Stéphane Jettot:
“Trees from Dynastic to National Emblem”

in: Eric Hounshell, Ruth Amstutz (eds.):

cache 03

SHADOW OF THE TREE

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TREES FROM DYNASTIC TO NATIONAL EMBLEM Pedigrees Attacked



William Hogarth, *The Marriage Settlement* (ca. 1743), London: National Gallery, NG113.

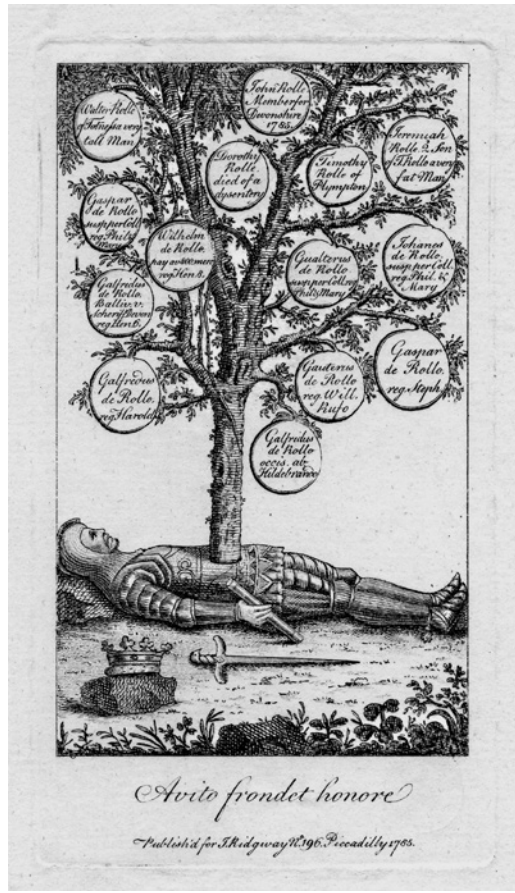
In *The Birth of a Consumer Society*, Neil McKendrick reflected on the emulative role played by nobles and gentlemen in the growing market economy. Hence, they were the prime target of ingenious entrepreneurs – manufacturers, craftsmen, and booksellers – not only as wealthy customers but also as their most convincing influencers.[1] Simultaneously, from a bottom-up perspective, aristocratic values were modified by the constraints of a larger market of consumers. In private libraries, many ornamented and heavy folios were replaced by smaller dictionaries and pocket-books. Similarly, how then were early-modern family trees, which adorned so many country houses and were devised and crafted by painters, heralds, and glassmakers, reshaped by the social and political transformations of the eighteenth century? During the first Hanoverians, most genealogical compilations published in London replaced printed family trees by alphabetical listings and tabular charts. Many social commentators and artists, ridiculed the possession of family pedigrees. Once seen as coveted family treasure, this artifact appeared, as in William Hogarth's *The Marriage Settlement* (ca. 1743), out of place and derisory in a metropolitan context. From the fifteenth century onward, trees of Jesse were used to promote the glory of the living members in the higher branches while the prime ancestor lay asleep on the ground.[2] Hogarth in his painting turned this logic on its head, as the gouty and ailing noble was the degenerate descendant of a once glorious duke of Normandy. Hogarth's tree is one of the many caricatures that used family trees to lambast a declining dynastic culture. Later in the century, when political radicalism

was at its peak, family trees were even used to launch personal attacks, as in James Ridgeway's *The Rolliad.*



Detail from William Hogarth, *The Marriage Settlement* (ca. 1743), London: National Gallery, NG113.

In the first painting of the famous *Marriage à la mode,* William Hogarth represented a gouty noble, Earl Squanderfield, who had lost his fortune and was therefore forced to marry his son into the mercantile class. Deprived of his son, unable to finish his country house which is seen in a state of semi-ruin in the background, he nonetheless proudly exhibited a decorated parchment of his pedigree.

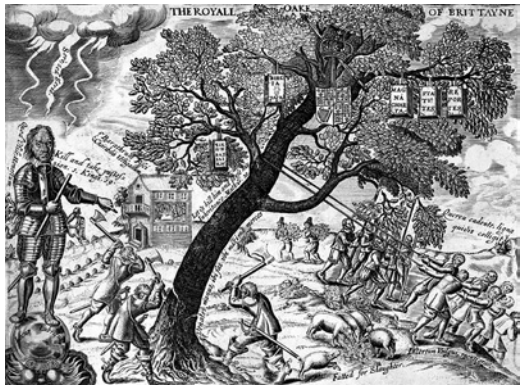


Avito frondet honore, Publish'd for J. Ridgway (1785), London: British Museum, BM: J,2.40.

In *The Rolliad*, a collective satire against the government, the publisher James Ridgeway inserted the burlesque pedigree of John Rolle, MP for Devon. Duke Rollo, the presumptive ancestor was depicted lying on the ground with his sword and Coronet while his latest descendants were introduced as "the most eminent of this great family": namely Walter Roll, a "very tall man," and Jeremiah, a "very fat man," and his mother Dorothy, whose main deed was to have died of dysentery.

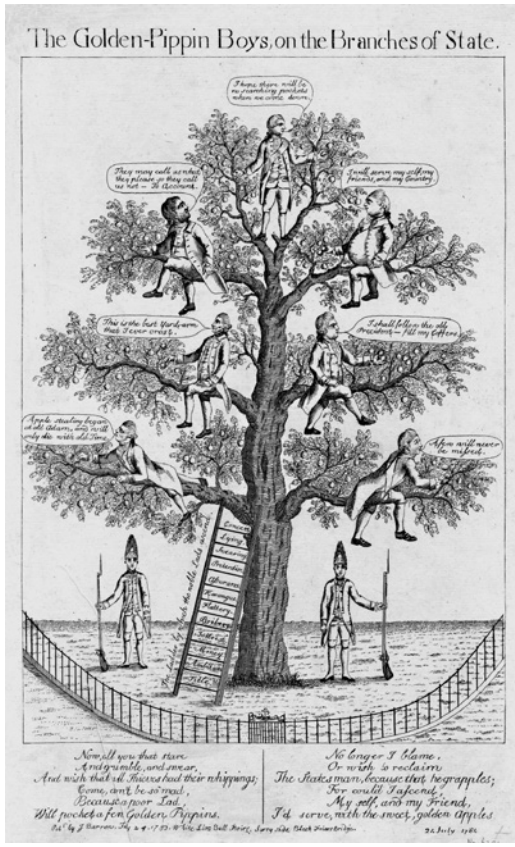
TREES FROM DYNASTIC TO NATIONAL EMBLEM Polysemic Trees

These puns and caricatures did not mean that tree-shaped diagrams definitely lost their visual and naturalistic appeal. We can only provide a brief outlook of a plurisecular evolution from a dynastic tree to a more inclusive symbol. During the first British revolution in the 1640s, the oak came to represent both the Stuart dynasty – identified by its coat of arms – and the Constitution. Later, during the eighteenth century, trees were increasingly used as a metaphor for the state and ceased to be linked to the Stuarts.



Frontispiece to Clement Walker's *Anarchie Anglicana, or, The History of Independency, the Second Part* (1649), London: British Library, BL : E.1052.

In this caricature by Clement Walker (The Royal Oake of Brittayne), Cromwell was accused of not only destroying the Stuart dynasty but also of unrooting the Bible, the Magna Carta, and the Statutes.



John Barrow, *The Golden-Pippin Boys, on the Branches of State* (1783), London: British Museum, BMSat 6248.



William Guthrie, *A Complete History of the English Peerage* (1763), Edinburgh: National Scottish Library, AB. 8.90.2.

In 1760, with the accession of George III and the promotion of a consensual British identity, Britannia came to be represented sitting under an oak.

Radical caricaturists were also inspired by the semantic richness of the state tree. In a 1783 caricature directed at the government, an apple tree simultaneously represented the state, its rewarding sinecures, the aspiring elite climbing up a social scale, and the tree of sin. Again, as in the case of John Rollo, those higher up in the tree were expected to be the more corrupted.

TREES FROM DYNASTIC TO NATIONAL EMBLEM Tree as Nation

In the tumultuous years of the American and French Revolutions, trees were remobilized to fulfill a more conservative and national agenda. As American and French revolutionaries successfully used the emblem of the liberty tree, British caricaturists came to use tree as a national and loyalist symbol.



James Gillray, *New Dynasty – or – The Little Corsican Gardiner Planting a Royal-Pippin-Tree* (1807).

In the war against Napoleon, James Gillray used the same oak tree, carrying the same emblems to create a startling contrast with the small trees planted by the dictators. While Napoleon was accused of planting a crop of illegitimate princes from his own family, the royal oak no longer represented a dynasty, or even the English kingdom but the whole British nation. It bears the following principles: "monarchy," "protestant faith," "integrity of the Lord," "independence of the Commons," and "liberty of the press."

Hence, the old dynastic tree came to be reinvented to suit a more inclusive and patriotic culture. These various examples provide only a snapshot of the remarkable creativity demonstrated by eighteenth-century London publishers and caricaturists in their reconfigurations of the early-modern dynastic trees.

Notes

1 Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, J. H. Plumb: *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press (1984).
2 Christiane Klapisch Zuber: *L'arbre des familles*, Paris: Edition de la Martinière (2009); Susan L. Green: *Tree of Jesse Iconography in Northern Europe in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, Farnham: Ashgate (2020).

Further Readings

Sarah Easterby-Smith, Emily Senior: "The Cultural Production of Natural Knowledge: Contexts, Terms, Themes", in: *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36/4 (2013), pp. 471–476.

Marc-Edouard Gautier: *Mille ans d'histoire de l'arbre généalogique en France,* Rennes: Ouest-France (2007).

Kilian Heck, Bernhard Jahn (eds.): *Genealogie als Denkform in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer (2000).

Stéphane Jettot: *Selling Ancestry: Family Directories and the Commodification of Genealogy in Eighteenth Century Britain,* Oxford: Oxford University Press (2023).