoretically subject to a bottomless labyrinth of prejudice dissociation. Fisher’s narrative paradigm proposes an elegant solution to this problem by presenting these heuristics within a framework where subjectivity is inbuilt, information is labeled as contributing to individual narrative, and history and society are composed of the continual interplay of these individual narratives (1987).

Fisher argues, thus, that communication is assimilated into a listener’s lived narrative. Aside from general rules, however, he provides no model for measuring the cognitive effort involved in processing that communication, and the degree to which that communication remains relevant and applicable in a listener’s narrative over any given length of time.

**Heuristic-Systematic Model**

Chaiken (1987) created the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) to provide a continuum for measuring cognitive effort involved in message processing, with heuristic processing on one end of the scale and systematic processing on the other. Heuristic processing may be undertaken
either consciously or subconsciously, and requires little cognitive effort by referencing previous scenarios and experiences with inferred similarity. An example of a heuristic cue in persuasive communication is expert testimonial, wherein the listener will accord validity to the message because of the inference that “experts’ statements can be trusted” (Chaiken et al., 1989, p. 216).

In a refinement of the model published some years later, Chaiken et al. (1989) define systematic processing as an active response to communication, wherein “receivers access and scrutinize” the information presented to them (p. 212). The HSM assumes that listeners are primarily concerned with assessing the validity of a message, and is therefore limited to situations in which the communicator is seeking to establish validity with the audience (Chaiken et al., 1989).

Nabi (2007) notes the HSM allows for “multiple motives” in that both types of processing may be used concurrently, resulting in a listener affirmation that is based “not only on accuracy but also on impression management or ego-defensive goals” (p. 382). This duality of process corresponds well within the framework of the narrative paradigm; persuasive messaging may be rigorously analyzed but it is ultimately integrated into a listener’s narrative through identification.

Tversky and Kahneman (1982) observe that, while heuristics may be useful in some instances, they may also lead to “severe and systematic errors” (p. 3). These errors may be acted upon with sincere conviction, as people engaged in heuristic processing often operate “under the impression that they are being logical” (Mio, 1997, p. 118). Chaiken et al. (1989) conclude heuristic processing produces lower message recall and overall confidence in the quality of a message than systematic processing.
Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to analyze the British cultural and rhetorical narratives presented in Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” address. The significance of this study is to identify and link the use of embedded cultural narratives in historically successful political communication with contemporary research on heuristic processing.

This study will be guided by research questions formed after reviewing relevant literature on narrative theory, heuristic processing and rhetorical devices. These questions are intended to provide a comprehensive discussion on the cultural relevance, history and means of delivery of the narratives present in Churchill’s address.

1. What British cultural narratives are referenced or embedded in Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” speech?
2. How would these narratives have been relevant to the British people in 1940?
3. What rhetorical devices did Churchill employ in embedding these narratives?
CHAPTER FOUR:
METHODOLOGY

Rhetorical Analysis

Rhetorical analysis has been understood to involve an examination of persuasion since Aristotle, but the definition of rhetoric itself has transformed continually since its origin. In the introduction to his *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, Jasinski (2001) notes rhetoric represents both “a type of discursive practice” and “the activity of thinking about or theorizing that practice” (p. xxiv). The persuasive aspect of rhetoric is, at its core, the act of promoting a series of associations and dissociations in the minds of an audience (Hart, 1990). The analytical aspect of rhetoric examines texts for persuasive elements and studies the effect of those elements on the culture in which they were communicated (Bauer & Glaskell, 2000). Approaching political communication through rhetorical analysis enables the scholar to “dissemble” political strategies and identify the means by which they are implemented (Martin, 2013, p. 88).

Currently, scholars are investigating the role rhetoric plays in shaping our social reality (Jasinski, 2001). While applying the constructivist movement to rhetorical analysis is relatively new in terms of academic history, the concept of rhetoric as a formative participant of reality is a basic premise in biblical canon and is everywhere implied in its mythic precursors (John 1:1, King James Version; Hesiod’s *Theogony*). On describing the functions and scope of rhetoric, Donald Bryant (1953) writes he is “almost forced” to acknowledge all action, writing, speaking, support and explanation “evinces rhetorical symptoms” (p.401).
Political rhetorical analysis “involves employing rhetorical categories” to ascertain the various means by which political speakers “deploy ideas” in an attempt to persuade an audience (Martin, 2013, p. 88). Hart (1990) describes the popular understanding of political rhetoric as “intentional confusion,” and equates the act of being persuaded to being conquered (p. 32). In Politics and Rhetoric, Martin (2013) acknowledges this dimension of submission successful persuasive communication, but makes the distinction between politics and the political:

Rhetorical persuasion might properly be understood as a form of mediation between politics and the political. That is to say, argumentative practices link routine politics to essentially contentious judgments about the basic dimensions and limits of human association, reinforcing, contesting or even repressing them in varying degrees. (p. 6)

This study applies rhetorical analysis to Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” address, identifying British cultural narratives embedded in the text and examining the relevancy of these narratives, as well as the rhetorical devices by which they were communicated to the audience. The narratives are presented and discussed according to their occurrence in the address from introduction to conclusion. Reoccurring themes drawn throughout the text are examined in full upon their initial introduction, for example, Arthurian legend from the point it first occurs to its conclusion in the address. Bauer and Gaskell’s (2000) definition of rhetorical analysis as persuasive investigation is applied to each of these narratives, a consideration of the history and relevance of the narratives in British culture following their thematic identification. The rhetorical devices by which Churchill introduces these narratives are then discussed, their linguistic tradition and use in Churchill’s address informing a discussion on the meaning and relevancy of the cultural narratives embedded by their use. Before these devices are analyzed, however, a definition of terms is necessary.
Rhetorical Devices

The devices by which rhetoric is endeavored vary according to the context and intent with which communication is undertaken; for Churchill, these devices were consistently literary in nature (Manchester & Reid, 2012). Biographers have attributed this tendency to Churchill’s insistent study of a wealth of classical English literature, his previous experience writing historical biographies and his abiding interest in the English language (Manchester & Reid, 2012; Charteris-Black, 2005). It will be necessary, therefore, to explore the history and usage of a number of rhetorical devices before turning to an analysis of Churchill’s 1940 address.

Metaphor

One of the earliest recorded discussions of metaphor as a rhetorical device comes from Aristotle, who maintained that metaphor serves to “point out resemblances” between two things not immediately related, the connecting of which moves the reader “beyond the ‘usual’ linguistic and rhetorical rules of clarity and decorum” (Punter, 2007, p. 12). Charteris-Black (2005) defines metaphor as “a linguistic representation” causing “semantic tension” by shifting the “use of a word or phrase from the context or domain in which it is expected to occur to another context or domain where it is not expected to occur” (p. 14). The duality of understanding involved in making these connections introduces metaphor as a device that serves both linguistic and cognitive functions (Cameron & Low, 1999).

In political communication, metaphors and symbolic language have long served to activate cognitive heuristics in an audience (Mio, 1997). Metaphor is used as a means of inviting an audience to associate concepts from a source domain to a target domain, for example connecting the effects of a physical earthquake to the ramifications of passing legislation (Neagu,
Citizens are often “interpolated” as metaphors themselves; for example, the phrase “tobacco giants” implicitly associates audiences with either giants or their opposites, the mythic giant-killers (Punter, 2007, p. 42). This last example illustrates the ease with which an expansive cultural narrative can be embedded in an address through brief metaphorical language.

Where comparison between two objects ceases, and an item presented directly represents or evokes an abstract set of concepts or ideas, metaphor ends and symbol begins (Brittan, 2003).

**Symbol**

Metaphor and symbol are closely related, divided contextually according to “cultural spread,” or the frequency and primacy of an image in a culture (Punter, 2007, p, 30). An example of this principle can be found in Churchill’s comparing British citizens to tenacious vegetation (“there are bitter weeds in England” as told to Napoleon by an unknown source) versus his calling Britain a beacon, or light. Both instances feature unexpected linguistic comparison; light, however, was a well-known cultural evocation of mythic narratives almost always involving life, goodness and wisdom, whereas vegetation held a less prominent place in British cultural history (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989).

As evidenced in the preceding example, symbol, like metaphor, is able to serve as a type of narrative shorthand. Churchill’s use of “light” evokes various mythological narratives, each informing some aspect of light as British citizens would have understood it. The Victorian Era found poets such as Tennyson utilizing symbol through biblical rhetoric: an image would be described with passages taken from biblical scripture (Bennet, 1969). Such description would immediately invite associations to the particular biblical passage and the greater narrative.
Churchill not only quotes Tennyson in “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” he uses this device himself (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989).

**Allegory**

The use of symbol throughout a narrative, an image or expression standing in as a rhetorical representation for another thing from beginning to conclusion, introduces the concept of allegory as a rhetorical device (Punter, 2007). Bloomfield and Levin (1981) observe the “dualistic nature” of allegory has remained relatively unchanged, and the premise that it “says one thing, and means another,” can be found in most scholarship on the topic (Fletcher, 1964). The primary mode used to describe the symbols running throughout allegory is personification, wherein an object is vested with human characteristics and taken through a narrative of its own, reacting to stimuli as if it were a person (Bloomfield & Levin, 1981). Allegory as a rhetorical device in political discourse is less prominent, likely due to the burden it places on the audience to correctly identify and extrapolate the intended meaning throughout an entire narrative (Neagu, 2013). The myriad interpretations of Christ’s parables, for example, in comparison to Churchill’s anecdote relating the English to tenacious weeds, illustrates the narrow scope of metaphor compared to allegory, and the increased likelihood with which an audience would correctly process a single-occurring message (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989).

**Personification**

Personification, as previously mentioned, has historically been associated with its role in allegory, and has not received serious academic attention until recently, when allegory was reconsidered as a mode of effective communication after a period of dismissal by literary
scholars in the 19th century (Paxson, 1994; Bloomfield & Krieger, 1981; Punter, 2007). As a rhetorical device, personification continues to perform the function it served in allegory; that of eliciting sympathy for an object by use of human descriptors. Separated from the constraints of allegory, however, personification becomes an effective, if polarizing, resource in the realm of political communication (Swedlow, 2010).

Charteris-Black found in his 2005 study that personification accounted for 39 percent of Churchill’s wartime metaphors. In “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” for example, ‘person’ is the source domain and Belgium is the target domain; Belgium is described in terms of an individual facing pressure from a greater force and ultimately capitulating at the expense of his or her allies (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989). According to Charteris-Black (2005), the common use of personification in the conceptual metaphor “A Nation is a Person” in political communication is a question of identification and ideology:

Typically, the ideological basis for using personification is either to arouse empathy for a social group, ideology or belief evaluated as heroic, or to arouse opposition towards a social group, ideology or belief that is evaluated as villainous. This is done by associating social groups, ideologies and beliefs that are positively evaluated with heroic human attributes - such as courage and determination - and by associating negatively evaluated social groups, ideas etc. with villainous attributes - such as cowardice and treachery.

(p. 41)

These associations imply a greater relationship between the audience and themes of villainy or heroism; else the association of any nation to either of these categories would produce little effect. This innate cultural predisposition toward particular concepts introduces use of myth in political communication.
Myth

Joseph Campbell, during his multicultural 1949 study on the subject, identified myth as a narrative transcending time, space and culture, an understanding of certain immutable realities conveyed through narrative action. Lewis (1947) noted that myth proper is not bound by words; rather, it is merely translated by authors looking to harness the premise of the myth, and delivered to readers in accessible language. Myth is often critically identified with poetic adornment, but its origins stem from base, utilitarian lessons permeated through time and culture (Kirk, 1970). The marriage of immemorial origin and present application is well-addressed in Tudor’s (1972) definition: “To be a myth, a story must assert the abiding presence of primordial and sacred realities in the temporal word of everyday affairs” (p. 62). Honko (1972) identified twelve critical theories that inform a definition of myth, including “myth as source of cognitive categories,” and “myth as a mirror of culture,” both of which directly relate to Churchill’s use of cultural narrative in his wartime address (p.13-14). In a similar attempt at taxonomy, Cuthbertson (1975) assigns myth several levels of evaluation, each requisite to understanding the concept: historicism, cognition, poetic metaphor, modernity and universality.

Political myth is similar to cultural myth in that they both must possess a sense authority or rightness in terms of historical example in order to achieve posterity, and they can both be communicated through various mediums, e.g. images, rhetoric and music (Flood, 1996). The difference between the two, Flood (1996) argues, is that political myth is “ideologically marked” and therefore contains “an implicit invitation” for the listener to identify with the ideology contained therein (p. 42). This categorizes political myth as a subset of general myth, both of which are intended to achieve some practical purpose (Tudor, 1972).
Having explored the definitions of the rhetorical devices used in Churchill’s “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” address a discussion of the cultural narratives uncovered by a rhetorical analysis of the text will commence.
British Cultural Narratives

Having suffered massive setbacks at Dunkirk, with no encouragement or assistance apparently forthcoming, Winston Churchill delivered “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” to an audience whose morale would drastically affect British outcomes (Charteris-Black, 2005). The rhetorical devices used to achieve this purpose have been the subject of much scholarship, but the cultural narratives evoked by Churchill’s rhetoric have gone largely unexamined. By drawing on stories with deep roots in British culture, Churchill activates heuristics inviting listeners to identify with sentiments of nationalism, valor, service and discipline (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989). Primary among the narratives rhetorically embedded in the text, and espousing each of the values Churchill invites the audience to identify with, is that of the British knight, and the narrative of knighthood in the history of the British people.

Knighthood and Chivalric Values

In recounting the tactical evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from the port of Dunkirk, France, Churchill introduces the narrative of knighthood and chivalric values through praise for the personnel involved in the evacuation: “A miracle of deliverance, achieved by valour, by perseverance, by perfect discipline, by faultless service, by resource, by skill, by unconquerable fidelity, is manifest to us all” (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989, p. 160). Prestage
(2004) defines chivalry as “the moral and social law and custom” of nobility in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, and, significantly, notes that chivalry existed as “an example to men of low degree” intended to illustrate desirable standards of courage and morality (p.12-13). This hierarchical dimension of knighthood and chivalric values retains much of its original application in Churchill’s use of the narrative to describe British military personnel and action; nonmilitary citizens listening to the address are rhetorically encouraged to narratively identify with the moral character and heroic nature of actions achieved by individuals belonging to the military class as admirable and worthy of emulation.

Functionally, chivalry is derivative of the French word for horseman, chevalier, and served as an identifier of the office of knighthood before its refinement as a symbol representing the ideals associated with that office (Barber, 1980; Prestage, 2004). Though the concept of knighthood, or military service in exchange for contracted land, originates around 1000 A.D., Barber (1980) contends the origin of chivalric values must be looked for in the preceding era of Germanic tribal warfare, where warriors evinced profound devotion to their chieftains out of tribal or familial bonds. Evidence of this conflict-based tribal devotion can be found in Tacitus’ Germania and Anglo-Saxon poetry predating the contractual nature of military service (cf. Wiglaf in Beowulf, Byrhtwold in The Battle of Maldon). Ultimately, however, the profit-centric nature of military service in the tenth century strained the relationally motivated nature of warrior kinship, leading to the creation of “liege homage,” wherein a knight was encouraged to swear an oath of fealty to the lord from whom that knight leased the most land (Barber, 1970).

As a secular agrarian culture began to coalesce between these oath-bound localities, the pressure for acceptance of this chivalric, oath-based system fell upon the Church, both that the Church might benefit from conscripting knights for its own religious ends, and that knights
might benefit from divine endorsement from the Church (Chickering et al., 1988). Here the faith-based element of chivalry is introduced, elevating a service born out of necessity into an institutional pageant of moral and religious significance. This marriage of knighthood and the divine is prominently manifest in later popular romantic literature (e.g. Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*) and persists up till its use in “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” where Churchill describes the virtues of valor, discipline, service, etc. as achieving a “miracle of deliverance” (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989, p. 160).

The Church of Western Europe in the tenth century found its roots in what historians delineate as the beginning of the Middle Ages, the fifth century, corresponding to the fall of Rome. Thus displaced, monks traveling throughout northern Britain found surprisingly keen audiences in the tribal, war-prone Anglo-Saxon chieftains, where description of a single God of relationship and justice, whose incarnate person displayed strength through self-sacrifice, gentleness and love, came as an astonishing refinement of the opaque terror instilled by the Anglo-Saxon gods of their forebears (Bryant, 1967). This sudden and relatively effortless conversion of Anglo-Saxon leadership contributed, Bryant (1967) argues, to the protracted symptom of Christianity being “mainly a religion of the upper classes,” and in the centuries of brutally forced unity among Anglo-Saxon peoples that followed, “a superior kind of magic,” ensuring wealth and eternal life (p. 28). The Church and the Crown, each having remarkably emerged from the centuries of failed, violent attempts at cultural unity known as the Dark Ages, achieved a tenuous, if complex, relationship. Around the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Church recognized the ascendance of knighthood, and sought to leverage that ascendance to its benefit:

In chivalry, as it became called, the Church offered the military class a code of honour. It devised an elaborate ceremony at which the young knight, before being invested with
arms, knelt all night in solitary prayer before the altar and, like the king at his crowning, took the Sacrament, swearing to use the power entrusted to him in righteousness and the defense of the helpless. And, for the sake of society, it invested the oath of fealty with mystery and sanctity. (Bryant, 1967, p. 52-53)

This mystery and sanctity became a defining feature in the narrative of knighthood and chivalric values, and persists until its use by Churchill in “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” where the defensive maneuvers of the Royal Air Force during the Dunkirk evacuation led Churchill to propose that “the cause of civilization itself will be defended by the skill and devotion of a few thousand airmen” (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989, p. 161). Here Britons are invited to identify with the narrative of knighthood and chivalry as it pertains to the just defense of a cause, borne of loyalty, not civic obligation. This identification, if successfully achieved, encouraged listeners to consider the metaphor “Britain is a Knight,” and to view the events of June 1940, and their role in those events, allegorically. A number of heuristic premises accompany this understanding of Britain as participating in the narrative of knighthood and chivalric values, not least of them being a divine sanction of action, and the oath-bound duty of citizens to be loyal, disciplined and moral.

Though the romantic ideals of chivalry are inextricably wound up with the societal injustices and personal hypocrisies it endorsed (for, inevitably, the behavior of knights in reality did not reflect that of their literary counterparts), it is inarguably Western Europe’s first contact with the notion of the morality of service: “Chivalry taught the world the duty of noble service willingly rendered” (Prestage, 2004, p. 27).

This moral obligation to serve and defend is rhetorically embedded in the concluding remarks of “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” where Churchill uses the rhetorical device of
metaphor to describe the alliance between the French and the British as two nations “linked together in their cause and in their need,” each willing to “defend to the death their native soil” (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989, p. 165).

**King Arthur and the Arthurian Legend**

While the British cultural narrative of knighthood and chivalric values occurs as rhetorical subtext throughout “We Shall Fight on the Beaches,” the cultural narrative of King Arthur and the Arthurian legend is directly referenced, with listeners explicitly encouraged to consider the parallels between that cultural narrative and the action upon which Britain is currently engaged (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989). Specifically, Churchill quotes Alfred Lord Tennyson’s 1842 *Morte d’Arthur*, a poetic interpretation of the ancient legend based primarily on two culturally authoritative Arthurian sources: Sir Thomas Malory’s 1485 work of the same name, and a collection of eleven Welsh prose stories published by Lady Charlotte Guest in 1838, entitled the *Mabinogion* (Tennyson & DeVane, 1940). Churchill proposes the actions and character of the Royal Air Force during the evacuation of Dunkirk provide contemporary examples of Tennyson’s description of bygone heroism in *Morte d’Arthur*, the final part of his Arthurian compilation entitled *Idylls of the King*, where “every morn brought forth a noble chance / and every chance brought forth a noble knight” (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989). The British cultural narrative of King Arthur and the Arthurian legend has persisted tenaciously throughout Britain’s cultural history, Arthur’s character continually transforming to suit the needs of the times in which he is evoked (Bryden, 2005; Higham, 2002; Pearsall, 2003; Barczewski, 2000). Tennyson’s poem, in particular, introduces additional narrative dimension, including themes such as the critique of Victorian societal values, and the necessity of an ideal to sustain
human goodness throughout the ages (Eggers, 1971). Before the meaning cast by the specific use of Tennyson’s poem in “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” can be analyzed, however, a look at the general historical presence of the narrative of King Arthur and the Arthurian legend in British culture will be necessary.

In his introduction to Studies in the Arthurian Legend, Rhys (1966) concludes that, while the romantic tradition of Arthurian legend was cultivated comparatively late in British history (around the eighth and ninth centuries), the myth of an Arthur figure has existed in Celtic and Welsh culture before recorded history. Proof of a historical Arthur before his mention as legend in the Historia Brittonum in the middle of the ninth century may exist in the work of a Celtic-British scholar named Gildas, who mentions a notable Saxon military victory around the fifth century, but evidence on this point is inconclusive at best (Pearsall, 2003). The difficulty lies in Gildas failing to mention any notable British leader by name, while the author of the Historia, presumed to be a monk named Nennius, interpolates the King Arthur of Welsh legend as the leader of a rallied Britain (Higham, 2002). Nennius writes with decidedly nationalistic intent, and this interpolation of Arthur as “a construction of British identity” is viewed with marked academic skepticism (p. 72).

Churchill (1956), himself a lifelong enthusiast of English history, published a four-volume treatise on the country’s origins following his resignation as prime minister in 1955, entitled A History of the English-Speaking Peoples. His self-described intent was “not to rival the works of professional historians,” but “to present a personal view on the process whereby English-speaking peoples throughout the world have achieved their distinctive position and character” (p. viii, preface). Of the historical origins of Arthur, Churchill evinces characteristic sentiment and nationalism:
Nennius also tells us, what Gildas omits, the name of the British soldier who won the crowning mercy of Mount Badon, and that name takes us out of the mist of dimly remembered history into the daylight of romance. There looms, large, uncertain, dim but glittering, the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Somewhere in the Island a great captain gathered the forces of Roman Britain and fought the barbarian invaders to the death. Around him, around his name and his deeds, shine all that romance and poetry can bestow. (p. 58-59).

As his preface indicates, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples* more closely resembles a fondly crafted narrative than a historical text. Churchill was 80 years of age at the time of its publication, having resigned his second term as prime minister due to ill health, and the work often includes self-aware caveats to such historical claims as those made above, as exampled by his conclusion on Arthurian legends: “True or false, they have gained an immortal hold upon the thoughts of men. It is difficult to believe it as all an invention of a Welsh writer. If it was he must have been a marvelous writer” (p. 59).

The *Historia Brittonum*, the historical authority by which King Arthur assumes his place in British cultural identity, is indeed, one of the earliest sources promoting “Englishness,” or “pan-British national identity,” in contrast to the fractured identities of the tribes and localities spread throughout the continent, unrelated to one another after the fall of Rome (Higham, 2002). From that point onward, Arthur becomes a symbol, filled with significance according to the ever-changing ideologies of the British cultural elite (Pearsall, 2003; Higham, 2002). Churchill proposes Arthur’s posterity derives from a mixture of historical struggle and hope, a manifestation of the Christian faith persisting through centuries of British hardship: “The
memory of Arthur carried with it the hope that a deliverer would return one day. The legend lived upon the increasing tribulations of the age” (1956, p. 61).

The next powerful resurgence of the narrative comes in Sir Thomas Malory’s posterity-honored rendering of King Arthur and the Arthurian legend, Le Morte d’Arthur, published in 1485. Chivalry having risen and fallen, Malory sought “to find in Arthur and the Round Table the lineaments of a great and noble society” (Pearsall, 2003, p. 82). This retelling of the legend, argues Eggers (1971), offers a humanistic rendering of the knights, the quest for the Holy Grail, and Camelot’s decline, epitomized in the nobly flawed character and story of Lancelot: “The ideals of chivalry are tested against his humanity; the absence of chivalric perfection seems to increase the humanity of the whole order of knights” (p. 38). The frailty of ideals and the chivalric code notwithstanding, Bryden (2005) writes Malory “endowed the legend of King Arthur with an unprecedented coherence and majesty,” and laid the foundation for the next great cultural resurgence of the Arthurian legend, a period in the nineteenth century known as the Victorian Arthurian Revival, led by Alfred Lord Tennyson and his Idylls of the King (p.13).

**Arthurian legend in nineteenth-century Britain.**

In her introduction to Reinventing King Arthur, Bryden (2005) calls nineteenth century interest in King Arthur and the Arthurian narrative “a literary and cultural phenomenon,” where “a diverse group of people, from different social and cultural backgrounds,” contributed works celebrating and refashioning the Arthurian narrative to suit Victorian purposes, though all were “critically held to be subordinate to Tennyson, as the official instigator of Arthur’s return” (p. 1). Barczewski (2000) holds the roots of this resurgence can be found in the century preceding: “The near-constant military conflicts of the eighteenth century produced a need for heroes embodying
martial prowess and chivalric virtue, a role for which Arthur was well suited” (p. 30). While the roots perhaps are to be found thus, Pearsall (2003) notes, they do not necessarily account for the positivity with which the Victorian era accepted Arthur: the Protestants did not well-receive the violent and adulterous dimensions of the legend, and after so much use as royal propaganda, the narrative had lost the humanity, mysticism and poignancy given it by Malory. The explanation of the Victorian Arthurian Revival would appear, ultimately, to be found in the complex relationship between Christianity, Victorian manners, and British nationalism in the nineteenth century (Higham, 2002). It is this thematic combination that Tennyson draws on as a framework for his Victorian Arthurian epic, the faith-driven nationalism of which reappears almost exactly in the rhetorical framing of “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” (Eggers, 1971). Specific examples can be found in Churchill’s description of the feats of the light infantry division as “glorious,” his aforementioned description of Dunkirk as “a miracle of deliverance,” wherein the Royal Air Force “hurled back” the enemy, “going forth every morn to guard their native land and all that we stand for” (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989). It was for Churchill in 1940 as it had been with Tennyson in 1872: if British ascendancy were to survive the times, faith and nationalism would have to be inseparable.

The adoption of Arthurian legend as a vehicle for Christian morality and British nationalism is an appropriate historical example of Fisher’s (1987) narrative paradigm, where humans are essentially storytellers, and relate to narratives with which they desire to identify. Barczewski (2000) argues, as with people, so too with nations:

In recent years scholars have increasingly come to argue that national consciousness comes into being through narratives that erase contradictions, defuse paradoxes and fill in discursive gaps, thereby transforming the often tempestuous creation of a national
identity into a logical, linear, seemingly inevitable process. In other words, every nation requires a ‘national history’ in which the community’s evolution and existence is explained and validates; history not only creates nations, but nations also create their own histories. (p. 45)

Such a conclusion accounts for Tennyson’s desire to use a familiar cultural narrative as a beacon of Victorian standards, and as an admonition concerning the decaying state of morality, and therefore nationalist sentiment, in Victorian England. Such a conclusion also meaningfully illustrates why an 80-year-old former head of state, having fundamentally altered the course of his nation for better and for worse, would desire to spend his final years writing a history of his beloved country.

**Chivalry and Arthurian cultural narratives in the 1940s.**

The early twentieth century, Pearsall (2003) observes, witnessed a continuation of “the Victorian tradition of verse narrative on Arthurian themes,” but these became less overtly influential as the years progressed (p. 161). Britons in 1940 would have specifically been exposed to novelist T.H. White’s Arthurian trilogy, wherein White uses the legend of King Arthur to criticize political ideologies of the 1930s (Pearson, 2003). Stories about the ideals (and perhaps impossibility) of chivalry, and the narrative of King Arthur, were woven into English culture at an early date, and have persisted up until the present day (Higham, 2002). Commenting on the ability of Arthur and his ideals to transcend any given period in British history, Bryden (2005) concludes the Arthurian legend “is culturally reconstructed, historically appropriated and implicated in the processes of modernity - in his sense he re-enacts cycles of death and renewal.” (p. 145). Chivalry and Arthurian narratives continue to exist in that part of the British heritage “where the borders of national, cultural, and mythological identities overlap” (p. 1).
After having conducted an extensive review of the literature examining the British education system in the early twentieth century, this researcher was unable to find curriculums or syllabi detailing the specific content students would have studied; the literature tended to focus on the unprecedented inclusion of the working class, the funding for public schools, and the improvements in women’s university access in the educational system following the turn of the century (Stephens, 1998). Beyond the claim that these narratives persisted in popular British culture stated above, the proposal that students in the early 1900s, and therefore British citizens in 1940, would have been exposed to chivalric and Arthurian narratives, and Tennyson’s poetry in particular, may be demonstrated through a number of historical observations.

In his book, *Education in Britain since 1900*, Curtis (1970) writes “the present curricular trends are not entirely dissociated from those changes which have occurred in the composition of the classes” in this period, where there existed “an increasing demand for the study of literature and drama and for classes in psychology, philosophy, and musical appreciation,” especially in the realm of adult and technical education (p. 219). The composition of classes observed by Curtis (1970) is proposed by Simon (1991) to have been influenced in turn by educational “reconstruction, carried through in Victorian times,” which “still determines the basic characteristics of the educational structure as it exists today” (p. 24). As of 2007, the Oxford University English Language and Literature syllabus includes medieval literature as a foundational course and offers Tennyson as a consideration of special authors in one of the mandatory papers to be composed in the first year of attendance. According to the British Council website, updated 2014, The General Certificate of Education (GCE), “the UK equivalent of school-leaving or university entrance examinations,” includes an assessment covering Tennyson’s *Ulysses* in the 2014 exam. Unless there exists an undocumented period wherein
Victorian literature fell out of favor between its publication in 1872, Churchill’s use of those narratives in 1940, the 2007 Oxford syllabus or the 2014 GCE, this researcher would propose that medieval studies and Tennyson’s poetry existed in British educational curriculum from the early 1900s until the present day. The roots of this cultural interest in the narratives of chivalric values and the Arthurian legend can be traced to Alfred Lord Tennyson’s 1872 *Idylls of the King* (Bryden, 2005).

**Faith and civic duty in *Idylls of the King.***

Of the cultural meaning and impact of Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*, Eggers, remarks: “Victorians did not consider the *Idylls* as merely a poem, but an event, a cultural phenomenon. It was read, memorized, and lived” (p. 53). The *Idylls* are a compilation of Arthurian poetry published in 1872, with individual poems such as *The Lady of Shalott* and *Morte d’Arthur* published as early as 1832 (Tennyson & DeVane, 1940). Eggers (1971) describes the differences between Malory and Tennyson in these terms: “Malory sees the king as a poignant human figure, but Tennyson makes him a Christ figure,” with the decline of Camelot corresponding to “a failure to maintain Victorian standards” (p.42, 45). Contrasted to Malory’s relatable Lancelot, Tennyson’s Arthur serves as the unblemished moral center of the legend, creating chivalry, upholding standards for those around him, and, significantly, “whose failure is a warning to those who would take for granted the delicate equilibrium necessary to whose keep sudden social gains from becoming setbacks” (p. 40). The necessity for British ascendency, both against its foes and above its subjects, is thus argued.

The link between British Christianity and civic duty can be traced back to the writings of the Celtic-British historian Gildas, whose *De Excidio Britonum* describes the political and
historical states of fifth-century Britain as analogous to those of the Israelites after they had fallen away from God’s grace (Higham, 2002). This historical-biblical narrative retains so much significance, Higham (2002) argues, because it was one of the few preserved histories of that century, going on to become “the defining narrative which characterized the Britons as a people,” serving as “the founding text of British self-perception, and the narrative according to which the Britons were textualized historically by their neighbors” (p. 57).

By the nineteenth century, Eggers (1971) observes, faith had been tempered into a moral self-awareness, manners gaining predominance over divine mystery, causing Tennyson to juxtapose “traditional reverence along with modern self-awareness,” using the Arthurian narrative to present his age as caught between “conflicting extremes” (p. 55). The battle was an ideological one in the nineteenth century, but the dueling visions in Tennyson’s *Idylls* betray his concern about spiritual and national schism: “The two visions reveal the discordant character of the Victorian age itself, caught between old and new, trust and disbelief, authority and radicalism, progress and misery, peace and inner tension, respectability and prurience, spiritual enthusiasm and the cash nexus” (p. 55). The means to reconcile these forces comes in the form of King Arthur as Christ figure, and the Order’s urgent need to follow his example.

Though woven throughout the *Idylls*, a clear instance can be found in Tennyson’s *Morte d’Arthur*, one of the earliest-written poems in the *Idylls*, revised and published in the compilation as *The Passing of Arthur* and serving as the series’ conclusion. It is this poem from which Churchill draws. In it, Arthur rests dying in the ruins of a temple on the shores of Avalon. The last remaining knight of the Order, Sir Bedivere, has carried him away from battle, and awaits his final commands. Arthur, painted throughout the *Idylls* as above reproach, and nearly above
human feeling, questions his passing in a passage that closely echoes Christ’s startlingly human
lament during the crucifixion:

I perish by this people which I made, –

Tho’ Merlin sware that I should come again

To rule once more – but let what will be, be,

I am so deeply smitten thro’ the helm

That without help I cannot last till morn.

So saying, Arthur bids Bedivere throw Excalibur, Arthur’s mythic weapon, back into the
lake from which it came, as a fulfillment of prophecy. Bedivere takes the weapon, magnificent to
behold, and paces the shores of Avalon, struggling with the rightness of the command. To return
the sword to the lake is to lose all trace of Arthur and his Order: it a personal action demanded by
a ruler, against the reason of the subject. In this way, Bedivere’s struggle resembles the British
subject’s questioning of government as moral and civil authority. Here the roles of Christ figure
and national leader are carefully intertwined. Bedivere considers:

What good should follow this, if it were done?

What harm, undone? Deep harm to disobey,

Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.

Were it well to obey then, if a king demand

An act unprofitable, against himself?

The king is sick, and knows not what he does.

Bedivere hides the weapon among the reeds, alleging loyalty illuminated by reason, but
Tennyson describes the decision as “clouded with his own conceit,” (Tennyson & Rick, 2007, p
34). Upon Bedivere’s return, Arthur immediately perceives this unfaithfulness:
Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow’d of the power in his eye
That bow’d the will.

Arthur’s moving mixture of wrath and physical weakness overcomes the guilt-wrought Bedivere, and the knight returns to Avalon in haste, unearths Excalibur, and throws it into the lake without pause (Tennyson and Rick, 2007). As a result, he is rewarded with a vision of the Lady of the Lake. Such is Tennyson’s commentary on faith, self-awareness and nationalism in the *Idylls*.

The narrative of King Arthur and the Arthurian legend has always been closely wound with Christianity and citizenship, and given Britain’s close historical ties with faith as compelling service, Arthur as guiding light and Britain as guiding light appears a logical allegorical joining. In *Tennyson Laureate*, Valerie Pitt (1962) sheds light on the relationship between Christianity, Arthur and empire:

Tennyson created in the *Idylls* a mirror for the society of his times. We are presented with an ideal king, a warrior for Christ, throwing back the forces of barbarism, and ruling with justice, followed by a people labouring together to procure order and righteousness.

There can be little doubt that this was his ideal for the British Empire. (p. 188)

This narrative of cultivated empire triumphing over darkness, and establishing order over uncultivated peoples, closely resembles the complex mixture of idealism and imperialism that Churchill espoused in 1940, and is also almost a direct reflection of his ambitions for Britain’s
place on the global stage during, and after the war. Consider Churchill’s own description of the historicity of King Arthur in *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*:

> It is all true, or it ought to be; and more and better besides. And wherever men are fighting against barbarism, tyranny, and massacre, for freedom, law, and honour, let them remember that the fame of their deeds, even though they themselves be exterminated, may perhaps be celebrated as long as the world rolls round. Let us then declare that King Arthur and his noble knights, guarding the Sacred Flame of Christianity and the theme of a world order, sustained by valour, physical strength, and good horses and armour, slaughtered innumerable hosts of foul barbarians and set decent folk an example for all time. (p. 60)

In Tennyson, Churchill found a precise poetical rendering of his personal nationalism and political aspirations. Indicative of his much-studied rhetorical flair, however, Churchill does not rest at a comparison of 1940s Britain and the narratives of Arthurian legend and chivalric values: after having rhetorically invited listeners to identify with such narratives, Churchill proposes in “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” that Britain in June 1940 does not simply bear a likeness to these narratives, but is, in fact, a transcending historical continuation- a direct, physical descendent. He claims there has never been such opportunity for glory “in all the world, in all the history of war,” that “the Knights of the Round Table, the Crusaders, all fall back into the past: not only distant but prosaic” in comparison to the current actions of the Royal Air Force (Churchill & Cannadine, 1989, p. 161). Careful to include the working class in this up-bearing of British cultural history, he goes on to describe the activity at home in these terms: “An effort the like of which has never been seen in our records is now being made. Work is proceeding everywhere, night and day, Sundays and weekdays” (p. 162).
Finally, in a deft rhetorical combination of the above narratives, Churchill closes “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” with the passage that provides its namesake, drawing on chivalric service and devotion and Arthurian-Christian nationalism in exhorting the British people to serve the defense of the nation without yielding:

Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the British Fleet, would carry on the struggle, until in God’s good time, the new world, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old. (p. 165).

In the course of arguing Churchill’s use of these deep-rooted narratives in “We Shall Fight on the Beaches” would have activated a number of cultural heuristics relating to Arthur in British culture, the argument may arise that it would not have been cognitively possible for British citizens to recall, and identify with, the myriad characteristics of Arthurian legend of chivalric narratives upon their mention in Churchill’s address. To this point, Chaiken & Trope (1999) observe, “information related to heuristics/cues is not necessarily briefer or less complex than message arguments,” and, therefore, “processing the latter (vs. the former) should not necessarily require greater effort or higher motivation” (p. 301). Churchill evokes narratives with
a rich cultural history, but as Chaiken and Trope (1999) explain, the breadth and width of those narratives would not therefore have given listeners much cognitive difficulty and drawing upon them for heuristics.

**Conclusion**

Thus, the case is made that Churchill utilized a number of relevant, deep-rooted British cultural narratives in his political communication, exampled by an examination of his June 1940 address, “We Shall Fight on the Beaches.” First, major cultural narratives were identified and analyzed, the link between those narratives and Churchill’s personal ideologies proposed through a tripartite survey of British history, existing critical scholarship on each narrative, and Churchill’s own writing. Following the identification of each narrative, the relevance of those narratives to British citizens in the 1940s was proposed by a survey of historical cultural and educational materials running from the early 1900s to the present day. Finally, the rhetorical devices by which those narratives were embedded were defined and recognized throughout the discussion as they occurred. The study of the history of cultural narratives used in political communication reveals a great deal about the intention of the speaker and the beliefs the speaker holds, at the very least in relation to the understanding of the audience he or she is speaking to. The cultural narratives Churchill uses appear to promote his personal ideologies, especially in regards to the place of Britain as a light for moral and intellectual advancement.

Though much effort has been made to reduce researcher bias in examining the connection between Churchill’s personal and political views, and the views critically held to exist in the British cultural narratives he draws upon, no doubt a limitation exists in the form of content selection and narrative choice. The researcher did not, for example, feel it necessary to explore in
depth Churchill’s passing mention of the Crusades, his references to Napoleon or his remark on the glories of the light brigade: connecting those single words and phrases to greater cultural narratives felt artificial in comparison to the strength, force and cohesion with which the other chosen narratives existed throughout the source text. Future research, both qualitative and quantitative, concerning correlations between politicians’ use of cultural narratives and their perception of audiences, something similar to Werder’s 2005 study on the influence of perceived attributes of publics on public relations strategy use, would likely benefit ongoing research by providing insight into the relationship between political communication and cultural narratives.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A:

“WE SHALL FIGHT ON THE BEACHES”

From the moment that the French defences at Sedan and on the Meuse were broken at the end of the second week of May, only a rapid retreat to Amiens and the south could have saved the British and French Armies who had entered Belgium at the appeal of the Belgian King; but this strategic fact was not immediately realized. The French High Command hoped they would be able to close the gap, and the Armies of the north were under their orders. Moreover, a retirement of this kind would have involved almost certainly the destruction of the fine Belgian Army of over twenty divisions and the abandonment of the whole of Belgium. Therefore, when the force and scope of the German penetration were realized and when a new French Generalissimo, General Weygand, assumed command in the place of General Gamelin, an effort was made by the French and British Armies in Belgium to keep on holding the right hand of the Belgians and to give their own right hand to a newly created French Army which was to have advanced across the Somme in great strength to grasp it.

However, the German eruption swept like a sharp scythe around the right and rear of the Armies of the north. Eight or nine armoured divisions, each of about four hundred armored vehicles of different kinds, but carefully assorted to be complementary and divisible into small self-contained units, cut off all communications between us and the main French Armies. It severed our own communications for food and ammunition, which ran first to Amiens and afterwards through Abbeville, and it shore its way up the coast to Boulogne and Calais, and almost to Dunkirk. Behind this armoured and mechanized onslaught came a number of German divisions in lorries, and behind them again there plodded comparatively slowly the dull brute mass of ordinary German Army and German people, always so ready to be led to the trampling down in other lands of liberties and comforts which they have never known in their own.

I have said this armoured scythe-stroke almost reached Dunkirk - almost but not quite. The Guards defended Boulogne for a while and were then withdrawn by orders from this country. The Rifle Brigade, the 60th Rifles, and the Queen Victoria’s Rifles, with a battalion of British tanks and 1,000 Frenchmen, in all about four thousand strong, defended Calais to the last. The British Brigadier was given an hour to surrender. He spurned the offer, and four days of intense street fighting passed before silence reigned over Calais, which marked the end of a memorable resistance. Only thirty unwounded survivors were brought off by the Navy and we do not know the fate or their comrades. Their sacrifice, however, was not in vain. At least two armoured divisions, which otherwise would have been turned against the British Expeditionary Force, had to be sent to overcome them. They have added another page to the glories of the light divisions, and the time gained enabled the Graveline waterline to be flooded and to be held by the French troops.
Thus it was that the port of Dunkirk was kept open. When it was found impossible for the
Armies of the north to reopen their communications to Amiens with the main French Armies,
only one choice remained. It seemed, indeed, forlorn. The Belgian, British and French Armies
were almost surrounded. Their sole line of retreat was to a single port and to its neighbouring
beaches. They were pressed on every side by heavy attacks and far outnumbered in the air.

When a week ago today I asked the House to fix this afternoon as the occasion for a
statement, I feared it would be my hard lot to announce the greatest military disaster in our long
history. I thought - and some good judges agreed with me - that perhaps 20,000 or 30,000 men
might be re-embarked. But it certainly seemed that the whole of the French First Army and the
whole of the British Expeditionary Force north of the Amiens-Abbeville gap, would be broken
up in the open field or else would have to capitulate for lack of food and ammunition. These
were the hard and heavy tidings for which I called upon the House and the nation to prepare
themselves a week ago. The whole root and core and brain of the British Army, on which and
around which we were to build, and are to build, the great British Armies in the later years of the
war, seemed about to perish upon the field or to be led into an ignominious and starving
captivity.

That was the prospect a week ago. But another blow which might well have been proved
final was yet to fall upon us. The King of the Belgians had called upon us to come to his aid. Had
not this Ruler and his Government severed themselves from the Allies, who rescued their country
from extinction in the late war, and had they not sought refuge in what has proved to be a fatal
neutrality, the French and British Armies might well at the outset have saved not only Belgium
but perhaps even Poland. Yet at the last moment when Belgium was already invaded, King
Leopold called upon us to come to his aid, and even at the last moment we came. He and his
brave, efficient Army, nearly half a million strong, guarded our left flank and thus kept open our
only line of retreat to the sea. Suddenly, without prior consultation, with the least possible notice,
without the advice of his Ministers and upon his own personal act, he sent a plenipotentiary to
the German Command, surrendered his Army and exposed our whole flank and means of retreat.

I asked the House a week ago to suspend its judgment because the facts were not clear,
but I do not feel that any reason now exists why we should not form our own opinions upon this
pitiful episode. The surrender of the Belgium Army compelled the British at the shortest notice to
cover a flank to the sea more than 30 miles in length. Otherwise all would have been cut off, and
all would have shared the fate to which King Leopold had condemned the finest Army his
country had ever formed. So in doing this and in exposing this flank, as anyone who followed the
operations on the map will see, contact was lost between the British and two out of three corps
forming the First French Army, who were still farther from the coast than we were, and it seemed
impossible that any large number of Allied troops could reach the coast.

The enemy attacked on all sides with great strength and fierceness, and their main power,
the power of their far more numerous air force, was thrown into the battle or else concentrated
upon Dunkirk and the beaches. Pressing in upon the narrow exit, both from the east and from the
west, the enemy began to fire with cannon upon the beaches by which alone the shipping could
approach or depart. They sowed magnetic mines in the channels and seas; they sent repeated
waves of hostile aircraft, sometimes more than a hundred strong in one formation, to cast their
bombs upon the single pier that remained, and upon the sand dunes upon which the troops had
their eyes for shelter. Their U-boats, one of which was sunk, and their motor launches took their
toll of the vast traffic which now began. For four or five days an intense struggle reigned. All
their armoured divisions - or what was left of them - together with great masses of infantry and
artillery, hurled themselves in vain upon the ever-narrowing, ever-contracting appendix within which the British and French armies fought.

Meanwhile, the Royal Navy, with the willing help of countless merchant seamen, strained every nerve to embark the British and allied troops: 220 light warships and 650 other vessels were engaged. They had to operate upon the difficult coast, often in adverse weather, under an almost ceaseless hail of bombs and an increasing concentration of artillery fire. Nor were the seas, as I have said, themselves free from mines and torpedoes. It was in conditions such as these that our men carried on, with little or no rest, for days and nights on end, making trip after trip across the dangerous waters, bringing with them always men whom they had rescued. The numbers they have brought back are the measure of their devotion and courage. Hospital ships, which brought off many thousands of British and French wounded, being so plainly marked were a special target for Nazi bombs; but the men and women on board them never faltered in their duty.

Meanwhile, the Royal Air Force, which had already been intervening in the battle, so far as its range would allow, from home bases, not used part of its main metropolitan fighter strength, and struck at the German bombers, and at the fighters which in large numbers protected them. This struggle was protracted and fierce. Suddenly the scene has cleared, the crash and thunder has for the moment - but only for the moment - died away. A miracle of deliverance, achieved by valour, by perseverance, by perfect discipline, by faultless service, by resource, by skill, by unconquerable fidelity, is manifest to us all. The enemy was hurled back to the retreating British and French troops. He was so roughly handled that he did not hurry their departure seriously. The Royal Air Force engaged the main strength of the German Air Force, and inflicted upon them losses of at least four to one; and the Navy, using nearly 1,000 ships of all kinds, carried over 335,000 men, French and British, out of the jaws of death and shame, to their native land and to the tasks which lie immediately ahead. We must be very careful not to assign this deliverance the attributes of a victory. Wars are not won by evacuations. But there was a victory inside this deliverance, which should be noted. It was gained by the Air Force. Many of our soldiers coming back have not seen the Air Force at work; they underrate its achievements. I have heard much talk of this; that is why I go out of my way to say this. I will tell you about it.

This was a great trial of strength between the British and German Air Forces. Can you conceive a greater object of the Germans in the air than to make evacuation from these beaches impossible, and to sink all these ships which were displayed, almost to the extent of thousands? Could there have ever been an objective of greater military importance and significance for the whole purpose of the war than this? They tried hard, and they were beaten back; they were frustrated in their task. We got the Army away; and they paid fourfold for any losses which they have inflicted. Very large formations of German aeroplanes - and we know that they are a very brave race - have turned on several occasions from the attack of one-quarter of their number of the Royal Air Force, and have dispersed in different directions. Twelve aeroplanes have been hunted by two. One aeroplane was driven into the water and cast away, by the mere charge of a British aeroplane, which had no more ammunition. All our types - Hurricane, the Spitfire and the new Defiant - and all our pilots have been vindicated as superior to what they have at present to face.

When we consider how much greater would be our advantage in defending the air above this island against an overseas attack, I must say that I find in these facts a sure basis upon which practical and reassuring thoughts may rest. I will pay my tribute to these young airmen. The great French Army was very largely, for the time being, cast back and disturbed by the onrush of a few
thousands of armoured vehicles. May it not also be that the cause of civilization itself will be defended by the skill and devotion of a few thousand airmen? There have never been, I suppose, in all the world, in all the history of war, such an opportunity for youth. The Knights of the Round Table, the Crusaders, all fall back into the past: not only distant but prosaic; these young men, going forth every morn to guard their native land and all that we stand for, holding in their hands these instruments of colossal and shattering power, of whom it may be said that

Every morn brought forth a noble chance
And every chance brought forth a noble knight

deserve our gratitude, as do all of the brave men who, in so many ways and on so many occasions, are ready, and continue ready, to give life and all for their native land.

I return to the Army. In the long series of very fierce battles, now on this front, now on that, fighting on three fronts at once, battles fought by two or three divisions against an equal or somewhat large number of the enemy, and fought fiercely on some of the old grounds that many of us knew so well, in these battles our losses in men have exceeded 30,000 killed, wounded and missing. I take occasion to express the sympathy of the House to all who have suffered bereavement or who are still anxious. The President of the Board of Trade [Sir Andrew Duncan] is not here today. His son has been killed, and many in the House have felt the pangs of affliction in the sharpest form. But I will say this about the missing. We have had a large number of wounded come home safely to this country, but I would say about the missing that there may be very many reported missing who will come back home, some day, in one way or another. In the confusion of this fight it is inevitable that many have been left in positions where honour required no further resistance from them.

Against this loss of over 30,000 men, we can set a far heavier loss certainly inflicted upon the enemy. But our losses in material are enormous. We have perhaps lost one-third of the men we lost in the opening days of the battle of 21 March 1918, but we have lost nearly as many guns - nearly one thousand - and all our transport, all the armoured vehicles that were with the Army in the north. This loss will impose a further delay on the expansion of our military strength. That expansion had not been proceeding as fast as we had hoped. The best of all we had to give had gone to the British Expeditionary Force, and although they had not the numbers of tanks and some articles of equipment which were desirable, they were a very well-and finely equipped Army. They had the first fruits of all that our industry had to give, and that is gone. And now here is the further delay. How long it will be, how long it will last, depends upon the exertions which we make in this island. An effort the likes of which has never been seen in our records is now being made. Work is proceeding everywhere, night and day, Sundays and weekdays. Capital and labour have cast aside their interests, rights and customs and put them into common stock. Already the flow of munitions has leapt forward. There is no reason why we should not in a few months overtake the sudden and serious loss that has come upon us, without retarding the development of our general programme.

Nevertheless, our thankfulness at the escape of our Army and so many men, whose loved ones have passed through an agonizing week, must not blind us to the fact that what has happened in France and Belgium is a colossal military disaster. The French Army has been weakened, the Belgium army has been lost, a large part of those fortified lines upon which so much faith had reposed is gone, many valuable mining districts and factories have passed into the enemy’s possession, the whole of the Channel ports are in his hands, with all the tragic
consequences that follow from that, and we must expect another blow to be struck almost immediately at us or at France. We are told that Herr Hitler has a plan for invading the British Isles. This has often been thought of before. When Napoleon lay at Boulogne for a year with his flat-bottomed boats and his Grand Army, he was told by someone ‘There are bitter weeds in England.’ There are certainly a great many more of them since the British Expeditionary Force returned.

The whole question of home defence against invasion is, of course, powerfully affected by the fact that we have for the time being in this island incomparably more powerful military forces than we have ever had at any moment in this war or the last. But this will not continue. We shall not be content with a defensive war. We have our own duty to our Ally. We have to reconstitute and build up the British Expeditionary Force once again, under its gallant Commander-in-Chief, Lord Gort. All this is in train; but in the interval we must put our defences in this island into such a high state of organization that the fewest possible numbers will be required to give effective security and that the largest possible potential of offensive effort may be realized. On this we are now engaged. It will be very convenient, if it be the desire of the House, to enter upon this subject in a secret Session. Not that the Government would necessarily be able to reveal in very detail military secrets, but we like to have our discussion free, without the restraint imposed by the fact that they will be read the next day by the enemy; and the Government would benefit by views freely expressed in all parts of the House by Members with their knowledge of so many different parts of the country. I understand that some request is to be made upon this subject; which will be readily acceded to by His Majesty’s Government.

We have found it necessary to take measures of increasing stringency, not only against enemy aliens and suspicious characters of other nationalities, but also against British subjects who may become a danger or a nuisance should the war be transported to the United Kingdom. I know there are a great many people affected by the orders which we have made who are the passionate enemies of Nazi Germany. I am very sorry for them, but we cannot, at the present time and under the present stress, draw all the distinctions which we should like to do. If parachute landings were attempted and fierce fighting attendant upon them followed, these unfortunate people would be far better out of the way, for their own sakes as well as for ours. There is, however, another class, for which I feel not the slightest sympathy. Parliament has given us the powers to put down Fifth Column activities with a strong hand, and we shall use those powers, subject to the supervision and correction of the House, without the slightest hesitation until we are satisfied, and more than satisfied, that this malignancy in our midst has been effectively stamped out.

Turning once again, and this time more generally, to the question of invasion, I would observe that there has never been a period in all these long centuries of which we boast when an absolute guarantee against invasion, still less against serious raids, could have been given to our people. In the days of Napoleon the same wind which would have carried his transport across the Channel might have driven away the blockading fleet. There was always the chance, and it is that chance which has excited and befuddled the imaginations of many Continental tyrants. Many are the tales told. We are assured that novel methods will be adopted, and when we see the originality of malice, the ingenuity of aggression, which our enemy displays, we may certainly prepare ourselves for every kind of novel stratagem and every kind of brutal and treacherous maneuver. I think that no idea is so outlandish that it should not be considered and viewed with a searching, but at the same time, I hope, with a steady eye. We must never forget the solid assurances of sea-power and those which belong to air power if it can be locally exercised.
I have, myself, full confidence that if all do their duty, if nothing is neglected and if the
best arrangements are made, as they are being made, we shall prove ourselves once again able to
defend our island home, to ride out the storm of war, and to outlive the menace of tyranny, if
necessary for years, if necessary alone. At any rate, that is what we are going to try to do. That is
the resolve of His Majesty’s Government - every man of them. That is the will of Parliament and
the nation. The British Empire and the French Republic, linked together in their cause and in
their need, will defend to the death their native soil, aiding each other like good comrades to the
utmost of their strength. Even though large tracts of Europe and many old and famous States
have fallen or may fall into the grip of the Gestapo and all the odious apparatus of Nazi rule, we
shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end, we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the
seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall
defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the
landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall
never surrender, and even if, which I do not for a moment believe, this island or a large part of it
were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas, armed and guarded by the
British Fleet, would with all its power and might, step forth to the rescue and the liberation of the
old.

House of Commons, 4 June 1940
APPENDIX B:

MORTE D’ARTHUR

So all day long the noise of battle roll’d
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur’s table, man by man,
Had fallen in Lyonesse about their Lord,
King Arthur: then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay Ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
‘The sequel of to-day unsolders all
The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
They sleep - the men I loved. I think that we
Shall never more, at any future time,
Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
Walking about the gardens and the halls
Of Camelot, as in the days that were.
I perish by this people which I made, -
Tho’ Merlin sware that I should come again
To rule once more - but that what will be, be,
I am so deeply smitten thro’ the helm
That without help I cannot last till morn.
Thou therefore take my brand Excalibur,
Which was my pride: for thou rememberest how
In the old days, one summer noon, an arm
Rose up from out the bosom of the lake,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
Holding the sword - and how I row’d across
And took it, and have worn it, like a king:
And, wheresoever I am sung or told
In aftertime, this also shall be known:
But now delay not: take Excalibur,
And fling him far into the middle mere:
Watch what thou seest, and lightly bring me word.’

To him replied the bold Sir Bedivere:
‘It is not meet, Sir King, to leave thee thus,
Aidless, alone, and smitten thro’ the helm.
A little thing may harm a wounded man.
Yet I thy hest will all perform at full,
Watch what I see, and lightly bring thee word.’

So saying, from the ruin’d shrine he stept
And in the moon athwart the place of tombs,
Where lay the mighty bones of ancient men,
Old knights, and over them the sea-wind sang
Shrill, chill, with flakes of foam. He, stepping down
By zig-zag paths, and juts of pointed rock,
Came on the shining levels of the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o’er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled, as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem’d
Better to leave Excalibur conceal’d
There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded King.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
‘Hast thou perform’d my mission which I gave?
What is it thou hast seen? Or what hast heard?’

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
‘I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
And the wild water lapping on the crag.’

To whom replied King Arthur, faint and pale:
‘Thou hast betray’d they nature and thy name,
Not rendering true answer, as beseem’d
Thy fealty, nor like a noble knight:’
For surer sign had follow’d, either hand,
Or voice, or else a motion of the mere.
This is a shameful thing for men to lie.
Yet now, I charge thee, quickly go again
As thou art life and dear, and do the thing
I bad thee, watch, and lightly bring me word.’

Then went Sir Bedivere the second time
Across the ridge, and paced beside the mere,
Counting the dewy pebbles, fix’d in thought;
But when he saw the wonder of the hilt,
How curiously and strangely chased, he smote
His palms together, and he cried aloud,

‘And if indeed I cast the brand away,
Surely a precious thing, one worthy note,
Should thus be lost for ever from the earth,
Which might have pleased the eyes of many men.
What good should follow this, if this were done?
What harm, undone? deep harm to disobey,
Seeing obedience is the bond of rule.
Were it well to obey then, if a king demand
An act unprofitable, against himself?
The King is sick, and knows not what he does.
What record, or what relic of my lord
Should be to aftertime, but empty breath
And rumors of a doubt? but were this kept,
Stored in some treasure-house of mighty kings,
Some one might show it at a joust of arms,
Saying, “King Arthur’s sword, Excalibur,
Wrought by the lonely maiden of the Lake.
Nine years she wrought it, sitting in the deeps
Upon the hidden bases of the hills.”
So might some old men speak in the aftertime
To all people, winning reverence.
But now much honour and much fame were lost.’

So spake he, clouded with his own conceit,
And hid Excalibur the second time,
And so strode back slow to the wounded King.

Then spoke King Arthur, breathing heavily:
‘What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?’
And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
‘I heard the water lapping on the crag,
And the long ripple washing in the reeds.’

To whom replied King Arthur, much in wrath:
‘Ah, miserable and unkind, untrue,
Unknightly, traitor-hearted! Woe is me!
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow’d of the power in his eye
That bow’d the will. I see thee what thou art,
For thou, the latest-left of all my knights,
In whom should meet the offices of all,
Thou wouldst betray me for the precious hilt;
Either from lust of gold, or like a girl
Valuing the giddy pleasure of the eyes.
Yet, for a man may fail in duty twice,
And the third time may prosper, get thee hence:
But, if thou spare to fling Excalibur,
I will arise and slay thee with my hands.’

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And, leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch’d the sword,
And strongly wheel’d and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl’d in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the northern sea.
So flash’d and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt, and brandish’d him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.
And lightly went the other to the King.

Then spoke King Arthur, drawing thicker breath:
‘Now see I by thine eyes that this is done.
Speak out: what is it thou hast heard, or seen?’

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
‘Sir King, I closed mine eyelids, lest the gems
Should blind my purpose, for I never saw,
Nor shall see, here or elsewhere, till I die,
Not tho’ I live three lives of mortal men,
So great a miracle as yonder hilt.'
Then with both hands I flung him, wheeling him;
But when I look’d again, behold an arm,
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
That caught him by the hilt, and brandish’d him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.’

And answer made King Arthur, breathing hard:
‘My end draws nigh; ’tis time that I were gone.
Make broad thy shoulders to receive my weight,
And bear me to the margin; yet I fear
My wound hath taken cold, and I shall die.’

So saying, from the pavement he half rose,
Slowly, with pain, reclining on his arm,
And looking wistfully with wide blue eyes
As in a picture. Him Sir Bedivere
Remorsefully regarded thro’ his tears,
And would have spoken, but he found not words,
then took with care, and kneeling on one knee,
O’er both his shoulders drew the languid hands,
And rising bore him thro’ the place of tombs.

But, as he walk’d, King Arthur panted hard,
Like one that feels a nightmare on his bed
When all the house is mute. So sigh’d the King,
Muttering and murmuring at his ear, ‘Quick, quick!
I fear it is too late, and I shall die.’
But the other swiftly strode from ridge to ridge,
Clothed with his breath, and looking, as he walk’d,
Larger than human on the frozen hills.
He heard the deep behind him, and a cry
Before. His own thought drove him, like a goad.
Dry clash’d his harness in the icy caves
And barren chasms, and all to left and right
The bare black cliff clang’d round him, as he based
Sharp-smitten with the dint of armed heels -
And on a sudden, lo! the level lake,
And the long glories of the winter moon.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all decks were dense with stately forms
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream - by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold - and from them rose
A cry that shiver’d to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind, that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur’d Arthur, ‘Place me in the barge,’en
And to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.
But she, that rose the tallest of them all
And fairest, laid his head upon her lap,
And loosed the shatter’d casque, and chafed his hands,
And called him by his name, complaining loud,
And dropping bitter tears against his brow
Striped with dark blood: for all his face was white
And colourless, and like the wither’d moon
Smote by the fresh beam of the springing east;
And all his greaves and cuisses dash’d with drops
Of onset; and the light and lustrous curls -
That made his forehead like a rising sun
High from the daïs-throne - were parch’d dust;
Or, clotted into points and hanging loose,
Mix’d with the knightly growth that fringed his lips.
Not like that Arthur who, with lance in rest,
From spur to plume a star of tournament,
Shot thro’ the lists at Camelot, and charged
Before the eyes of ladies and of kings.

Then loudly cried the bold Sir Bedivere,
‘Ah! my Lord Arthur, whither shall I go?
Where shall I hide my forehead and my eyes?
For now I see the true old times are dead,
When every morning brought a noble chance,
And every chance brought out a noble knight.
Such times have been not since the light that led
The holy Elders with the gift of myrrh.
But now the whole ROUND TABLE is dissolved
Which was an image of the mighty world;
And I, the last, go forth companionless,
And the days darken round me, and the years,
Among new men, strange faces, other minds.’

And slowly answered Arthur from the barge:
‘The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfills Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?
I have lived my life, and that which I have done
My He within Himself make pure! But thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore, let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.
But now farewell. I am going a long way
With these thou seest - if indeed I go -
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt)
To the island-valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow’d, happy, fair with orchard-lawns
And bowery hollows crown’d with summer sea,
Where I heal me of my grievous wound.’

So said he, and the barge with oar and sail
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving with memories, till the hull
Look’d one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.