University of Tennessee, Knoxville

TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange

Doctoral Dissertations   Graduate School

5-2017

Re-Writing English Identity: Medieval Historians of Anglo-Norman Britain

Teresa Marie Lopez
University of Tennessee, Knoxville, tlopez@vols.utk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons, and the Medieval History Commons

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Teresa Marie Lopez entitled "Re-Writing English Identity: Medieval Historians of Anglo-Norman Britain." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Thomas Heffernan, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Laura Howes, R.M. Liuzza, Katherine Kong

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Re-Writing English Identity: Medieval Historians of Anglo-Norman Britain

A Dissertation Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Teresa Marie Lopez

May 2017

Dedication

To my husband, Eric Swanson, for all his tireless efforts in supporting my work.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Drs. Thomas Heffernan, Laura Howes, R.M. Liuzza, and Katherine Kong for their support and guidance throughout this dissertation process and my graduate experience. Their assistance made it possible for me to complete this project, and their expertise helped shape and sharpen the focus of my writing. Special thanks as well to the English Department's Director of Graduate Studies, Dr. Dawn Coleman, for providing continued support and advice throughout my studies.

I would also like to thank all of my colleagues and friends for encouraging me to complete my writing, especially Tara Ralph and Eric Swanson.

Abstract

My dissertation uses post-colonial and narrative theories to examine the historiographic tradition of twelfth-century England. This investigation explores the idea of nationhood in pre-modern England and the relationship between history and romance in post-Conquest historical writings. I analyze how Geoffrey of Monmouth, Henry of Huntingdon Geffrei Gaimar, and Laȝamon imagine and narrate the explicit changes to the ruling elite in twelfth-century England, and how this process constructs their idea of "Englishness."

Table of Contents

Introduction: Conquest, History, and Romance in Twelfth-Century England

In the late twelfth century (ca.1179) *Dialogus de Scaccario*[1] by Richard Fitz Nigel, the

discipulus and *magister* discuss the question of murder in an exchange that reveals more about

post-Conquest national identity than criminal activities. The *magister* defines the crime thusly:

"Murdrum enim idem est quod absconditum uel occultum" (X 80).[2] The *magister*'s definition is

colored by the conflicts between Saxons and Normans: "In primitiuo itaque regni statu post

conquisitionem qui relicti fuerant de Anglicis subactis, in suspectam et exosam sibi

Normannorum gentem latenter ponebant insidias, et passim ipsos in nemoribus et locis remotis,

nacta opportunitate, clanculo iugulabant" (X 80).[3] Most often, the *magister* claims, the murder of

a Norman was punished with a *murdro debet*, to which the *discipulus* asks if a similar

punishment is administered for the murder of an Englishman. The *magister* replies, "A prima

institutione non debet sicut audisti, set iam cohabitantibus Anglicis et Normannis et alterutrum

uxores ducentibus uel nubentibus, sic permixte sunt nationes ut uix decerni possit hodie, de

liberis loquor, quis Normannus sit genere…" (X 83).[4] This short, imagined dialogue represents

not only the unrest in the immediate aftermath of the Norman Conquest but also the eventual

blending of two combative cultures, the English (Anglo-Saxons) and the Normans. How is such

"mixing" achieved within the hundred years between the Conquest and the publication of Fitz

Nigel's *Dialogus*? Clues regarding the dissolution of stringent political and cultural boundaries

---

[1] All quotes and translations come from Emilie Amt's 2007 edition and translation of the text.
[2] For 'murder' means something concealed or hidden.
[3] In the state the kingdom was in just after the Conquest, those who were left of the defeated English secretly plotted against the mistrusted and hated Normans, and now and then, when they had the chance, clandestinely murdered them everywhere in woods and secluded places.
[4] It wasn't so at first, as you have heard, but now, with the English and the Normans living side by side and intermarrying, the two nations are so mixed that today one can scarcely distinguish who is English and who is Norman…

between Saxon and Norman can be traced through other literature of the twelfth century, namely histories.

History and historians become key to understanding the delicate balance of conquest and colonialism throughout time as writers respond to the contextual issues of their period. For the medieval period, Robert W. Hanning performs a comprehensive analysis of the early medieval "historical imagination" in his book *The Vision of History in Early Britain*. Closely examining Bede, Gildas, Nennius, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, Hanning is specifically concerned with studying the precommitments of the authors and the thematic concerns of their works. While the text performs an extremely thorough analysis of early medieval England's historical writings, it addresses Anglo-Norman historians only as they pertain to the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Hanning cannot easily explain the brevity of their existence, remarking, "A categorization of the factors which militated against the continuation of the work of William, Henry, and Orderic lies outside the scope of this study, and perhaps of modern scholarship" (173). However, Hanning does suggest a possible explanation: "The passing of Geoffrey's generation signaled the disappearance of an all-inclusive medieval historical imagination; thereafter we must make an important and unequivocal distinction between two separate traditions: the historical vision, and the romantic vision" (176). According to Hanning, the influence of *history* as a comprehensive genre gave way to romance after the twelfth century, based largely on the influence of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*HRB*). From that point on, King Arthur and the chivalric stories of his court became firmly entrenched in the historical representation of the matter of Britain.

I find the perspective on Anglo-Norman histories represented by Hanning's work inadequate. The lack of exploration on the "historical vision" of twelfth- and even early thirteenth-century

historians leaves a real gap in scholarly understanding of the shift from history to romance. And how non-historical are these romances really? British medieval history may have shifted in terms of its thematic concerns and authorial tone, but overall, we can see similar traits within the histories of this period. Historical writings appear to mediate the conflict between what the country was and what it might become. Following the Norman Conquest and subsequent colonization of Anglo-Saxon Britain, historians of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds create a vision of a post-colonial Britain, which involves a process of legitimizing Norman rule while de-legitimizing the previous political regime partially as a means of currying favor with the new ruling class.

This particular exigence, soliciting patronage, allows historians to compose a new English identity. Indeed, these writers seem to embrace the new Norman elite as an ideological consequence of colonialism. The Britons were conquered by the Saxons in the earlier historiographic tradition, and these writers expect, and accept, that the ruling Saxons would be overthrown by another invading force as the narrative of history continues. In affirming a new political identity, the past must be erased symbolically by relegating it to the narrative space of history where it can no longer affect the present. This process is not easily undertaken, and the tensions between shifting allegiances are not easily eradicated from the historical works of the period. For example, Geoffrey chooses to highlight the Welsh resistance to the Saxons in his history, a clear example of the violent reactions to a conquering culture. In fact, it is these particular moments of literary negotiation, the transformation of the disputes and anxieties of real events into a literary vision of history, that are the most intriguing to examine and the most essential to forming a political and ethnic identity for England. In this dissertation, I pay close critical attention to the representation of differing cultural groups, like the Welsh and the

Normans, to observe the symbolic acceptance of the enforced change to the country's political

and social identity.

Utilizing the historical writings of various post-Conquest historians, I examine the author, the

audience, and the text rhetorically—in terms of context, exigence, purpose, and constraints—as

well as narratologically, understanding how these histories work as narratives of shifting identity

from British to English.[5] Because these writers work within a system of patronage, I do not

overlook that these histories were written for the entertainment, education, and/or adulation of a

specific audience. I consider what motivates a writer to probe through the past, with and without

reliable sources, and create a history. My analysis considers both what is written about the past,

present, and even future of England and what is not. Primarily, my concern is how each author

responds to the events of the present through representations of the distant and not-so distant

past. The crafting of history in this period, for various reasons that will be explored in each

chapter, was shaped by the personal motivations of the authors much more so than in previous

periods.

History as a Genre in the Twelfth Century

Examining the contextual and rhetorical situation of each history requires that my

dissertation consider the function of literary history at this specific moment in British history.

Monika Otter's historiographic work[6] in post-Norman England indicates the difficulty of

---

[5] In general, the term British or Briton is applied to the native inhabitants of the island, those conquered by the Romans and later by the Anglo-Saxons, who are later referred to as Welsh. The cultural labels of the differing tribal factions of medieval Britain are varied and nuanced, but I will refer to these different groups as the Britons (Welsh), the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans (Anglo-Normans post Conquest), and finally as the English, an ethnicity made of up of the blending of Anglo-Saxon, Norman, and Briton cultures.

[6] Otter's "1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest," *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing*, and "Proxlixitas Temporum: Futurity in Medieval Historical Narratives" all focus on the Norman Conquest's effect on historical writings. Full bibliographic information for these works can be found in the works cited section.

highlighting a historian's response to the crucial "moment of transition" from Anglo-Saxon to Norman. As such, I pay critical and analytical attention to the early historical work of Bede, Alfred's *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*), Gildas, and the post-Norman histories and chronicles by authors like Geoffrey of Monmouth and Geffrei Gaimar. Historians like Bede and Gildas focus on the shift from Briton to Saxon rule on the island, providing a model for later historians recording a similar transition in the ruling elite.

The work of a historian involves using a set of events to create the stories that become the historical truth. Hayden White first postulated that historical writing is a creative process in his seminal work, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. While White focused specifically on nineteenth-century European histories, his overall theory regarding the historical imagination applies across periods:

> Histories (and philosophies of history as well) combine a certain amount of "data," theoretical concepts for "explaining" these data, and a narrative structure for their presentation as an icon of sets of events presumed to have occurred in times past. In addition, I maintain, they contain a deep structural content which is generally poetic, and specifically linguistic, in nature, and which serves as the precritically accepted paradigm of what a distinctively "historical" explanation should be. (ix)

For White, the writing of history is an act of explanation, looking to past events and crafting them into a narrative that attempts to explain how events unfolded and what effect those events have on the present condition. In this way, the historian performs a creative function in crafting a history of a certain period in the past in order to explain the significance of the past. There are many modes of explanation occurring in history writing, but ultimately "…the historian performs an essentially poetic act, in which he prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain

upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain 'what was *really* happening' in it" (White x). That the work of a historian involves somewhat verifiable dates, events, names, genealogies, and other factual data does not conceal the fact that, while they are not entirely inventing stories as a fiction writer would, historians still exercise interpretative judgment in choosing the stories to tell, framing these stories in terms of "the beginning" and "the end," and projecting a specific perspective on those events, even if this is not their deliberate intention. Because the historian's own "specific theories" influence his perspective on what "really" happened, investigation into the motivations and background of each historian becomes essential to reading and interpreting history.

Medieval scholars have applied White's conception of history to the works of many historiographers; Otter believes this critical perspective is especially important during the period following the Norman Conquest. Because Otter reads history as a narrative, she wishes to examine the historian's reaction to not just the past and the future but also, specifically, the present:

> All definitions of narrative, from Aristotle onwards, revolve around some three-part structure of beginning, middle, and end…the middle is what makes the narrative a narrative. Thus, even those historical narratives that most wish to avoid the moment of 1066—because it is personally painful, or potentially offensive to the writer's patrons and audience, or simply confusing and hard to handle technically—draw attention to the transition, if only by their conspicuous avoidance. ("1066," 567)

Otter's focus on the historical handling of this transitional moment in British identity provides a unique perspective that helps guide my own work. The attention drawn to the moment of transition by the historians' direct reference to it or "conspicuous avoidance" of it will be

important to note as part of my analysis. My dissertation considers how the contemporary cultural and political climate of the writer's time affects representations of the past. The individual motivations, political uncertainty, and social expectations of each historian can and do alter the vision of Britain created in his history.

As Hanning's work points out, there was a renewed interest in recording history at this moment of transition in British rule because of the shift in the ruling class as well as the increasing popularity of written records. I investigate what was distinct about this historiographic tradition and how the work of the historian framed the culture of the period. For one, histories of this period tended to focus more attention on the individual rather than just the collective. Individuals (both real and imagined), like King Arthur, Havelok the Dane, and William Rufus, become the focal point of post-Conquest histories more so than in earlier narratives, and, as the historians craft them as exemplary warriors and kings, they become representations for their own cultural backgrounds and ethnicities, thereby advancing the author's own political/ethnic allegiances into the larger narrative of British cultural identity. Hanning contends, "Most importantly, the exegetical parallel between personal and national levels of history grew markedly weaker, implying a conscious or unconscious revaluation on the part of the historian of the link between the history of salvation and national history" (125-26). I find that the relationship between the personal narratives of real and imagined figures and the grand narrative of British history provides ample material for analysis, especially when focusing on the historians' perception of the individual's contribution to the conception of national history.

Additionally, the individual narratives of famous historical and fictional characters become valuable historical commodities to the conquering culture. In claiming the island and its inhabitants, the Normans may also claim the history of the isle as a reflection of their own

cultural superiority. In essence, the story of one individual reflects the collective struggles and achievements of their culture. Arthur, Havelok, and Rufus are imbued with positive attributes and, with each victory, glorify both themselves and their people. By closely analyzing how these historical and/or fictional figures "fit" into the historian's vision of British history, I can expose the personal motivations and goals for the author, as well as his perception of differing cultures.

During this period of significant cultural change, a number of authors created their own visions of British history. The list of twelfth-century historians is extensive, including Orderic Vitalis, William of Newburgh, William of Malmesbury, and Eadmer, but my dissertation will focus specifically on four historians who best display the various methods, themes, languages, and styles of this historiographic tradition. Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Geffrei Gaimar, and, to a lesser extent, Laȝamon witnessed one of the most turbulent reigns of the Anglo-Norman period, and this disruption may expose common anxieties of both the elite and the clergy regarding the changing political identity of the country. From 1135 to 1154, King Stephen's [1095–1154] reign was challenged by his cousin Empress Matilda [1102–1167], the daughter and heir of King Henry I [1068-1135]. Later historians referred to the period as the "Nineteen-Year Winter" or "the Anarchy," but an entry in the *ASC* (as found in the Peterborough Manuscript) describes this time of turmoil in the 1137 entry as such: "War sæ me tielde, þe erthe ne bar nan corn, for þe land was al fordon mid suilce dædes, hi sæden openlice ðat Crist slep his halechen. Suilc mare þanne we cunnen sæin we þolenden .xix. wintre for ure sinnes" (Irvine 135).[7] The "things" referred to in the *ASC*, as well as those the chronicler cannot express, indicate a period marked by uncertainty and turmoil.

---

[7] Wherever men tilled, the earth bore no corn because the land was all done with such doings; and they said openly that Christ and His Saints slept. Such things, and more than we know how to tell, we suffered 19 years for our sins.

With this historical and political background in mind, I trace how those tensions are exposed when characterizing and narrativizing the history of the Welsh in relation to the rest of Britain. Henry, Geoffrey, and Gaimar composed their historical visions of England as the legitimacy of King Stephen's reign was constantly tested by Matilda. One chapter of my dissertation focuses on the re-working of Geoffrey's history into Laȝamon's *Brut*, a piece that signals the transition to a new vernacular language, as it is written in English. Laȝamon's source, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, represents a mixture of Welsh, English, and French influences, which are apparent in Laȝamon's poetic vision of British history. Each of these historians culled their stories from essentially the same resources, but each came up with their own unique visions of British history. Geoffrey, Laȝamon, and Wace composed histories placing King Arthur, a character largely derived from Gildas, as the most significant figure in British history. Others like Gaimar and Henry are less concerned with creating a narrative centered on one individual, especially the figure of Arthur, who remains absent from both of these histories. In addition, Geoffrey and Henry create prose histories, in contrast to the poetic style of Gaimar, Wace, and Laȝamon. These differences, as well as the linguistic differences between each author, help make my analysis of the historical conventions of the period more comprehensive than Hanning's, and display how divergent the historiographical tradition becomes during the twelfth century.

Ethnicity and Political Identity

Analyzing the context and constraints of the period is integral to my project, which ultimately aims to reconstruct the conditions that led to a shift in the characteristics of British identity and culture. The influx of histories in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries creates specific questions about English culture at this time. Anglo-Saxon England gave way to an Anglo-Norman culture following the Norman Conquest, leading to noticeable differences in

language, literature, and conceptions of Englishness. This dissertation examines how the histories of Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Geffrei Gaimar, and Laȝamon each represent the changing culture of England and the establishment of a uniquely English identity. Part of my analysis focuses on the specific problems of composing an English history that advances this hybridized culture of Norman and English during a time of political turmoil.

Questions of ethnicity and political divisions are particularly complex in the medieval period; they are even more complicated following the Norman Conquest and subsequent colonization of England. While it is misleading to consider "ethnicity" in the medieval period as synonymous with modern ideas of the term, it is clear that writers of the period had a sense of the differences marking the cultural borders between Anglo-Saxon, Welsh, and Norman. I consider Patrick Geary's notion of medieval ethnicity to be the most helpful to my conception of ethnicity in this period. To understand what is meant by different ethnic identities in the medieval period, medieval works should be analyzed in terms of when and how differences between people are signaled in the text (Geary 3). Ethnic difference is most often indicated by variations in language, origin, and political loyalty. However, as Geary indicates, reading about ethnic differences means noticing not only how but also when these distinctions are described. I examine each author's specific literary purposes to determine how ethnicity is indicated and described in his history. With this knowledge, I can scrutinize the particular instances where the author refers to ethnic difference.

In examining these works, linguistic distinctions, in both the language of the author and that of the historical figures represented, indicate the most significant feature for determining ethnic and political identity, as well as for marking the transformation from Anglo-Saxon to Anglo-Norman England. As the language of the elite changes from the English and Latin of Anglo-

Saxon England into the Anglo-Norman vernacular, so do the cultural characteristics of medieval England. The vernacular language of the people experienced changes to its vocabulary and syntax, and the written language of texts shifted from the Latin of the educated clergy and elite to the vernacular of Gaimar's *Estoire* and Wace and Laȝamon's *Brut*. Vernacular texts like these indicate changes to the written culture of the time and the importance of accessibility in language.

Hanning's evaluation of medieval historical imagination and the early medieval histories of Britain provides one way of accessing the specific approaches of historians from Bede through Geoffrey, but his argument stops short of fully examining the significance of twelfth-century historiography. In a more recent work, Michelle Warren analyzes how tensions arising from the shift in both physical and ideological borders appeared in Arthurian histories of the period:

> In fact, the Arthurian histories made canonical by medievalist criticism all emerged from border cultures and engage the dynamics of boundary formation into the thirteenth century and across the Channel. As writers responded to the disruptions in their contemporary landscapes by narrating the histories of Insular jurisdictions, Arthurian historiography took shape as a form of border writing. (xi)

The "disruptions" of the Saxon/Norman border and the continued disputes of the Welsh/British border repeatedly make their mark on Arthurian histories. Warren's ideas provide a perspective on the significance of twelfth-century historiography that uses contemporary post-colonial theory to analyze social and political relationships in literature of the medieval period, which will be helpful to my dissertation.

Warren's work is also dependent on the post-colonial theories of Homi Bhabha who, in *The Location of Culture*, carries on the work of Edward Said but claims that in a post-colonial

environment, multiculturalism is actually more of a cultural hybridity. His argument relies on this same idea of areas of intersection between both physical and metaphoric borders:

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These "in-between" spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal— that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha 2)

According to Bhabha, the personal or political "self" is only truly defined in moments where political, ethnic, and social differences are recognized. And this is ultimately where the idea of the nation is formed: "It is in the emergence of the interstices—the overlap and displacement of domains of difference—that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated" (Bhabha 2). Within the histories of Geoffrey, Henry, Gaimar, and Laȝamon, we can witness the "overlap and displacement" of difference as well as the formation of the English nation.

My work will shift from Warren's focus on the figure of Arthur and his sword Excalibur and Bhabha's modern conception of multiculturalism to show how historiography in the post-Conquest period is specifically concerned with not only shifting physical borders but the shifting borders of identity as well, such as linguistic change and cultural representation. To do so, I analyze the historical writings within a post-colonial tradition, but I also move beyond one specific character or symbol of each culture and analyze the construction of the history as a process of blending these ethnic differences into a narrative of English identity. Specifically, I examine the changing emphasis on "British" culture to "English" culture by following the

chronological progression of histories from secular clergy writing within the post-colonial climate of King Stephen's reign. The post-colonial environment of the period can be traced mostly through the alterations of the language, culminating with the use of English in Laȝamon's *Brut*. I necessarily view the historians and the individuals singled out in their histories as intermediaries for the collective experience of this cultural shift.

Using White's conception of history as narrative and Bhabha's theories about ideological borders and cultural hybridization in post-colonial environments, I analyze how Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey, Gaimar, and Laȝamon imagine and narrate the explicit changes to the ruling elite and the implicit alterations to the idea of England. As anachronistic as post-colonial theory may seem within the medieval context, my dissertation shows that these theoretical models accurately reflect the personal and collective responses to political and social shifts in cultures of both medieval and modern times. That the vocabulary did not exist during the medieval period does not mean notions of nation, ethnicity, and post-colonialism did not exist in some form, which might be different than our contemporary definitions. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* is one of the first critical works to claim that the nation is a social construct "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6-7). Following in this same vein, V. H. Galbraith claims, "A nation may be defined as any considerable group of people who believe they are one; and their nationalism as the state of mind which sustains this belief" (113). It is these definitions of nationhood and the related terminology (colonialism and post-colonialism) that will be form the basis of my use of these terms in the dissertation. Following the Norman Conquest, there was indeed a sense of disruption to the idea of medieval nationality in England, but these historians play a crucial part

of forming narratives that join the disparate cultures together under one English identity.

According to Galbraith, the most defining feature of the medieval English nation was language. And more recently, Kathy Lavezzo's *Imagining a Medieval English Nation* applies Anderson's concept to the medieval period, in which the English people did have an established sense of nationality under the Anglo-Saxon culture that was then conquered and colonized by the Normans. This theoretical understanding of nationhood allows me to examine how the allegiances of each author affect the tone and focus of his piece, how he is influenced by the sources he uses (or claims to use), how he represents the "present" in his history, and how national identity is constructed therein. Most importantly, I use these theorists to understand how an individual's story, both the historian's and the protagonist's, relates to the history of Britain. I also investigate the historians and their histories with questions more specifically related to their individual goals.

<u>History and Romance</u>

Much of my project also involves questioning the idea of genre, especially when dealing with romance and history. The binary structure set up by Hanning is useful in determining the distinctions between what Geoffrey and later historians are doing with history and how they diverge from the work of historians like Bede and Gildas. However, I do not believe Geoffrey intended to create something so very different from the work of his predecessors. Like the other historians of this period, Geoffrey could not help but be influenced by the earlier historiographical tradition and attempted to legitimize his work by using many of the same techniques as these writers, such as referencing credible sources and creating a sense of authority for the history. Regardless of the intentions of the works, many of these histories contain

elements that we refer to as romantic.[8] The intertwining of the romantic and historiographic

traditions of this period provides the individual narratives that are so attractive to my

dissertation. When the authors focus on specific characters—King Arthur, Havelok, etc.—and

expand minor recordings in a chronicle into longer narratives, the history becomes imbued with a

subtext that should illuminate the specific concerns and interests of each author, especially with

regards to the ethnic background of these characters. In addition, the romantic/historiographic

genre of twelfth-century England provides access to a major period of British medieval history—

the Norman Conquest.

Current scholarship on post-Norman England has progressed much since Hanning's *Vision*,

especially in the works of Otter, Michael Faletra, R. William Leckie, and Jocelyn Wogan-

Browne. Today, some scholars closely examine the specific constraints, thematic concerns, and

goals of historians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but few scholarly works focus on such

disparate historians working in close historical proximity to one another to accomplish a similar

cultural goal, the blending of the disparate cultural identities. Therefore, I believe this project is a

necessary examination of historical writing following the Norman Conquest. My dissertation fills

this critical gap and traces the shift from Anglo-Saxon cultural traditions to Anglo-Norman and,

ultimately, to the late medieval conception of Englishness. Like many of the historians that I

---

[8] Medieval scholars contentiously debate the standard definition of the romance genre, but semantically speaking the term *romans* was used to differentiate between texts written in the vernacular and those written in Latin. As John Finlayson contends, "Though ambiguity in the meaning of 'romance' is partly linguistic, literary studies of chivalric narratives have served to compound the confusion, rather than clarify it…the curious mingling of a recognition of the difference between the actuality of medieval romance and the nineteenth century's vision and expectations of it… seems to have bedevilled discussion of the Middle English romance" (48). Over time the genre expanded from mere language distinction to a literary form, one distinguished from others based on the use of certain genre conventions. However, W.R.J. Barron, in *English Medieval Romance*, contends the romance should be defined in terms of "mode" and not genre: "At the heart of the romance mode in all its manifestations certain values remain constant.…Whatever genre the romance mode may adopt, they find expression through the same conventional motifs: the mysterious challenge or summons to a mission; the lonely journey through hostile territory; the first sight of the beloved; the single combat against overwhelming odds or a monstrous opponent" (4-5).

examine in this dissertation, I am mostly concerned with uncovering the origins of the English

identity as it was constructed during this period, which will provide a clearer portrait of this

period of medieval England and the people who occupied it. Reconstructing the political climate,

rulers, and familial disputes in which the authors composed their histories will show how

literature can ease the transition of cultural change.[9] The following chapter summaries provide a

brief outline of the specific questions and concerns I have for each text. All of these questions

should lead to a better understanding of when and how medieval English nationhood is

imagined, and how cultural differences are assimilated into (or rejected from) this picture.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1: Geoffrey's History and Historia: The Function of a Pseudo-History

The influence of Geoffrey's *HRB*[10] [1123–1139] on English historiography and the romantic

tradition is well known to scholars who study medieval England. For the purposes of this study, I

will consider not only how Geoffrey's *HRB* eclipsed other historical writers of the time but also

the effect his work had on the changing landscape of medieval literature. In addition, the

significant impact Geoffrey's text had on the literary and historical landscape of England makes

it necessary to explore the authorial choices Geoffrey made as he composed his history. Often his

HRB is considered more of a pseudo-history, but accuracy in representation is not as integral to a

study of the literary qualities of historical writing. However, Geoffrey's claims for the history of

Britain, while not wholly divergent from other origin stories in continental Europe, are blatantly

implausible and were questioned by his contemporaries. I examine what sources Geoffrey used

---

[9] See the genealogical table on page 22 for the rulers most integral to the political and historical context of these writers.

[10] This dissertation uses Michael D. Reeve's 2007 edition and translation of *De Gestis Britonum* [*Historia Regum Britanniae*], as it is the most comprehensive compilation of all existing manuscripts of Geoffrey's *HRB*. In addition, I will be using the translation provided in this text by Neil Wright, a renowned Geoffrey scholar. See the works cited page for full bibliographic information.

and why he veered from the established British historical representations of Bede and Gildas with his own fabricated Welsh (British) source. In claiming a specifically British source for his history, Geoffrey creates many questions about his motivations and techniques. For example, why does Geoffrey even make this claim to a specifically Celtic source when such a source has never been located? Such authorial choices suggest a specific rhetorical purpose beyond an attempt to seem like an expert on the subject.

In continuing to analyze the text, it will also be imperative to examine this rhetorical purpose in terms of audience and context. What is the relationship between the *HRB* and its Anglo-Norman audience? More specifically, what was Geoffrey attempting to gain by composing a British history for a Norman audience? Most importantly, if Geoffrey was hoping to impress the ruling Normans, why would he focus so much attention on a specifically Welsh hero like Arthur? Understanding the specific context and constraints of the time period and geographic location in which Geoffrey is composing expose more about the author's intent for his history.

The ultimate goal of this chapter is to reveal how this historical narrative feeds into the grander narrative of national identity. How are cultural identities represented in the work? How does the narrative work as a piece of early English nationalism? How does it formulate English identity within the contemporary climate of its conception? Geoffrey aims to create a unique brand of British history, but not solely for the purposes of gaining a suitable patron. His highly-fictionalized history of the conquering of the Britons reflects a desire to explain, justify, and enhance the transformation of post-Conquest England.

Chapter 2: Translating and Transforming Arthurian Historiography in Laȝamon's Brut

Historical writings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries could easily be divided into Arthurian and non-Arthurian texts. Tracing the influence of Geoffrey's *HRB* on historical

narratives, the second chapter of my dissertation focuses on another Arthurian history. Wace responded to the popularity of Geoffrey's *HRB* by translating and expanding the work into his own verse history, *Roman de Brut*[11] [1150–55], written in the Norman language. The project was completed by 1155, after King Stephen's reign ended. Wace's work was used as a source for the Middle English *Brut*.[12] Composed sometime between 1185 and 1216, Laȝamon's *Brut* is the only text in my study composed outside of the reign of King Stephen. However, both Wace's and Laȝamon's texts represent the transition from earlier forms of historical writing into the more romantic traditions that followed Geoffrey's *HRB*; in addition, the texts indicate a shift from Latin-based writing into Middle English, a significant marker of the hybridized culture of Anglo-Norman England.

Laȝamon translated Wace's *Roman de Brut* from the Norman language into an English poem about British origins and history. *Brut*'s linguistic features are the most integral to an illustration of the destruction of the borders between the two cultures. As Kenneth Tiller notes, "On the level of translation, … Laȝamon establishes an implicit link between the territorial advances of the Norman conquerors and the efforts of Anglo-Norman historical authors to translate English historical texts and exposes the writing of history as a linguistic process, an act of *translatio* that establishes its own legitimacy by appropriating the historical texts of others" (20). The history of the Britons (Welsh), as represented in Geoffrey's *HRB*, is used to further legitimize Norman rule. The layers of historical influences and linguistic differences between the *HRB*, *Roman de Brut*,

---

[11] This dissertation uses Judith Weiss's 1999 edition and translation of the *Roman de Brut*. Full bibliographic information can be found on the works cited page.

[12] All quotations of the text will come from the British Museum MS. Cotton Caligula A.IX found online at *Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse* supported by the University of Michigan (full bibliographic information available on the works cited page). As Barron and S. C. Weinberg's edition and translation of *Laȝamon's Brut or Hystoria Brutonum* make clear, the "generally high quality of the Caligula Text, presenting comparatively few textual problems considering its length, suggests the scribe carefully reproduced the idiom of the original composition," making it ideal for use in this dissertation (ix). Translations of the text come from Barron and Weinberg's edition.

and *Brut* make these texts prime examples of how histories of the period reflect the newly

hybridized culture of England, one which transcribes its history over the older historiography.

This chapter examines the process of translation and how the re-interpretation of Geoffrey's

text embodies a new historical and cultural tradition for the period. In examining the work, I ask

questions regarding the author's motivations, the linguistic features of the poem, and how the

contemporary political climate affected the composition of the work. In addition, I analyze how

this text fits into the historical tradition of its predecessors in the twelfth century. In these stories,

the figure of King Arthur transforms from the Welsh hero of a French text about British history

in Wace's text into an English king in Laʒamon's *Brut*. The transformation of this specific

character and his court reflects the changing cultural environments in which each history was

composed.

Chapter 3: Henry of Huntingdon's Historicizing of the Present

On the non-Arthurian side of history is Henry of Huntingdon, whose *Historia Anglorum*

(*HA*)[13] [1123–1154] so wholly avoids the exaggerations and fabrications of Geoffrey's *HRB* that

the author returns to his work repeatedly throughout his lifetime to update and revise with new

historical data. Henry is particularly important to this study because of these revision to his *HA*,

which took place between 1129 and 1154. His work, therefore, should be more influenced by the

present, as changes in the political climate became more apparent when examining what is

revised, expanded, and edited in the history. Henry's work is integral to understanding the

process of narrativizing history and illustrating how authorial preference can alter the recording

of history. Using primarily Bede and the *ASC*, Henry's vision of history may tell a similar story

to that of Gaimar, who also uses the *ASC*, but my focus is on the divergences between these two

---

[13] For the purposes of this chapter, I will be using Diana Greenway's edition and translation of Henry's *Historia Anglorum*. Full bibliographic information can be found on the works cited page.

historians, specifically their religious concerns. Henry's *HA* creates historical order through

God's judgement and punishment while Gaimar avoids ecclesiastical matters.

In an attempt to consider how Henry's history contributes to the reworking of separate

British identities—Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and Welsh—into the beginnings of

Englishness, this chapter focuses not only on how the author uses his sources to re-create the

narrative of British history from the Romans through the Norman colonization but also on how

ethnic distinctions are represented in the history. I also examine how the influences of Henry's

familial, ethnic, and political background affect his imagining of British history and, ultimately,

English identity. His patron, Alexander of Blois (named in the dedicatory preface), should be

considered his primary audience, affecting the composition, themes, and tone of his work. His

influence is important to my investigation. Like Geoffrey, Henry remains faithful to the language

of the earlier historiographic tradition, but his use of Latin and religious morality to tell the

history of the island seem to alienate him from the vernacular traditions of other historical

writers. This chapter answers a few key research questions, including: What is the author's

perspective on the Norman rulers, particularly the less successful ones, and the post-colonial

condition of Anglo-Norman England? Additionally, how does Henry historicize current events?

Chapter 4: Geffrei Gaimar's Blending of History, Romance, and Cultural Identity

Gaimar's *Estoire de Engleis* (*Estoire*)[14] [1141-1150], while technically not focused on

Arthurian-based history because those parts did not survive, does show some of the French

romantic influences that can be noted in Geoffrey's *HRB*. Thus far, there is more critical

attention paid to the language of Gaimar's text than to the work's contribution to the historical

tradition of the twelfth century. *Estoire* is "the oldest surviving work of historiography in the

---

[14] For this chapter, I will be using Ian Short's 2009 edition and translation of the *Estoire des Engleis*. See the works cited page for full bibliographic information.

French vernacular," and the piece itself is part of a larger chronicle that is no longer available (Short ix). Judging from the epilogue, Gaimar opened his history with an exploration of the Trojan roots of the Britons, similar to the story given by Geoffrey of Monmouth. The rest of the work is a verse interpretation of the *ASC*. In addition to the scant critical work on the *Estoire*, little is known about the author himself, though we can make some assertions about his possible educational background based upon the sources he uses. This chapter works with what evidence is available about the author by examining his very specific audience for the *Estoire*.

As with the other historical texts in this dissertation, I claim that Gaimar's *Estoire* offers a post-colonial historiographic perspective on the Norman Conquest, which draws on not only the earlier tradition of Anglo-Saxon history, the *ASC*, but also on the post-Norman romantic tradition of Geoffrey's *HRB*. The romance genre's focus on the deeds of specific chivalric/heroic figures and adventure is reflected in Gaimar's construction of a narrative history from the chronological events of the *ASC*. Gaimar's history distinguishes itself from the other historical works of the period by re-imagining the Anglo-Saxon history of England in the language and literary tradition of the Normans. His use of the vernacular provides an opportunity to analyze the importance of language in establishing and representing shifting political allegiances for those who were dependent on the patronage of the Norman elite. In this chapter, I examine what contemporary historical events may have influenced Gaimar's history and how the post-colonial condition of Anglo-Norman England may have been part of the reason for composing this history. Why does Gaimar focus on particular figures, like Havelok the Dane, who do not figure so prominently in other histories? What is distinctive about Gaimar's position in Anglo-Norman England? What affect does his French background have on the construction of his chronicle?
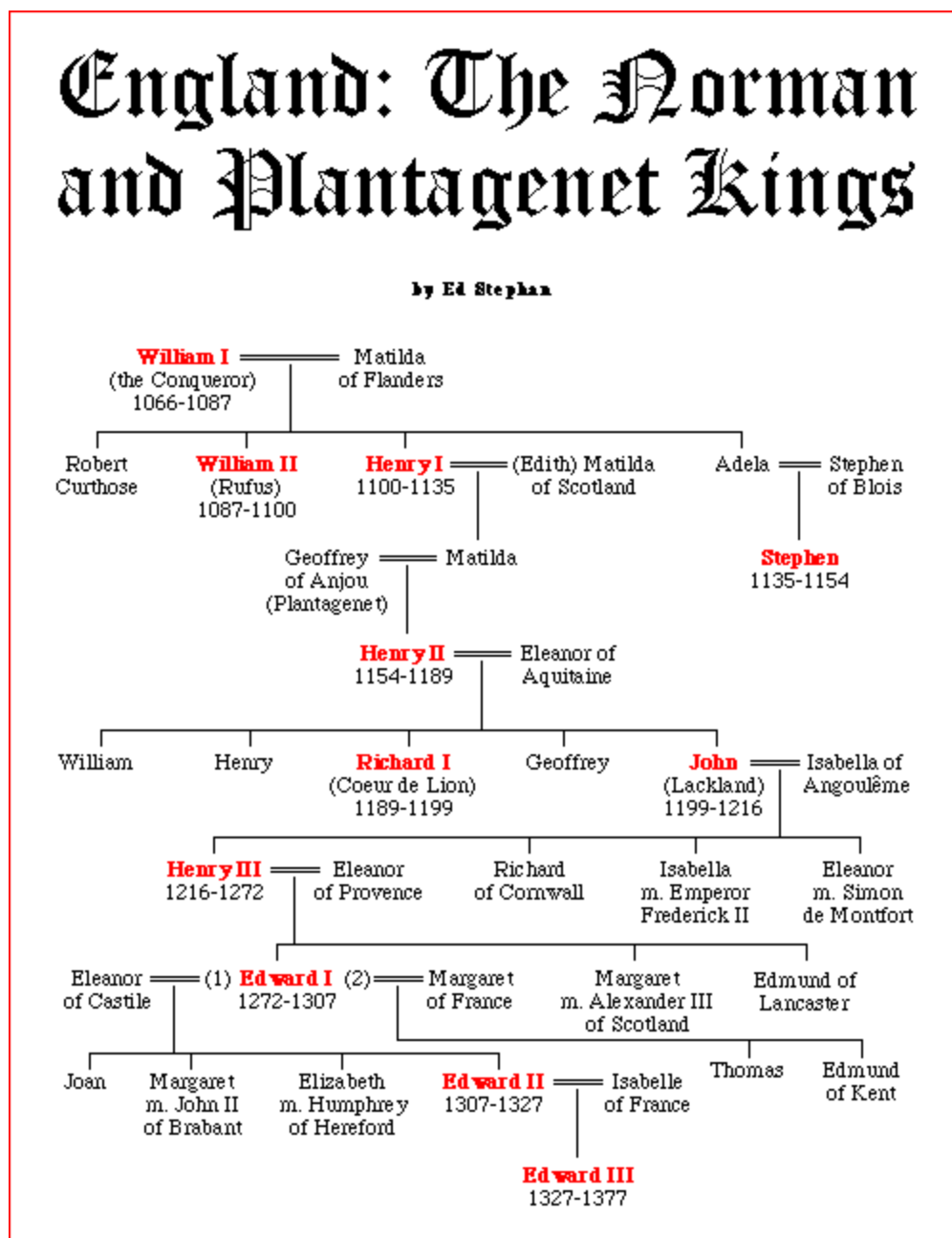
Figure 1. The Norman and Plantagenet Kings of England

Chapter 1 – Geoffrey's History and *Historia*: The Function of a Pseudo-History

Any discussion regarding medieval historiography would be incomplete without at least mentioning Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*HRB*). As Hanning puts it, "Until the sixteenth (and in some quarters the seventeenth) century, British history was Geoffrey's *Historia*, expanded, excerpted, rhymed, combined, or glossed" (174). Geoffrey's *HRB* exemplifies the specific ability of twelfth-century historiographies to reflect cultural and social change, as well as their contribution to the formation of British nationalism. The influence of Geoffrey's work on English historiography and the romantic tradition is well known among scholars of medieval literature. Geoffrey's claims for the history of Britain, while not divergent from other origin stories, are blatantly implausible and raise serious questions about his motivation and purposes. Accuracy in representation, however, is not integral to a study of the literary qualities of a historical writing, nor is it a necessary part of pre-modern historiography. In fact, the *HRB*'s most problematic characteristic, its fictional quality, demonstrates one of the most compelling traditions of medieval historiography and reveals the author's purpose.

Situated in a particularly tumultuous historical context,[15] Geoffrey's *HRB* participates in a larger social objective to legitimize and glorify the origins and history of Britain's inhabitants, and thus provide some sense of British identity by narrativizing history, which entails taking the chronological events of the past and creating a cohesive narrative with a specific rhetorical aim. Geoffrey, like the other authors discussed in this dissertation, participated in the outpouring of historical writings that started early in the twelfth century. While perhaps motivated by the same social and political changes as writers like Henry of Huntingdon, Order Vitalis, or William of Malmesbury, Geoffrey distinguished his history by situating it much farther back in time than

---

[15] See section on the Civil War on page 38.

any other historian, avoiding historicizing the present or even the recent past. As an insular

history, the *HRB* operates more deliberately as a nationalistic piece, highlighting the antiquarian

history of the Welsh (or Britons). Following the didactic model of Gildas's *De Excidio et*

Conquestu Britanniae (*DECB*) and the mythological influences of Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*

(*HB*), Geoffrey simultaneously glorifies and criticizes the Welsh who occupied both a literal and

figurative marginal space at the time Geoffrey composed his history from 1123 to 1139 (Reeve

vii).[16] I contend that Geoffrey's *HRB* represents nationalistic sentiments in the twelfth century,

placing ethnic, cultural, and national ties above ecclesiastical ones, which accounts for the vast

amount of fabrications Geoffrey added to the history of England. His historic representation of

British history is meant to add to the mythological value of the island for the Norman

conquerors, safely glorifying the ancient history of the Welsh within the narrative space of

history. In the end, Welsh identity, like that of any other conquered culture, is absorbed into the

larger narrative of the island's history, representing the new pre-national state of England.

Geoffrey of Monmouth

    Biographical information can indicate much about an author's motivations, as his personal

context sometimes relates to or is affected by the political landscape of the period. In Geoffrey's

case, education and upbringing provide contextual clues about the author's underlying goals for

his *HRB.* Most of the little that is known about Geoffrey comes directly from what he tells us

about himself in his *Prophetiae Merlini* (*PM*), *HRB*, and *Vita Merlini* (*VM*).[17] The most

definitive proof of Geoffrey's existence comes from seven charters,[18] dated from 1129 to 1151,

---

[16] The years between the investiture of Alexander, to whom Geoffrey dedicated the *Prophetiae Merlini* (1135), as bishop of Lincoln, and the earliest known copies of the manuscript.

[17] The *PM* referred to is Caroline D. Eckhardt's 1982 edition, and the *VM* is Basil Fulford Lowther Clarke's 1973 edition. Full bibliographic information for both these texts is provided on the works cited page.

[18] The seven charters are as follows: 1) the foundation charter of Oseney Abbey in 1129; 2) "a charter at St. John's College, Oxford, in which Robert D'Oilley confirms to the secular canons of St. George's in the Castle of Oxford

which bear the signature of a witness named *Galfridus Artur* (Salter 383–84). From this

evidence, Geoffrey's physical presence in Oxford can be reasonably verified, or at least the

presence of someone with the same name. But the existence of manuscripts of *HRB*, *VM*, and

PM originating in Oxford at the same time that these charters are signed by someone with the

same name strongly suggests that the historian is the very same *Galfridus Artur*. In addition, his

signature, Geoffrey Arthur, seems to verify that his father's name was Arthur, which Geoffrey

would have "used as young man until his own professional identity became secure" (Curley 2).

Arthur was a much more common name in Brittany than in Wales, adding to speculation that at

least his father was Breton (Lloyd 465). Wihenoc of Dol, a Breton, one of the lords of

Monmouth, founded the town's Benedictine Priory in 1075, and the town eventually fell under

the jurisdiction of Robert, Earl of Gloucester, one of the dedicatees of the *HRB*, during

Geoffrey's lifetime (Curley 1–2). Geoffrey's family may have been related to Wihenoc, possibly

influencing their decision to settle in Monmouth.

The charters at Oxford offer interesting clues about the author. Geoffrey signed the Oxford

charters with the title *magister*. This title indicates that Geoffrey had a specific occupation in

Oxford: "While Oxford at this time did not yet possess a university, lectures by this date are

known to have been given there by Theobald of Etampes, who also used the title magister, as

early as 1101-17....The title magister probably indicated that Geoffrey taught in one of the

Oxford clerical schools of the day" (Curley 2). Geoffrey's title suggests that he was in a position

of authority in Oxford and permitted to teach, especially the liberal arts. As a magister, Geoffrey

---

gifts of land in Walton"; 3) one in which Walter excuses Godstow Abbey from certain payments to the archdiocese in January of 1139; 4) another gift of land in Shillingford by Walter; 5) Walter's agreement that the church of St. Giles in Oxford should be tithing the new Church (Godstow) around 1150; 6) one grant of land that has Geoffrey signing as *episcopus* or bishop; 7) and the final charter affirming Robert de Chesney as bishop-elect in 1151 (Salter 383-384).

would have been educated and would have had access to various historical texts to build his knowledge of medieval historiography. In fact, his time in Oxford and signature on these charters suggests that "Geoffrey belonged to a close-knit group of scholars, prelates, and noblemen connected to Lincoln and Oxford, and that among these were men such as Alexander of Lincoln and Archdeacon Walter of Oxford, who cultivated a taste for history and had access to books" (Curley 2–3). Alexander of Blois, Bishop of Lincoln [1123–1148], would be a motivating force in Geoffrey's *PM* and *VM*, but Walter had the most significant influence on the *HRB*.

Geoffrey's signature on the seven charters appears alongside that of Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford [d.1151]. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Walter was "a canon of the collegiate church of St. George within the castle Oxford, and according to the Oseney Abbey chronicle he was successful in claiming for his own collegiate body the rights over the church of St. Mary Magdalene" (Stephen 250). Geoffrey's early education may have been in a Benedictine church in Monmouth, but it is as a secular canon of Saint George's College,[19] an Augustinian school, that he composed his *HRB*, *PM*, and *VM*. At this time, "Oxford and Lincoln were undoubtedly important urban networks through which books and information were constantly passing and where enterprising authors could find patrons and colleagues" (Curley 3). Despite the increased number of books and manuscripts in Oxford and Lincoln, accessibility would have still been a problem for a young scholar like Geoffrey without the influence of friends and patrons like Alexander of Lincoln and Archdeacon Walter. Geoffrey's involvement with Walter is especially important to an examination of the context in which his *HRB* was composed. As

---

[19] According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, "Most agree in counting him among the canons of the church of St. George in Oxford Castle. He witnessed charters in the company of another canon, Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, and appears among the witnesses to an alleged charter of Robert d'Oilly in favour of the canons of St George's. Although this latter document has been shown to be a forgery, Geoffrey's association with St George's should not be dismissed. Osney and Thame, two of the three institutions whose documents Geoffrey witnessed, enjoyed the patronage of the d'Oilly family, founders and patrons of St George's" (Stephen 251).

Geoffrey refers to Walter specifically in the *HRB*, Walter's interest in history and his ability to access books (even rare ones) offer a partial rationale for Geoffrey's historical undertaking. The opportunity to explore historical avenues (like the history of the Welsh) mostly ignored by other contemporary historians, such as William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, provided Geoffrey with a unique historical vision that would allow him to stand apart from his peers, as I argue below.

The charters give supportable data on Geoffrey's time in Oxford and relationship to Walter, and his position in the clerical institution as a magister as well as a Bishop of St. Asaph. A less supportable claim made by Geoffrey, or sometimes by scholars, is the author's ethnic background. A most significant detail in Geoffrey's works is that the author calls himself *Galfridus Monemutensis* and, in his prologue to the *HRB*, claims that he is given an old book written in the British language by Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, and tasked with translating it into Latin. John Gillingham claims that, as the author titles himself *Galfridus Monemutensis*, he is clearly labeling himself as "of Monmouth" and composing a seemingly nationalistic piece for the Welsh and is, therefore, of a Welsh ethnicity ("Contexts" 104). Other scholars, particularly J. S. P. Tatlock, contend that Geoffrey was of Breton paternity (443). In addition to the arguments regarding Geoffrey and his father's decidedly Breton name, Tatlock contends, "It is doubtful he would have been given a Welsh see, especially one regarded as an English outpost, had he been a Welshman, even a well-affected Welshman" (443). With the threat of more Welsh uprisings,[20] it is unlikely that Geoffrey would have been placed in close proximity to Wales if he had been a Welshman.

---

[20] Welsh forces took advantage of the succession dispute when Stephen took the throne from Matilda and battled against the Normans to reclaim lands lost during the Conquest in the Battle of Llwchwr (or Gower) in 1136. Stephen's forces were unable to defeat the Welsh, and this successful military campaign inspired other rebellions.

The name itself implies a specific affinity with the area of Monmouth. Geoffrey's familiarity with the area of Monmouthshire (one of the only geographical regions depicted accurately in the *HRB*[21]) implies he was most likely born and raised in and around Monmouth. Michael Curley's text *Geoffrey of Monmouth* even suggests that the author may have been "educated in the Monmouth priory, and may possibly be 'Geoffrey the scribe' (*Gaulfridus scriba*) to whom a Monmouth charter makes mention around 1120" (2). This Benedictine priory, which was "dedicated in 1101 and ... given to the Benedictine abbey of Saint Florent de Saumur, 35 miles west of Tours," would have greatly affected the way Geoffrey spent his early years (Curley 2). *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (*Regula Benedicti*) created a model of behavior, prayer, community, and even the regulation of time usage. The order stressed the importance of obedience, humility, contemplation, sacred study, and self-sufficiency. Whether or not Geoffrey was this specific scribe, his education and life in Monmouth would have prepared him for his next destination, Oxford.

Examining the scant evidence regarding what is known about Geoffrey's historical context provides a much clearer picture of the author. Growing up in Monmouth, which bordered Welsh territory, would have exposed Geoffrey to at least four distinct cultures—Breton, Welsh, Norman, and Saxon. As Faletra points out, "The Breton and Welsh languages, moreover, were sufficiently similar (though not completely mutually comprehensible) to allow some limited types of communication between them" (*History* 10). This environment would have contributed to Geoffrey's familiarity with Welsh mythology and the customs of the people, although it would not necessarily mean that he ever considered himself a Welshman or that he even understood the

---

[21] Tatlock's *The Legendary History of Britain* describes the geographical Britain presented by Geoffrey, focusing on the author's propensity to mislabel and misidentify areas, except for areas near Monmouth. Curley's *Geoffrey of Monmouth* also makes the assertion that Geoffrey was raised in Monmouth and probably educated in the area as well. See the works cited page for bibliographic information on both texts.

language. But what most of these perspectives on his ethnicity fail to consider is that, more than a Welshman or a Breton, Geoffrey was an opportunist. The fact that Geoffrey claims a specifically Welsh background signifies the importance of this lineage (even an appropriated lineage) to the work, but only in so far as it gains him some kind of special authorial access to the ancient history of the Welsh. As a Welshman, it is only fitting and proper that he should be tasked with translating the history of his own people into Latin, taking a vernacular text accessible only to the few literate Welsh and transforming Welsh history into British history. The text makes clear that his sympathy for the Britons turns to contempt for their unworthy successors, the Welsh; yet, I find his treatment of these ethnic groups to be merely a way of soliciting a Norman patron. As I argue in the following sections, Geoffrey's devotion lies mostly to the Norman aristocracy and the establishment of an Anglo-Norman England, not to rekindling the Welsh race or inciting ethnic pride amongst his "fellow" Welshmen.

Geoffrey's Motivation

This limited biographical information is somewhat supplemented by the author's perspective on his historical narrative and the persona he projects through his writing. Looking at what Geoffrey says about his specific motivation for composing the *HRB* is particularly intriguing. The prologue to the *HRB* is the first place in which Geoffrey tries to firmly establish his work as a history. Geoffrey starts with an attempt to build some authority with his audience. His prologue attempts to declare the purity of his intentions:

> Cum mecum multa et de multis saepius animo reuoleuens in hystoriam regum Britannie inciderem, in mirum contuli quod infra mentionem quam de eis Gildas et Beda luculento tractatu fecerant nichil de regibus qui ante incarnationem Christi inhabitaurent, nichil etiam de Arturo ceterisque compluribus qui post incarnationem successerunt repperissem,

cum et gesta eorum digna aeternitate laudis constarent et multis populis quasi inscripta

iocunde et memoriter praedicentur. (Prologue 1-2.1-7.5) [22]

Geoffrey is complimentary of his predecessors and their "fine work" but points out a deficiency

in the historiography of England. The absence of any early recorded history or references to

Arthur supports Geoffrey's assertion that there is a need for a British history, one that he is most

equipped to complete. A number of praise-worthy individuals remain unacknowledged in the

surviving histories of England, although Geoffrey is quick to point out that their deeds are so

well known that they must have been written down.

This assertion ably sets up his claim to a British source: "Talia michi et de talibus multociens

cogitanti optulit Walterus Oxenefordensis archidiaconus, uir in oratoria arte atque in exoticis

hystoriis eruditus, quendam Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum qui a Bruto primo rege

Britonum usque ad Cadualadrum filium Caudallonis actus omnium continue et ex ordine

perpulcris orationibus proponebat" (Prologue 2.7-12.5). [23] The source not only perfectly fills the

perceived gap in British history, it is also written in the vernacular, which should strengthen its

credibility to the reader. A British history written in the British tongue implies that the author

was personally invested in the historical events, perhaps even a witness to some. The authority of

the anonymous author is what Geoffrey hopes to claim as the translator of the text while also

eluding any accusations of historical inaccuracy since he is not the original author.

---

[22] While my mind was often pondering many things in many ways, my thoughts turned to the history of the kings of Britain, and I was surprised that, among the references to them in the fine works of Gildas and Bede, I had found nothing concerning the kings who lived here before Christ's Incarnation, and nothing about Arthur and the many others who succeeded after it, even though their noble deeds were worthy of eternal praise and are proclaimed by many people as if they had been entertainingly and memorably written down. (Prologue 1-2.4)

[23] I frequently thought the matter over in this way until Walter archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the rhetorical arts and in foreign histories, brought me a very old book in the British tongue, which set out in excellent style a continuous narrative of all their deeds from the first king of the Britons, Brutus, down to Cadualadrus, son of Caduallo. (Prologue 2.4)

Geoffrey's preface mentions Bede and Gildas as sources for his work, although they are not utilized explicitly in the *HRB*. Geoffrey claims that the *HRB* is merely a translation of a British book: "Rogatu itaque illius ductus, tametsi infra alienos ortulos falerata uerba non collegerim, agresti tamen stilo propiisque calamis contentus codicem illum in Latinum sermonem transferre curaui; nam si ampullosis dictionibus paginam illinissem, taedium lengetibus ingererem, dum magis in exponendis uerbis quam in historia intelligenda ipsos commorari oporteret" (Prologue 2.12-17.5). [24] Geoffrey seems to have noble aspirations as simply a "translator" of the text and not the writer of a British history. He attempts to present himself as not only a humble servant of the British people (in translating and transcribing their history) but also a practical writer who does not want to confuse his readers. This is a false kind of humility, however, as Geoffrey seemingly fabricates his source.

It is possible that there was no "British book." Geoffrey Ashe, in examining Geoffrey's claims from a modern and not a medieval perspective, notes, "There are no extant copies of the book, or even fragments of it, and Geoffrey's claim as it stands is quite inadmissible" (10). However, the lack of extant copies of the manuscript is not compelling enough evidence for Michael Curley, who believes that the involvement of Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, through the invocation of his name in the prologue, precludes the possibility of such a lie. Curley claims:

> The office of archdeacon was a very public one, exposing its holder to contact with many
>
> people, including the learned. It is unthinkable that Geoffrey was playing a hoax without
>
> Walter's knowledge. Did they cook up the story of the ancient book together? This seems

---

[24] Though I have never gathered showy words from the gardens of others, I was persuaded by his request to translate the book into Latin in a rustic style, reliant on my own reed pipe; had I larded my pages with bombastic terms, I would tire my readers with the need to linger over understanding my words rather than following my narrative. (Prologue.2.4)

unlikely. Both men were too much in the public eye and too dependent on the will of others to risk being unmasked and exposed to ridicule. (12)

And still, there are many current scholars who agree with Rosemary Morris: "Geoffrey's *ex nihilo* creation of a complete biography of Arthur is an ineffably important achievement" (13).

It seems Geoffrey's veracity was also questioned by his own contemporaries. In his *Itinerarium Cambriae*, Gerald of Wales mocks Geoffrey for his blatantly fictional history by including a humorous scene in which a man is tortured by demons when a copy of the *HRB* is placed upon him. William of Newburgh also scorns the notion that Geoffrey's history could be considered factual, comparing him unfavorably to the venerable Bede:

> Hæc cum juxta historicam veritatem a venerabili Beda expositam constet ese rata; cuncta, que home ille de Arturo et ejus successoribus vel, post Vortegirnum, prædecessoribus scriber curavit, partim ab ipso, partim et ab aliis constat esse conficta; sive effrænta menntiendi libidine; sive etiam gratia placendi Britonibus, quorum plurimi tam bruti esse feruntur, ut adhue Arturum tanquam ventururm exspectare dicantur, eumque mortuum nec audire patiantur. (6) [25]

Since there is no surviving manuscript of this British book, there is no way to verify the work; although, the fact that very little of what Geoffrey composes can be found in other sources suggests that much of the work is fabricated or comes from a very unique volume that has been lost. Geoffrey is not drawing from the authority of established historians, and this is probably the reason he employs such humility in this prologue. In fact, Geoffrey's staged humility allows him

---

[25] Now, since it is evident that these facts are established with historical authenticity by the venerable Bede, it appears that whatever he [Geoffrey] has written, subsequent to Vortigern, either of Arthur, or his successors, or predecessors, is a fiction, invented either by himself or by others, and promulgated either through an unchecked propensity to falsehood, or a desire to please the Britons, of whom vast numbers are said to be so stupid as to assert that Arthur is yet to come, and who cannot bear to hear of his death. [from Hans Claude Hamilton's edition, see works cited for full bibliographic information.]

to gain the goodwill of his audience, a common medieval rhetorical trope known as *captatio benevolentiae*. Giving due deference to both Walter and his historical predecessors adds to Geoffrey's ethos, making him a more reliable and credible author for the reader.

Regardless of how fictionalized the history may seem to a modern audience, medieval authors and audiences had a clear understanding of the difference between *historia* and *fabula*. Medieval historians regarded *historia* as an accurate narrative, one that was beholden to truthfully representing the events of the past as they transpired. However, "truth" was established in a different way, most often relying on *auctoritas*, "the prestige and cultural acceptance of major texts" (Otter, "Functions" 109). *Fabula*, a tale or story, was the realm of the poet, not the historian. Problems arise when ascribing Geoffrey's work to the genre of *historia* due to his claimed source for the *HRB*. But Geoffrey's prologue actually lacks the support of *auctoritas*. Not using an acknowledged major text, like Bede or Gildas, hurts his authority as an author. But he makes attempts to reclaim that authority through his ability to create a history greater than the "source" he claims to translate.

Geoffrey employs a particularly clever rhetorical move in denying himself the credit for authoring this history by taking on the role of translator. He can accept the glory for his work in "discovering" this history and translating it while simultaneously deflecting the blame for any fabrications in the text, which can be ascribed to the original author and not to Geoffrey. In fact, the way in which Geoffrey plays with both fact and fiction throughout his narrative draws attention to the inherent fictionality of historical narratives. As Kimberly Bell points out, historical narratives are creative constructions built around the author's manipulation of the reader's idea of history as well as his source material, which makes the process inherently more fiction than fact (15).

Because Geoffrey very specifically claims that his work is a translation, this process of translation (whether or not it actually took place) carries great symbolic meaning for the purpose of the *HRB*. Warren claims, "Like memory and forgetting in etymology, translation remaps historical knowledge to reflect a change in relations of domination. Translation actively engages the boundaries of identity because it shuttles between differences and near-resemblances. In colonial encounters, translation can enhance power differences and thus reinforce the boundaries that support domination" (12). The unfamiliar, the history as recounted in its native language, is made both familiar and different through translation. The history of the Britons becomes overtaken by the new political structures of the period, moving them from the British tongue to Latin, the language of the educated, symbolizing the shift of power from one cultural mode to another. Geoffrey claims to be taking a piece of history written in Welsh and translating it into a medium that can be understood by his Norman audience. In doing so, he highlights the cultural diaspora following the Norman Conquest by creating a Norman history out of the British past, but Geoffrey's authorial choices raise the question of why he would choose to focus his history on the subjugated Welsh instead of the Norman conquerors or even the English. His focus on British history indicates a preoccupation with the distant past.

The Dedication

The claims the author makes about himself and his motivations are revealing but are not as telling as the individuals listed in the dedication that follows these words. The dedication of this history to possible patrons suggests that Geoffrey was influenced by specific historical figures and contemporary events and was seeking some preferment from whoever might be willing. The extant copies of the manuscript show five variations on the dedication, including Robert of Gloucester [ca. 1100-1147]; Waleran, Count of Meulan [1104-1166]; King Stephen; a nameless

individual; and one without a dedication at all.[26] Reeve claims, "The dedication to Stephen and

Robert, however, is a clumsy adjustment found in one manuscript (no. 15).…Either, then, the

original dedication was the one to Robert alone, found in 129 manuscripts, and Geoffrey

augmented it with three sentences addressed to Waleran, or it was the joint dedication found in

ten manuscripts…and he reduced it by dropping those sentences" (ix-x). To that end, Reeve's

2007 edition of the text contains the following dedication:

> Opusculo igitur meo, Roberte dux Claudiocestriae, faueas, ut sic te doctore te monitore
>
> corrigatur quod non ex Galfridi Monemutensis fonticulo censeatur exortum sed sale
>
> mineruae generauit, quem philopsophia liberalibus artibus erudiuit, quem innata probitas
>
> in militia militibus praefecit; unde Britannia tibi nunc temporibus nostris ac si alterum
>
> Henricum adepta interno congratulatur affectu. (Prologue 3.17-23.5) [27]

Faletra's 2008 edition of the *HRB* includes a dedication that can be found in one extant Latin

manuscript: "Therefore, King Stephen of England, accept my little book and let it be set aright

by your learning and probity so that it may no longer be considered the work of Geoffrey of

Monmouth but instead the product of your own sagacity" (41). These dedications are very

similar other than the change in the names. In his 1984 edition of the *HRB*, Neil Wright notes,

"Stephen visited Oxford, where Geoffrey was probably working, in 1136. Griscom suggested

that Geoffrey seized this opportunity to present a copy of his work to the king, hastily revising

---

[26] The manuscripts that start with the description of the island are nos. 1, 4, 5, 67, 68, 70, 106, 110, 143, and 163, and those that begin with the narrative are nos. 41, 69, 86, 132, 140, 142, 178, and 200. A dedication to Robert alone can be found in 3 of 129 manuscripts. A joint dedication to Robert and Waleran can be found in 4, nos. 39, 48, 49, 107, 128, 134,136, 170, 197, and 199. All information on the manuscripts' different dedications can be found in Reeve's edition of the *HRB*.

[27] Therefore, earl Robert of Gloucester, look favourably on my little work: let it be corrected by your instruction and advice so that it does not seem to have arisen from Geoffrey of Monmouth's slight stream but, duly seasoned with the genius of your wit, is called the product of the illustrious king Henry's son, whom philosophy has nurtured in the liberal arts, and whose natural valour has made him a commander of knights in battle; hence the island of Britain now congratulates herself on gaining in you a Henry reborn for our time. (Prologue 3.4)

the existing dedication (that to Robert and Waleran)" (xv). The fact that only one copy of the Stephen dedication still exists suggests that Wright may be correct. Stephen would have been present in Oxford on a number of occasions while Geoffrey was composing his history and making copies of it for distribution, which would also support this position. The chance to impress the reigning king with a dedication would have been a great opportunity for Geoffrey, and as we can see from his shifting allegiances in the dedication, Geoffrey was willing to alter the dedication as necessary. This is not an unusual practice for a historian at the time, but it definitely indicates that Geoffrey did not favor either Matilda or Stephen in this conflict.

Regardless of to whom the book is dedicated, the choices for these dedications are especially important to my argument. King Stephen and Robert of Gloucester, Matilda's illegitimate half-brother, were two major figures in a turbulent civil war between the rightful heir to King Henry I's throne, Empress Matilda, and her cousin, King Stephen. The unfolding of these historical events, during Geoffrey's own lifetime, provides a necessary avenue of analysis to understanding Geoffrey's historical writing. The political events of this period, following the cultural upheaval of the Norman Conquest, illuminate possible social motivations for the author and his text. In playing both sides of the nineteen-year civil war, Geoffrey could better situate himself to gain notoriety and patronage as a British historian.

Civil War: The Context of the *HRB*

Written after the Norman invasion, the *HRB* represents a departure from the ecclesiastical histories of Bede and Gildas, which focused most of their attention on the English and their conversion, as it seems to take aim at the specific cultural situation in Britain after the Norman colonization of England. The Norman Conquest changed the political and social landscape of England as the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy was replaced by the Anglo-Normans. As Hanning

points out, historians in the twelfth century dealt with the Norman invasion in various ways, "From one point of view, then, the Normans are God's chosen people—the latest heirs of Israel, and the successors in national-ecclesiastical history.… From another point of view, one provided by classical history and rhetoric, the Normans are imperial repressors of English liberty" (128). The variety of responses to this change is exhibited in the histories of the twelfth century. Geoffrey's *HRB* tiptoes on the line between these two historical visions, creating a historical narrative that omits the Normans and yet is continually concerned with issues of legitimacy and succession, as well as conquest and repression, topics his contemporary audience would clearly associate with the Normans. While the Saxons are the invading force that end this British history, their conquest can be seen as a foreshadowing of Norman rule in the eleventh century.

The Norman Invasion of 1066 may have been part of the motivation for the *HRB*, but more contemporary events probably had a greater impact on its composition. King Henry I, son of William the Conqueror, had two surviving children from his marriage, Matilda and William Adelin [1103-1120]. Matilda married Henry V [1081-1125], the Holy Roman Emperor, becoming Empress Matilda. After her first husband's death, she married Geoffrey, Count of Anjou[1113-1151], and had three sons. Unfortunately, her younger brother died, before his father, in the *White Ship* tragedy on November 25, 1120.[28] William's early death led to problems with the line of succession. Henry had his doubts about Matilda's ability to rule, mostly for fear that her husband would rule alongside her. An apparent "frontier dispute which had lately soured relations" between Henry and his son-in-law is often seen as the cause of this mistrust (Crouch 30). Before he died, King Henry did, however, attempt to guarantee the succession of Matilda to

---

[28] The *White Ship* was offered to Henry I to return to England from Barfleur in Normandy. Although Henry declined to sail on the vessel, he had some of his retinue use the ship, including his son, William, and two of his illegitimate children, Richard of Lincoln and Matilda Fitzroy. The ship hit a submerged rock and sank, killing all but two passengers. The sinking of the *White Ship* left Henry without a legitimate male heir.

the throne: "On 1 January 1127 all the assembled magnates swore to support the Empress's succession to England and Normandy conditional on the king's death without further legitimate male children" (Crouch 25). These "assembled magnates," which would have included Matilda's cousin and Henry's nephew Stephen of Blois,[29] swore to accept Matilda as the rightful heir if Henry produced no more male children. However, once Henry died in December of 1135, Matilda did not receive what was promised to her in that earlier meeting. Indeed, Crouch remarks on the hesitancy among the aristocracy to accept Matilda as the legitimate heir (33). The fact that Matilda was a woman may have been the cause for some anxiety among the Norman aristocracy; she would have been the first ruling female in England. As a result, Matilda found herself without any support for her claim to the throne, other than from her husband and some Welsh rebels.[30]

Matilda's competition for the kingship of England, Stephen, spent much of his time at his uncle's court as Count of Blois, Mortain, and eventually Boulogne with his wife, Matilda (not Stephen's cousin and rival), Countess of Boulogne. Following Henry's death, Stephen was the closest in proximity to England (Matilda and Geoffrey were in Anjou while Stephen was in Boulougne) and quickly crossed the Channel. He garnered enough support from the nobles to supplant Matilda as the new King of England and was crowned at Westminster on December 22, 1135. Despite this event, a civil war [1135-1154] erupted between King Stephen and Matilda. This conflict did not end until Stephen's death and the succession of Matilda's son, Henry II [1133-1189], in 1154. Early on in the rebellion, Matilda lacked the military support to adequately

---

[29] Stephen was the grandson of William I [1028-1087], son of Stephen II, Count of Blois [1045-1102], and Adela of Normandy [1067-1137]

[30] Welsh forces joined the Angevin revolt as the civil unrest made it possible for them to recover lands lost in the Norman Conquest. The Welsh marshes were the location of many skirmishes and battles between Stephen's forces and Matilda's.

challenge Stephen, but in 1138 she received the support of her half-brother, Henry I's

illegitimate son, Robert of Gloucester. The entirety of King Stephen's reign was marked by

instability and violence, as referenced in the Introduction to this dissertation.

These historical events comprise the political and social context in which the *HRB* was

composed. Geoffrey lived and worked in areas that would have been specifically affected by

both the Norman Conquest and the subsequent civil war between Stephen and Matilda. Oxford,

where he signed the seven charters, was the site of major political moves by King Stephen.

Curley writes, "King Stephen held council at Oxford during the summer of 1139 and there

arrested Alexander, bishop of Lincoln…among others" (3). Alexander was part of Geoffrey's

close-knit group of scholars and colleagues at Oxford, who encouraged Geoffrey to write about

Merlin and his prophecies, which earned Alexander a reference in the Preface to the *PM*:

"Nondum autem ad hunc locum historiae perueneram cum de Merlino diuulgator rumore

compellebant me undique contemporanei mei prophetias ipsius edere, maxime autem Alexander

Lincolniensis episcopus, uir summae religionis et prudentiae" (Preface 109.1-4.143). [31] In

addition, Stephen besieged Matilda in Oxford Castle in December of 1142 (Curley 3). Occurring

three years into the war, the siege of Oxford Castle was an important event in the dispute

between the two relations; Stephen had a tactical advantage in trapping Matilda in Oxford Castle.

Had Matilda not escaped to Wallingford before Christmas, the siege would have been the turning

point or even the final battle in the war. Such disruptions and warfare in a city like Oxford

display the great chaos and turmoil of the civil war. The charters indicate that Geoffrey resided

in Oxford during this time, and it is very likely that he witnessed the unfolding of this battle,

---

[31] Before I had reached this point in my history, news of Merlin spread and I was being pressed to publish his prophecies by all my contemporaries, and particularly by Alexander bishop of Lincoln, a man of the greatest piety and wisdom. (Preface 109.1-4.142)

which would have shaped his vision of British history. Family disputes and questions of legitimacy would have been at the forefront of the historian's mind as he watched the newly formed Anglo-Norman kingdom being torn asunder by this period of civil war. This preoccupation with civil disputes becomes evident when Geoffrey displays the treachery inflicted on his most famous king, Arthur, at the hands of his nephew, as explored below.

Geoffrey's dedications indicate a specific Norman audience for the *HRB*, Robert of Gloucester or King Stephen, during a turbulent civil war; they suggest that part of Geoffrey's concern is the idea of regnal legitimacy. However, a man in Geoffrey's position would have been aware of the danger in outwardly declaring his allegiance to either Matilda or Stephen as the rightful heir. Being on the wrong side of this debate (or rather, on the side that ultimately loses the conflict) would have seriously damaged the career he was working so hard to establish and could have threatened his life. In this situation, Geoffrey avoids the discussion and adopts a stance of neutrality through his multiple dedications.

Yet, without declaring a favorite side in this civil dispute, Geoffrey creatively injects these questions of legitimacy and lineage into his British history. The fact that Matilda's cousin, her father's nephew, stakes a claim to the throne despite having no legitimate claim to the throne is mirrored in the *HRB* by the familial and regnal dispute that destroys Arthur's reign and leads to the slow decline of the British people. The major disputes that cause the most damage to the Britons' security are domestic ones, especially that of Modred, who usurps his uncle's throne and incestuously attempts to marry his aunt. Instances of betrayal happen quite often in the *HRB*, like Vortigern and Constans, but instances of familial betrayal seem to hold more weight. Arthur's death at the hands of his nephew in Book XI signals a shift in the portrayal of the Britons and the

end of British rule. The decision to focus so much attention on familial betrayal was surely Geoffrey's commentary on the dynastic politics of his day.

In addition, we can see Geoffrey targeting his Norman audience through the choice of the Britons for his history. The Normans could be easily connected with the Bretons, descendants of the Britons, to undermine Gildas' vision of the Britons as weak and disloyal people. The Normans are definitely of Scandinavian origins, but their proximity to Brittany and the Bretons, another Celtic race, could be an indication that Geoffrey wants the Normans to see themselves in the Britons, allowing them to align their origins with the early noble beginnings of the Britons. In extending the reign of the Britons in England, Geoffrey could reconstruct the vision of the Britons, connecting them to the heroic figures of the past and legitimizing their greatness. However, the *HRB* reads more like a narrative of failure, recounting the glorious rise and tragic fall of an ethnic group unable to sustain its hold on the island. In this way, instead of adding to the Welsh sense of pride, the failure of the Britons and their Welsh ancestors could actually work to quell the anti-Welsh anxiety of the Normans through the representation of the Welsh as a thoroughly defeated group and could serve as a warning to the currently ruling Normans.

Geoffrey's Sources

The opening of the *HRB* displays Geoffrey's familiarity with the major historical writers of medieval Britain. He specifically mentions the work of Bede and Gildas. Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HEGA*) begins with the Britons' loss of the island to the Saxons, but it is mostly concerned with the Christian conversion of the Saxon pagans. Geoffrey is not particularly interested in ecclesiastical matters and sets his history in the ancient past, so Bede is not really a crucial source for his history. Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (*DECB*) is less a history and more an exploration of the faults and perfidy of the Britons, ending with the

tragedy of the conquest of the Britons at the hands of the barbarous Anglo-Saxons as a punishment from God. Of the earlier medieval histories available to Geoffrey, as Francis Ingledew indicates, Nennius's *HB* is considered an unacknowledged source for the *HRB*. All of these texts attempt to allocate some genealogical right to the territory of Britain for the Britons. And yet, even these histories cannot be claimed as the primary source of information for Geoffrey's incredibly intricate historical tale. Geoffrey may have built on the models of earlier medieval historiography, but the content of the *HRB* appears uniquely his own. In a single paragraph recounting the different medieval sources that Geoffrey occasionally referenced in his work, Tatlock contends, "It is evident…how little Geoffrey owed to his predecessors" (4).

Geoffrey's project could have easily followed the model set forth by Gildas and openly upbraided the Welsh for their sinful descent into submission. As Tatlock contends, Geoffrey's goal may have been to obtain some personal notoriety or pecuniary reward for his efforts, but his treatment of British history suggests a political and ethnic motivation (425–26). His history complicates the position of the Welsh, creating a formidable opponent for the Anglo-Saxons. Before recounting the inglorious fall of the Britons into their lowly state, Geoffrey works to build up their reputation, legitimizing their reign as a natural consequence of their dynastic roots. Because he is mostly concerned with shaping the narrative to show their eventual ignominious slide into the current barbarous state, he must make the contrast between their ancient past and contemporary future (their present) all the more extreme. In this way, he can argue that even the most impressive political and ethnic regimes can fall.

<u>Legitimacy and the Welsh</u>

With scant information taken from the traditional models of British historiography, Geoffrey's history distinguishes itself from the start by providing the "true" origins of the British

people. After briefly describing the geography of England, Geoffrey begins Book I: "Aeneas post Troianum bellum excidium urbis cum Ascanio filio diffugiens Italiam nauigio adiuit…Denique, suprema die ipsiuis superueniente, Ascanius, regia potestate sublimatus, condidit Albam super Tyberim genuitque filium cui nomen erat Siluius" (I.6.48-54.7). [32] Silvius, the grandson of Aeneas, becomes the father of a character who seems to be completely of Geoffrey's own imagining—Brutus. The origin of the future founder of Britain is closely tied with the Ancient Greek story of Oedipus: "Certitudine ergo rei comperta, dixerunt magi ipsam grauidam esse puero qui patrem et matrem interficeret, pluribus quoque terris in exilium peragratis ad summum tandem culmen honoris perueniret. Nec fefellit eos uaticinium suum" (I.6.57-60.7-9). [33] The unborn child is already endowed with a prophecy and prestige as well as an impressive lineage, which he will transmit to his people, the Britons. Before Geoffrey's *HRB*, the only text to ascribe some genealogical origins to the Britons was the *HB* (Ingledew 677).

The Trojan origins of the British people, while highly fictitious, reflect Geoffrey's desire to create a larger contrast between the Britons and their unworthy inheritors, the Welsh. In addition, Geoffrey's origin story implies that genealogy is a kind of destiny. Brutus is a formidable figure and the first in a long line of born leaders: "Diuulgata itaque per uniuersas nations ipsius fama, Troiani coeperunt ad eum confluere, orantes ut ipso duce a seruitute Graecorum liberarentur, quod leuiter fieri asserebant, cum in tantum iam infra patriam multiplicati essent ita ut septem milia, exceptis paruulis et mulieribus, computarentur" (I 7.75-79.9). [34] He becomes a rallying point for the surviving Trojans, continuing to expand the population while freeing them from

---

[32] After the Trojan War Aeneas fled the devastated city with his son Ascanius and sailed to Italy…After Aeneas had breathed his last, Ascanius succeeded him, built Alba by the Tiber and had a son named Silvius. (I.6.6)

[33] Once they were certain, the magicians said that the girl was carrying a boy who would kill his father and mother, wander many lands in exile and in the end receive the highest honor. Their prophecy was not made in vain. (I.6.6-8)

[34] As Brutus' fame spread through every land, Trojans began to flock to him, asking that he be their leader and free them from their bondage to the Greeks; it would be a simple matter, they claimed, since their population in that land had now grown to seven thousand, not counting women and children. (I 7.8)

slavery. In Oedipal fashion, Brutus lives up to the prophecies of the magicians and mistakenly

kills his father, wanders aimlessly, and is eventually exiled. His greater destiny is revealed to him

when he prays at a temple of Diana and she proclaims:

> Brute, sub occasu solis trans Gallica regna
>
> insula in occeano est undique clausa mari;
>
> insula in occeano est habitata gigantibus olim,
>
> nunc deserta quidem, gentibus apta tuis.
>
> Hanc pete; namque tibi sedes erit illa perhennis.
>
> Hic fet natis altera Troi tuis.
>
> Hic de prole tua reges nascentur, et ipsis
>
> tocius terrae subditus orbis erit. (I.16.305-312.21) [35]

This moment not only attempts to authenticate the nobility of British origins but also ties the

Britons into a larger dynastic future.

Indeed, when Geoffrey's Brutus reaches the "*altera* Troy," the account continues to make

improbable, but important, arguments about Britain: "Erat tunc nomen insulae Albion; quae a

nemine, exceptis paucis gigantibus, inhabitabatur…Denique Brutus de nomine suo insulam

Britanniam appellat sociosque suos Britones. Volebat enim ex diriuatione nominis memoriam

haberer perpetuam. Vnde postmodum loquela gentis, quae prius Troiana siue curuum Graecum

nuncupabatur, dicta fuit Brittanica" (I.21.453-462.27-29).[36] In creating this hero, Geoffrey

---

[35] Brutus, to the west, beyond the kingdom of Gaul, / lies an island of the ocean, surrounded by the sea; / an island of the ocean, where once giants lived, / but now it is deserted and waiting for your people. / Sail to it; it will be your home for ever. / It will furnish your children with a new Troy. / From your descendants will arise kings, who will be masters of the whole world. (I.16.20)

[36] The island was at that time called Albion; it had no inhabitants save for a few giants. Brutus named the island Britain after himself and called his followers Britons. He wanted to be remembered forever for giving them his name. For this reason, the language of his people, previously called Trojan or 'crooked Greek,' was henceforth called British. (I.21.26-28)

attempts an etymological link between his Britons and the classical tradition of Greece. Brutus names his people the Britons and the island Britain so that he will never be forgotten. In addition, Geoffrey claims the island is uninhabited, which is highly suspect due to its close proximity with France, but it validates a pre-ordained ownership of the island by the Britons. These auspicious beginnings for the early Britons indicate a personal motivation on the part of the author. Geoffrey asserts a noble origin for his Britons, building up their dynastic connections only to later scorn their unworthy successors, the Welsh. The contrast between the Britons divinely ordained preeminence on the island and their ruined state in the future highlights the tragedy of their folly.

By connecting the Britons to the most significant event in history, the Trojan War, Geoffrey places them at the center of the history, rather than as the marginal, dominated faction. In fact, Geoffrey's claims regarding this Trojan ancestry make the British a more formidable enemy for the Romans, a group that sees the Britons' existence on the "edge of the world" as an indication of their insignificance. Book IV recounts the origins of the conflict between the Romans and the Britons. Geoffrey claims, "Interea contigit, ut in Romanis repperitur hystoriis, Iulium Caesarem subiugata Gallia ad litus Rutenorum uenisse; et cum illinc Britanniam insulam aspexisset, quaesiuit a circumstantibus quae patria et quae gens inhabitasset dum ad occeanum intueretur" (IV.54.1-4.69).[37] Caesar's interest is piqued by the island, and when he finds out about the Britons' Trojan ancestry, he proclaims: "Hercle ex eadem prosapia nos Romani et Britones orti sumus, quia ex Troiana gente processimus.…Sed nisi fallor ualde degenerati sunt a nobis nec

---

[37] Meanwhile, as we read in the histories of Rome, it happened that after his conquest of Gaul Julius Caesar had arrived on the coast of Flanders; and when, as he surveyed the ocean, he spied the island of Britain from there, he asked those standing beside him about the country and its inhabitants. (IV.54.68)

quid sit milicia nouerunt, cum infra occeanum extra orbem commaneant" (IV.54.6-10.69).[38]

Caesar uses this judgment to justify his demand for tribute.

Geoffrey's early Britons do not respond well to the threat of Caesar and his Roman forces,

establishing their characteristic valor when responding to their would-be masters in a manner not

seen with Gildas' representation of the Britons. Cassibellanus, King of the Britons, responds

angrily to Caesar's demand and displays the nobility and courage of the Britons:

> Opprobium itaque tibi petiuisti, Caesar, cum communis nobilitatis uena Britonibus et
>
> Romanis ab Aenea defluat et eiusdem cognationis una et eadem catena praefulgeat, qua
>
> in firmam amicitiam coniungi deberent. Illa a nobis petenda esset, non seruitus, quia eam
>
> potius largiri didicimus quam seruitutis iugum deferre. Libertatem namque in tantum
>
> consueuimus habere quod prorsus ignoramus quid sit seruituti oboedire; quam si ipsi dii
>
> conarentur nobis eripere, elaboraremus utique omni nisu resistere ut eam retineremus.
>
> (IV.55.23-30.69) [39]

Cassibellanus invokes the same blood-tie that Caesar uses to demand the tribute, but he claims it

as a tie that should bind the two ethnic groups in *amicitia*.

Histories such as Geoffrey's utilize these dynastic connections to justify a prior claim to

territory, just as Caesar tries to do to Cassibellanus through showing a blood kinship. But

Geoffrey's Britons are imbued with more than the glory of their Trojan lineage and reputation as

men of liberty. Divine providence guides Brutus, a mythological and divinely empowered

---

[38] By Hercules, we Romans and the Britons share a common ancestry, being both descended from the Trojans….
But, unless I am mistaken, they are no longer our equals and have no idea of soldiering, since they live at the edge of
the world amid the ocean. (IV.54.68)

[39] Your request disgraces you, Caesar, since Briton and Roman share the same blood-line from Aeneas, a shining
chain of common ancestry, which ought to bind us in lasting friendship. Friendship, not slavery, is what you should
have asked us for, since we are more accustomed to give that than to bear the yoke of servitude. We are so used to
freedom that we have no idea what it is to serve a master; if the gods themselves tried to take it from us, we would
strive with every sinew to retain our liberty. (IV.55.68)

conqueror, toward Britain. Ownership in land becomes inextricably linked with the power of

origins: "Genealogical textuality in family, regnal, and national histories expressed and

stimulated a class-interested historical consciousness. The possession of territory and power

came to correlate distinctively with ownership of time; time came to constitute space—family

and national land—as home, an inalienable and permanent private and public territory"

(Ingledew 668–69). Geoffrey's "ownership of time" comes from his fabrication of Trojan

ancestry for the Britons, which suggests, by the end of his history, that the Britons are entitled or

destined to recover their territory. However, these historic representations are meant to add to the

mythology of England and the metaphoric glorification of the Welsh in the narrative, not create a

justifiable means for the Welsh to reclaim their land. What becomes of Welsh "destiny" and

identity affects a reading of Geoffrey's history in terms of its nationalistic sentiments.

<u>Nationalism and King Arthur</u>

Geoffrey's history functions as rhetoric for resisting the total eradication of the Welsh

identity at the hands of both the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans. He constructs a narrative of

history that is centered on this specific ethnic group. In order to place the Britons (Welsh) at the

forefront of Britain's early history, Geoffrey does more than simply lengthen the time of British

authority. Geoffrey's use of fictional motifs and anecdotes in re-creating British history adds

significantly to Welsh identity, but only in the narrative space of literature. Inside this history,

the Welsh have a remarkable dynastic connection and the obligation to live up to that standard.

The Trojan lineage of the Welsh can be connected to crucial contemporary anxieties about

the English kingship, with worry over Welsh rebellions and the problems of having a legitimate

heir to the throne. However, the *HRB* has also been read as a nationalistic piece for the Welsh.

Gillingham points to Geoffrey's identification with Monmouth as an indication of his Welsh or

even Breton lineage. He writes, "He [Geoffrey] was writing just at the time when the learned

Anglo-French world with which he was familiar was beginning to despise Welshmen, to write

off the Britons as barbarians, as brutish creatures without a history" (Gillingham, "Contexts"

110). Since Geoffrey calls himself *Galfridis Monemuntesis*, identifying himself specifically as

from Wales, Gillingham believes Geoffrey's history becomes a method of revitalizing the

damaged reputation of his ancestors. Geoffrey not only creates a remarkable lineage for the

Britons, he also utilizes numerous warrior-kings that justify a positive portrayal of his ancestors,

such as Brutus, Ambrosius, Uther, and Arthur.

Reclaiming some of the reputation of the Welsh seems to be the main focus of the history

from the start. Geoffrey's prologue indicates that his most pressing concern regarding the

existing British histories is the lack of information about King Arthur. Like other figures in the

text, Arthur continues the tradition of Briton dominance on the island, but Arthur's reign is the

climax of this narrative; every king after Arthur merely occupies the dénouement of the story of

the Britons. Arthur dominates the narrative around Book XI, and Geoffrey makes his Arthur the

perfect example of a kingship. He writes,

> Erat autem Arturus quindecim annorum iuuenis inauditae uirtutis atque largitatis, in quo
>
> tantam gratiam innata bonitas praestiterat ut a cunctis fere poplis amaretur. Insignibus
>
> itaque regiis inciatus, solitum morem seruans largitati indulsit. Confluebat ad eum tanta
>
> multitudo militum ut ei quod dispensaret deficeret. Sed cui naturalis inest largitio cum
>
> probitate, licet ad tempus indigeat, nullatenus tamen continua paupertas ei nocebit.
>
> (IX.143.9-14.193) [40]

---

[40] He was a youth of fifteen of great promise and generosity, whose innate goodness ensured that he was loved by almost everybody. As a newly crowned king, he displayed his customary open-handedness. Such a crowd of knights flocked to him that he ran out of gifts. Yet a man who combines an upright character with natural generosity may be out of pocket for a short time, but will never be the victim of lasting poverty. (IX.143.192)

As Lavezzo points out, using an individual to represent the majesty of the nation and its people is not an uncommon practice in the medieval historiographic tradition. In examining Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, Lavezzo notes, "Nations, Higden tells us (with the help of Josephus), are given to constructing heroes whose exceptionally grand qualities testify to the grandeur of their people...part of the work of national history is that of giving pleasure, of offering a fantasy that creates a sovereign nation" (xiv). Not only bold but also magnanimous, Arthur represents all the positive traits Geoffrey hopes to imbue in the image of the Britons. The character of Arthur becomes the main focus, the driving force, of Geoffrey's history, and represents the author's best attempt to rehabilitate the marginalized Welsh and place them more directly in British history, despite their inevitable fall from grace. Having a courageous hero like Arthur as representative of the nation makes the Welsh people's ultimate defeat all the more tragic for the Norman audience.

Arthur's prowess in battle helps keep the Britons in control and unified against a common enemy, the Saxons. However, Arthur is more than just a great warrior like his predecessors; the prestige and notoriety of the Arthurian court distinguishes Geoffrey's King Arthur from the other Britons and inspires the romantic tradition of chivalric stories that follow the *HRB* in the medieval period. Victorious in battle, Arthur begins to invite all the best knights to his court, even conducting festivals at Carleon:

> Tunc, inuitatis probissimis quibusque ex longe positis regnis, coepit familiam suam augmentare tantamque faceciam in domo sua habere ita ut aemulationem longe manentibus populis ingereret. Vnde nobilissimus quisque incitatus nichili pendebat se nisi sese siue in induendo siue in arma ferendo ad modum militum Arturi haberet. Denique, fama largitatis atque probitatis illius per extremos mundi cardines diuulgata

reges transmarinorum regnorum nimius inuadebat timor ne inquietatione eius oppressi nationes sibi subditas amitterent. (IX.154.225-232.205) [41]

Arthur becomes a formidable figure, causing other nations to fear him and his influence. His reign is the height of British power, providing a climax to the narrative of the British rule and portending their inevitable fall.

Even after his defeat in battle against his traitorous nephew Modred, Arthur remains a figure of Welsh resistance, and Geoffrey's final words on the subject contain the promise of his return: "Sed et inclitus ille rex Arturus letaliter uulneratus est; qui illinc ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis euectus Constantino cognato suo et filio Cadoris ducis Cornubiae diadema Britanniae concessit anno ab incarnatione Domini .dxlii" (XI.178.81-84.253). [42] Unlike every other king before him in the *HRB*, Arthur's death is never announced. He continues a mostly symbolic reign as he waits to be healed of his grievous wound. Geoffrey's conspicuous avoidance of the death of King Arthur points to his concern for Welsh identity and its resistance to a figurative and literal oblivion. However, the avoidance only draws attention to the fictionality inherent in declaring Arthur to be a ghostly figure who waits for the opportunity to return to save his people. The legendary quality to this story makes the historic events and Arthur seem all the more unbelievable, although it was a great tale shared by many during the time. As such, Gillingham's claim that Geoffrey attempts to create a narrative of Welsh national resistance through historical figures like Brutus and Arthur fails to account for Geoffrey's

---

[41] Then Arthur began to increase his household by inviting all the best men from far-off kingdoms and conducted his court with such charm that he was envied by distant nations. All the noblest were stirred to count themselves as worthless if they were not dressed or armed in the manner of Arthur's knights. As his reputation for generosity and excellence spread to the farthest corners of the world, kings of nations overseas became very frightened that he would attack and deprive them of their subjects. (IX.154.204)

[42] The illustrious king Arthur too was mortally wounded; he was taken away to the island of Avallon to have his wounds tended and, in the year of Our Lord 542, handed over Britain's crown to his relative Constantinus, son of Cador duke of Cornwall. (XI.178.252)

ultimate aim for the *HRB*. Indeed, it seems that Geoffrey had more of his own interests in mind than those of any national group; Geoffrey is more of an opportunist than a nationalist.

By the twelfth century, well after the Normans have established a fairly unified dominion of the island, the Welsh remain an unpopular group, cordoned off in their corner of the country as they had been for centuries. From his "Description of the Island," Geoffrey indicates the present condition of England and its inhabitants: "Postremo quinque inhabitatur populis, Normannis uidelicet atque Britannis, Saxonibus, Pictis, et Scotis; ex quibus Britones olim ante ceteros a mari usque ad mare insederunt donec ultione diunia propter ipsorum superbiam superueniente Pictis et Saxonibus cesserunt" (Description.5.42-47.7).[43] The Normans come first in this list, as they now dominate the island, but the Britons, whose pride led to their downfall, are the subject of Geoffrey's history. After Arthur's defeat and symbolic demise, the Welsh fight amongst themselves, foolishly letting their pride interfere with the governance of the island and resistance to the Saxons. As I argue below, Geoffrey is more critical than approving of the Welsh, especially after Arthur's symbolic death (his journey to Avalon). This is the point in the narrative where Gildas' depiction of the Britons becomes integral to the *HRB*. As the most problematic, as well as the most socially and politically insignificant group, the Welsh make an interesting choice for Geoffrey's history. It is as if the author wishes to reclaim some historical prestige for them, which may incite some nationalistic pride for their ethnic group.

The possible nationalistic elements of Geoffrey's depiction of the Welsh are difficult to prove not just because of his unspecified allegiances, but because the representation of the different warring cultures indicates an early form of postcolonial history. Nationalism itself, and

---

[43] It is finally inhabited by five peoples, the Normans, the Britons, the Saxons, the Picts and the Scots; of these the Britons once occupied it from shore to shore before the others, until their pride brought divine retribution down upon them and they gave way to the Picts and the Saxons. (Description.5.6)

nationhood, are more modern concepts not readily applied to the medieval period. And if

nationalism is a challenging topic to discuss in the medieval period, post-colonialism is an even

trickier concept, as, in the common meaning of the term, it follows not only the formation of the

nation-state but also the construction of the imperialistic country. But as Warren claims:

> Postcolonial studies…formulate theories of culture and identity in border communities
>
> that speak to the discontinuities of medieval boundaries, even though the legal and
>
> political mechanisms differ greatly. At the same time, certain resemblances between
>
> medieval and modern cultures dismantle the seemingly impermeable boundary that critics
>
> draw on the modern side of the Middle Ages…the familiar and the foreign (the modern
>
> and the medieval) are always already mutually contaminated and in the process of
>
> decomposition. Postcolonial criticism narrates the traumas of this process. (xi)

Warren sees postcolonial perspectives in the writers of the medieval period and identifies

Arthurian historiography as a form of border writing, a specific response to the "cultural trauma"

of the Norman invasion. Interest in the insular histories of the past was sparked by a defensive

need to retain the cultural identities of the past and the present; new boundaries and borders were

formed in this process, both in the physical territories of England and the narrative space of

history (Warren 1).

In many ways, Geoffrey's use of Arthur represents a postcolonial perspective on medieval

history. Arthur can certainly be seen as a hero who elevates his people beyond their current

status as sinful pagans and barbarians. In fact, Geoffrey does not wish to comment directly on the

British submission to the Saxons but to relate that event to more contemporary incidents.

Geoffrey displaces the current defeat of the Saxons by the Normans with the earlier conquest of

the Britons by the Saxons. Hugh MacDougall suggests, "By portraying the British as a once

great people with extensive dominions he could at once raise their status in the eyes of their new Norman overlords and suggest a precedent to the Norman kings in their imperialistic ambitions" (7).

While Geoffrey's text may seem particularly concerned with Welsh nationalism, some scholars claim that because Geoffrey's audience is primarily Norman, such a motivation would have been misguided. Tatlock claims:

> Patriotism in Geoffrey is of the medieval kind. He shows little general national feeling, nor any marked attachment for the land of Britain, except in his opening chapter (impressive, but taken from Gildas). He also exhibits little emotional local or regional loyalty, though he certainly does show such familiarities; nor any special feudal or class attachments, certainly not markedly for the church nor even for kings save as they are his subject and represent the people he is celebrating, and though he assumes aristocrats of course as the chief of humanity. With a strong steady sense of the unity of south Britain, sometimes all Britain, his loyalty is racial, for the Britons. (396)

For Tatlock, there is no nationalistic sentiment for England, but racial pride for the Britons. This matters to an audience of Normans who embrace their new land as conquerors finding the inherent and metaphoric importance of the land and its people as well as their own genealogical connections to the island.

Marked for Failure

Gillingham and MacDougall suggest that Geoffrey may have wished to bring to light the unique and praise-worthy qualities of the Britons to his Norman audience, but he seems to have done so more as a cautionary tale than anything else. He is by no means always complimentary of the British, and in attempting to justify the present subjugated state of the Britons by the

Saxons (or the Welsh), Geoffrey's *HRB* lays the majority of the blame on the same group he wishes to exalt. For example, Book VI explores the character of Vortigern, a usurper and traitor to his people, who embodies the negative traits of the British.

After the Romans leave Britain, the Britons make Constantinus their king and give him a Roman wife who bears him three sons: Constans, Aurelius Ambrosius, and Uther Pendragon. The sons were sent away for instruction: "Constantem uero primogenitum tradidit in ecclesia Amphibali infra Guintoniam ut monachilem ordinem susciperet; ceteros autem duos, Aurelium uidelicet et Vther, Guithelino ad nutriendum commisit" (VI.93.142-145.119).[44] Constantinus is surreptitiously murdered by a Pict in his service, leading to a discussion about his successor. Vortigern, earl of Gewissei, is integral to bringing Constans to the throne because his younger brothers, Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther Pendragon, are still too young to rule:

> Denique, cum nunc sic, nunc aliter contendissent, accessit Vortergirnus consul Gewisseorum, qui omni nisu in regnum anhelabat, et adiuit Constantem monachum illumque in haec uerba allocutus est: "Ecce, pater tuus defunctus est et fratres tui propter aetatem sublimari nequeunt, nec alium uideo in progenie tua quem in regem populus promoueret. Si igitur consilio meo adquiescere uolueris possessionemque meam augmentare, conuertam populum in affectum sublimandi te in regnum et ex tali habitu…" (VI.94.148-158.119)[45]

Vortigern easily sets up Constans as a puppet king because the inexperienced Constans knows very little about ruling and had devoted his life to the church. With Constans under his influence

---

[44] The king presented his eldest, Constans, to the church of St. Amphibalus in Winchester to become a monk; the other two, Aurelius and Uther, he entrusted to Guithelinus to bring up. (VI.93.118)

[45] After much disagreement, Vortigern, earl of Gewissei, eager to win the crown for himself, intervened by visiting the monk Constans and addressing him as follows: "Look, your father has died, your brothers are too young to succeed him and, in my opinion, there is no one else in your family that the people can make king. If you agree to follow my advice and increase my wealth, I shall induce them to be willing to crown you and divest you of your monkish habit…" (VI 94.118)

and the other contenders for the throne too young to claim it, Vortigern cleverly plots to usurp the kingdom. Over time, he builds enough support and a large enough retinue that he puts his plan into action by suggesting that Constans put Picts in his court to relay information about possible Pictish rebellions: "Ecce occulta incauti amici proditio! Non enim id laudabat ut salus inde proueniret Constanti sed quia sciebat Pictos gentem esse instabliem et ad omne scelus paratam; inebriati ergo siue in iram inducti, commoueri possent facile aduersus regem ita ut absque cunctamine ipsum interficerent, unde si id contigisset haberet adytum promouendi sese in regem ut seapius affectauerat" (VI.95.201-206.121).[46] Vortigern's plot succeeds when he befriends the Picts and manipulates them into murdering Constans in a drunken rage. After that, Vortigern crowns himself king.

Vortigern's deception is made worse because he had befriended Constans when the young monk was unsure of his path, showing Vortigern as an untrustworthy and devious figure. He is also a terrible leader, mostly as a result of his deceitfulness, and it is not long before he loses his grip on the crown: "Proditione tandem eius diuulgata, insurrexerunt ineum comprouintialium populi insularum quos Picti in Albaniam conduxerant; indignati namque Picti commilitones suos qui propter Constatem interfecti fuerant in ipsum uindicare nitebantur.…Anxiabatur etiam ex alia parte timore Aurelii Ambrosii fratrisque sui Vther Pendragon, qui ut praedictum est minorem Britanniam propter ipsum diffugerant" (VI.97.239-244.123). [47] He is unable to successfully fight against the Picts and resorts to hiring Saxon warriors, Hengest and Horsus, to help the British.

---

[46] Covert betrayal, this was, of an unsuspecting friend. The advice was not given to save Constans, but because Vortigern knew the Picts were a fickle nation, ready for anything: if he made them drunk or enraged, they could easily be stirred to kill the king without a thought, and then he would have the chance to become king as he had so often longed. (VI.95.120)

[47] As his treachery became known, the peoples of the neighbouring islands whom the Picts had brought to Scotland rose up against him; the Picts were angry that their countrymen had been killed on account of Constans and wanted to take revenge on him.…Equally he was troubled by fear of Aurelius Ambrosius and his brother Uther Pendragon, who, as I said, had fled to Brittany because of him. (VI.97.122)

This action leads to the eventual domination of Britons by the Saxons, when the Saxons continue to increase their numbers in Britain and extort many gifts of land and treasure from Vortigern.

Throughout his dealings with the Saxons, Vortigern is characterized as weak and ineffectual; he is hated by his own people, especially when he becomes enamored with a Saxon's (Hengest's) daughter, Ronwein: "Vortigern autem, diueros genere potus inebriatus, intrante Sathana in corde suo, amauit puellam et postulauit eam a patre suo. Intrauerat, inquam, Sathanas in corde suo quia cum Christianus esset cum pagana coire desiderabat" (VI.100.357-360.129-131).[48] Interestingly, the relationship between Ronwein and Vortigern is entirely Geoffrey's invention, and it highlights how Geoffrey imbues his characters with individual motivations and human frailties. The magnitude of Vortigern's folly is evident by the repetition of "Satan had entered into his heart," and the reader can see that he, even at this early stage in his ruling, represents the worst kind of ruler and Briton. His desire for a Saxon woman, Ronwein, aligns him more closely with the enemy than with his own people. Vortigern puts his own desires above those of his people; he is a foil to the magnanimous nobility of Arthur and exemplifies many of the traits that Geoffrey applies to the contemporary Welsh later in the *HRB*.

Vortigern's people see the folly of his ways as they watch the Saxon population grow and see their leader consorting with the pagans: "Quod cum uidissent Britones, timentes proditionem eorum dixerunt regi ut ipsos ex finibus regni sui expelleret. Non enim debebant pagani Christianis communicare nec intromitti, quia Christiana lex prohibebat; insuper tanta multitudo aduenerat ita ut ciuibus terrori essent; iam nesceibatur quis paganus esset, quis Christianus, quia

---

[48] Vortigern became drunk on various kinds of liquor and, as Satan entered into his heart, asked her father for the girl he loved. Satan, I repeat, had entered into his heart, for despite being a Christian he wanted to sleep with a pagan woman. (VI.100.128-130)

pagani filias et consanguineas eorum sibi associauerant" (VI.101.389-394.131). [49] Vortigern

resists their demand to expel the Saxons because of his own selfish reasons; his love for his wife

and close kinship with the pagans overrides his desire to protect his people from being eradicated

through this intermingling of races. In response, his people depose him and make his son

Vortimer king. Vortimer makes an effort to fight off the invading Saxons, but his death puts his

father back on the throne. It is not until Ambrosius, the rightful heir, kills Vortigern that his reign

finally ends.

Despite his horrible behavior and disastrous mistakes as a leader, Vortigern is not

representative of the Britons or of Geoffrey's opinion of the Britons. Vortigern was abhorred by

his people, and Geoffrey clearly indicates that Vortigern did not act like a Christian king, as

Arthur did. Geoffrey repeatedly claims that it was the devil in Vortigern's heart that caused him

to betray his own people and his pride that caused him to reach for the crown in the first place.

Unlike Vortigern, Geoffrey clearly describes other British characters, such as Malgo and

Modred, as morally reprehensible without such an excuse for their behavior; he implies that

Britons are eventually overcome because of their own ethical and political failings.

Geoffrey's assertion that Britons are the destined inheritors of England (over their Saxon and

Norman conquerors) through their Trojan lineage is complicated by their own mistakes. Siân

Echard notes that Geoffrey follows Gildas' model, placing responsibility and blame on the

Britons for their defeat at the hands of the Saxons as part of God's ultimate plan. But in

Geoffrey's historical vision of the Britons, "even when God is with the Britons, either the

treachery of others, or their own folly (or sometimes both) becomes the final determinant of fate"

---

[49] When the Britons saw this, they feared that they would be betrayed and told the king to expel the Saxons from the kingdom. Pagans ought not to communicate or mix with Christians, as it was forbidden by Christian law; moreover so many of them had arrived that his subjects feared them; no one knew who was pagan and who was Christian, since the pagans had married their daughters and relatives. (VI.101.130)

(Echard 26). This portrayal may seem to undercut Geoffrey's opposition to the negative portrayals of the Britons in earlier histories; however, it is Geoffrey's appropriated position within this ethnic group that allows him to rightfully indicate the pitfalls of his own community. Even the most famous of the Britons, Arthur, is virtuous and brave as a result of his individual characteristics, not as a result of his British heritage: "Arthur's great deeds are always attributed, in proper Norman fashion, to his individual abilities and never to the general goodwill of the Britons; Arthur's compatriots, in fact, revert to their wicked ways as soon as Arthur bows out, and the insurrection of Modred also attests to the inherent evil of the Britons" (Faletra, "Narrating" 72). Arthur might be the one exceptional Briton, especially when compared to other rulers like Vortigern and Modred.

Like Vortigern, Modred is a usurper who displays all the negative qualities of the Britons. Geoffrey represents Modred's betrayal as the worst possible action against the noble King Arthur. Book XI begins: "Ne hoc quidem, consul auguste, Galfridus Monemutensis tacebit, sed ut in praefato Britannico sermone inuenit et a Waltero Oxenefordensi, in multis historiis peritissimo uiro, audiuit, uili licet stilo, breuiter tamen propalabit, quae proleia inclitus ille rex post uictoriam istam in Britanniam reuersus cum nepote suo commiserit" (177.1-5.249).[50] Geoffrey reiterates that this episode was clearly recounted in the text and verified by Walter, which makes sense as this is the first full account of Modred and his deeds. Modred attempts to take the British crown, amassing a large army of Britons, Picts, Scots, and Irish. Throughout this civil rebellion, Geoffrey continually labels Modred a traitor who stubbornly refuses to yield even when he has clearly lost. In fact, this leads to Arthur's demise:

---

[50] Geoffrey of Monmouth will not be silent even about this, most noble earl, but, just as he found it written in the British book and heard from Walter of Oxford, a man very familiar with many histories, he will tell, in his poor style, but briefly, of the battles the famous king fought against his nephew, when he returned to Britain after his victory. (XI.177.248)

At Arturus, acriori ira accensus quoniam tot centena commilitonum suorum amiserat, in

tercia die, datis prius sepulturae peremptis, ciutatem adiuit atque infra receptum

nebulonem obsedit. Qui tamen, coeptis suis desistere nolens se dipsos qui ei adhaerebant

pluribus modis inanimans, cum agminibus suis egreditur atque cum auunculo suo

proeliari disponit. Inito ergo certamine, facta est maxima caedes in utraque parte, quae

tandem magis in partem ipsius illata coegit eum campum turpiter relinquere. (XI.178.36-

43.251) [51]

This traitorous move on Modred's part throws off the line of succession, as King Arthur has no

legitimate heirs and leaves the throne to a kinsman, Constantine. In fact, the whole episode

between Arthur and Modred is quite similar, and I believe deliberately so, to the contemporary

civil war between Stephen and Matilda, as explored below.

Following the loss of King Arthur, the Briton successors rule with mixed results, warring

against Modred's followers and Saxon rebels. Constantine slays Modred's sons to keep them

from getting the throne and is struck down for his crime shortly after. From there, Constantine is

succeeded by Aurelius Conan: "Cui successit Aurelius Conanus, mirae probitatis iuuenis et

ipsius nepos, qui monarchiam tocius insulae tenes eiusdem diademate dignus esset si non foret

ciuilis belli amator" (XI.181.105-107.255).[52] Here, Geoffrey begins to parallel Gildas, indicating

the British rulers' tendency for civil disputes. From Aurelius Conan, the throne passes to

Vortiporius who has a fairly peaceful reign until the ascension of Malgo, whose sinful deeds

---

[51] Arthur, yet more angry at the loss of so many hundreds of his soldiers, first buried the dead, then on the third day
marched to Winchester and laid siege to the wretch who was taking refuge there. Modred, unwilling to give up,
stiffened his companions' resolve, came out with his army and prepared to fight his uncle. Battle was joined with
great slaughter on both sides, but eventually the tide turned against Modred and forced him into a shameful retreat.
(XI.178.250) [Please note that Reeve's translation provides more details than the Latin. The "ciutatem adiuit" is
identified as Winchester in the English translation above.]
[52] Constantius was succeeded by his nephew Aurelius Conanus, a youth of great promise who ruled over the whole
island, and who would have been worthy of the crown save for his fondness for civil strife. (XI.181.254)

incite God's wrath. Geoffrey writes, "Cui successit Malgo, ominum fere ducum Britanniae pulcherrimus, multorum tirannorum depulsor, robustus armis, largior ceteris, et ultra modum probitate praeclarus nisi sodomitana peste uolutatus sese Deo inuisum exhibuisset" (XI.183.115-118.255).[53] Malgo's depravity, in terms of his apparent homosexuality, provokes God's anger, although Geoffrey carefully avoids directly defining or even highlighting this sin. In fact, Geoffrey seems complimentary of Malgo for the first half of his description, but Malgo's sinfulness reflects the ambiguous sinfulness of his people, and the Britons are easily conquered as they give themselves over to foolish in-fighting over their land. Geoffrey has set up a genealogical standard for the Britons, and when they fail to live up to the glory of their supposed ancestry, he scolds them:

> Quid, ociosa gens pondere inmanium scelerum oppressa, quid semper ciulia proelia
> posita regna potestati tuae subdidisses nunc uelut bona uinea degenerata in amaritudinem
> uersa patriam, coniuges, liberos nequeas ab inimicis tueri?…Quia ergo regnum tuum in
> se diuisum fuit, quia furor ciuilis discordiae et liuoris fumus mentem tuam hebetauit, quia
> superbia tua uni regi oboedientiam ferre non permisit, cernis iccirco patriam tuam ab
> impiissimis paganis desolatam, domos etiam eiusdem supra domos ruentes, quod posteri
> tui in futurum lugebunt. (XI 185.141-153.257) [54]

Having been more critical of personal failures from characters like Vortigern, Geoffrey now applies his scornful tone to the whole race. Echoing Gildas' powerful chastisement of the Britons

---

[53] Vortiporius was succeeded by Malgo, probably the most handsome of all Britain's rulers; he drove out many tyrants, was a mighty warrior, more generous than the rest, and would have enjoyed the highest of reputations had he not made himself hateful to God by wallowing in the sin of sodomy. (XI.183.254)

[54] Why, you slothful race, weighed down by your terrible sins, why with your continual thirst for civil war, have you weakened yourself so much by internal strife? …Your kingdom is divided against itself, lust for civil strife and a cloud of envy has blunted your mind, your pride has prevented you from obeying a single king, so your country has been laid waste before your eyes by most wicked barbarians, and its houses fall one upon another. (XI 185.256)

in *DECB*, Geoffrey's ire is particularly directed at those who engage in "civil strife," allowing envy and pride to overtake them and causing damage to the dynasty of the Britons. Geoffrey's reproach of internal strife and civil war suggests a more contemporary focus for his own overall aims, as suggested by the timeframe of his history.

While Geoffrey carefully avoids placing his history within the relatively recent past, the influence of current events is still evident in the work. Indeed, Geoffrey's final vision of the Britons seems unlikely to ignite much cultural pride, as it presents a bleak portrait for their future. This seems like a necessary strategy for the author, especially when writing to a Norman audience that may be concerned about their current civil strife and its consequences. His history ends in a less hopeful tone for the Britons: "Barbarie etiam irrepente, iam non uocabantur Britones sed Gualenses, uocabulum siue a Gualone duce eorum siue a Galaes regina siue a barbarie trahentes.…Degenerati autem a Britannica nobilitate Gualenses numquam postea monarchiam insulae recuperauerunt; immo nunc sibi, interdum Saxonibus ingrati consurgentes externas ac domesticas clades incessanter agebant" (XI.207.592-600.281).[55] The Welsh, in this passage, are deemed no longer worthy of the label of Briton. Geoffrey lacks confidence in their future as they waste their time with petty squabbling.

Indeed, the internal conflicts, "massacring…each other," seem like a reference to the contemporary civil conflict between Matilda and Stephen. Having lived through and most likely directly witnessed the events of the civil war in Oxford, Geoffrey would have been keenly aware of the destructiveness of internal disputes between royal family members. Issues of ascension, familial betrayal, and civil war litter the *HRB*, leading to the death of the most significant British

---

[55] As their culture ebbed, they were no longer called Britons, but Welsh, a name which owes its origins to their leader Gaulo, or to queen Galaes or to their decline.…The Welsh, unworthy successors to the noble Britons, never again recovered mastery over the whole island, but, squabbling pettily amongst themselves and sometimes with the Saxons, kept constantly massacring foreigners or each other. (XI.207.280)

ruler, King Arthur. The civil strife is ultimately the biggest Welsh sin, according to both

Geoffrey and Gildas. The war between Matilda and Stephen also divides the loyalty of the

people, the newest successors to the island. After William I, the Normans enjoyed relative peace,

but the civil war has not only disrupted the idea of kingship but also made it possible for the

Welsh uprisings. Taking advantage of the discord and confusion surrounding Stephen's

usurpation of the throne, the Welsh contribute to Matilda's rebellion to continue the disruption of

Norman rule and regain some of their lost territory.

The Norman Future

Geoffrey always seems more concerned with the Normans than with the Welsh or even the

victors of his history, the Anglo-Saxons. In regards to the name change from Briton to Welsh, R.

William Leckie notes, "The change in appellation mirrors the political realities of the period, but

Geoffrey does not provide a corresponding sign of newly won Anglo-Saxon pre-eminence. The

omission is noteworthy.... Although Geoffrey attaches considerable importance to the renaming

of Albion, he does not now signal a passage of dominion by similar means" (70). Clearly,

Geoffrey wishes to underplay the significance of the Saxons and their victory, most likely

because their conquest will not survive past the Norman invasion. As an author writing a history

so far removed from its events (approximately seventy years after the Norman Conquest),

Geoffrey uses his knowledge of "future" events to color his depictions of the past and the

Saxons. In doing so, Geoffrey places more importance on the future Norman elite by omitting

much of the Saxon history. This is especially true when the future is actually introduced to the

narrative through Merlin's prophecies.

Between Books VI and VIII, Geoffrey diverges from history to present the prophecies of

Merlin, a magician recently discovered by Vortigern who is said to be fathered by an incubus. As

mentioned earlier, this inclusion was at the request of Bishop Alexander, a fan of the character

Merlin. Wishing to please the bishop, Geoffrey again translates the prophecies and provides

them for his British history. What follows are a series of esoteric statements by Merlin, filled

with symbolic imagery than can be interpreted in various ways. Readers can make sense of part

of the prophecies, especially as it applies to the events recounted in the *HRB* (especially Arthur's

kingdom), but "the slippery and polysemic nature of Merlin's language makes it impossible to

reach a definitive interpretation so that accepting his text as an accurate account of history

becomes problematic" (Bell 18). However, scholars have made attempts to interpret the

allegorical meaning of the figures presented.

Indeed, Kimberly Bell discusses Merlin as a literary representation "whose actions reflect

both the role of the reader and the various functions of the historian" (14). Geoffrey's Merlin

becomes a stand-in for the author in the text, representing his perspective on the ancient and

recent past, which makes Merlin's prophecies all the more interesting. Merlin's prophecies

become an intriguing and puzzling contribution to the text, occupying an entire book shortly

before Arthur's ascension. Reading his prophecies not as merely symbolic possibilities in the

narrative of the history but as the assertions of an author who knows what history has in store for

the Britons and the Saxons provides some stability to the otherwise obscure references. In

addition, it provides access to Geoffrey's true attitude on the future of the Britons.

For example, Merlin prophesizes that the time of the red dragon (the Britons) is nearing its

end, and they will be overtaken by the white dragon (the Saxons). The allegory continues as the

white dragon becomes rather synonymous with the "German worm" who is crowned king. But

even the dominion of the German worm or white dragon will end: "Terminus illi positus est

quem transuloare nequibit; centum namque quinquaginta annis in inquietudine et subiectione

manebit, ter centum uero insidebit" (*PM*.113.66-68.147).[56] The white dragon's kingdom falls to

two new dragons, a possible representation of the Norman kings William I and William II, until

the lion of justice takes control. Merlin remarks, "Catuli leonis in aequoreos pisces

transformabuntur, et aquila eius super montem Arauium nidificabit" (*PM*.113.84-86.147).[57] Later

on, that same eagle is referred to again: "Deaurabit illud aquila rupti foederis et tercia

nidificatione gaudebit" (*PM*.114.93-4.149).[58] All of these references seem without context and

therefore nearly impossible to interpret.

Yet, Faletra contends that the twelfth-century audience of this text would have specific ideas

about the allegorical meaning of these prophecies: "The Lion of Justice is probably Henry I, the

Eagle Empress Matilda, the German Worm the Saxons" (Faletra, "Narrating" 75). The lion's

cubs becoming fishes could be a reference to Henry's son William Adelin drowning at sea, and

the broken treaty might be the broken promises of the Norman nobles who did not ultimately

support Matilda's ascension. In fact, Faletra suggests that the *HRB* is actually more focused on

Normans than previously thought, mostly because of Merlin's prophecies. He claims:

> For the most part, however, the prophecies insofar as they are interpretable make their
>
> clearest references to events of the Norman dynasty. Geoffrey seems to revel in current
>
> affairs, recalling specific happenings in the reigns of the Norman kings from William the
>
> Conqueror to Stephen. And although they occasionally make clear references to some
>
> kind of pan-Celtic alliance or British resurgence, informed readers will realize that the
>
> exploits of the Boar of Cornwall or of Conan and Cadwallader belong to the closed off
>
> Briton past rather than to the Norman present (Faletra, "Narrating" 75).

---

[56] A limit has been set for the white dragon beyond which it will not be able to fly; for a hundred and fifty years it will endure harassment and submission, but for three hundred it will be in occupation. (*PM*.113.146)
[57] The lion's cubs will become fishes of the sea, and his eagle will nest on Mount Aravius. (*PM*.113.146)
[58] The eagle of the broken treaty will gild the bridle and rejoice in a third nesting. (*PM*.114.148)

Because of their deliberately ambiguous symbolism, the prophecies, Faletra can assume, symbolize the inevitability of the Norman Conquest. Faletra also claims that Geoffrey's *HRB* performs the same function as other histories of the period, despite the many differences between Geoffrey's style and that of other authors: "Despite, then, its apparent methodological and narrative opposition to the *Gesta Regum*…they both legitimize Norman colonization of Wales by creating and perpetuating textual myths of the innate defeatedness and the inevitable defeatability of the British people" (Faletra, "Narrating" 82). Faletra makes an interesting claim; however, the *HRB* seems like more than just a projection of the future onto the past (the Norman Conquest as seen through Merlin's eyes). It seems an exploration of the social and political condition of the twelfth century. Faletra's reading of the text focuses too specifically on its ending and the esoteric "Prophecies of Merlin" section of the *HRB*. Even before this final word on the Welsh, there are indications that Geoffrey's history is less about legitimizing Norman dominion (or that of any other ethnic group) and more about exploring the anxieties of the colonization.

Diana promises Brutus an empty island, but Brutus and his followers must rid the island of its remaining native inhabitants, giants, especially Goemagog: "Hic quadam die, dum Brutus in portu quo applicuerat festiuum diem deis celebraret, superuenit cum uiginti gigantibus atque dirissima caede Britones affecit" (I.21.472-474.29).[59] These episodes signify an inability to escape the colonial attitude of the period. The Britons succeed in eradicating all the giants, including Goemagog, which indicates that Geoffrey is not in support of some Welsh uprising or a revitalizing of the culture, but actually supports the Norman elite as an ideological consequence

---

[59] One day when Brutus was holding a feast for the gods at the port where he had landed, Goemagog arrived with twenty giants and inflicted terrible carnage on the Britons. (I.21.28) [Note: The text does not name the giant Goemagog until the following line, but Reeve's translation refers to him by name in this line]

of the colonial environment of England. The historical pattern is set: one group will conquer and be conquered by another. The Saxons dominated the Britons just as the Saxons were conquered by the Normans. The Britons are the focus of this history only in terms of metaphoric glorification, a post-colonial revitalization of the lost culture within the safety of the historical text. Geoffrey's nationalism could be directed more to the Normans, as they are the current rulers, which will help him garner a patron.

In terms of Geoffrey's treatment of the British, his infusion of a colonial perspective, and even his symbolic representation of the conflict between Matilda and Stephen through the characters of Arthur and Modred, the *HRB* can be seen as a nationalistic piece in support of the Normans and not the Britons. The real work of the text is not restricted to its ending but is suffused throughout the piece. The components of the story that build up to the climactic moment of Arthur's reign are arguably more revelatory than the falling action of its third act. The colonization of Albion, Briton interactions with the Romans, and the Saxons create a more nuanced portrait of the Britons and highlight one of the defining features of Geoffrey's *HRB*, the fabrication of British history. The faded glory of Arthur's departure into Avalon and the ominous warnings of the prophecies tie up the loose ends of history, but they do not deny the possibility of a return to Briton rule in England. The ending may seem to make the possibility of British dominion an improbability, but it leaves some opportunities for the history to function as a statement of resistance to invading forces.

Geoffrey's support of the Normans and apparent sympathy for the plight of the Welsh can be easily transferred to the contemporary political events taking place around him. Arthur's position as king is assured through his lineage, reaching all the way back to his Trojan roots, but he is temporarily supplanted by a treacherous cousin; similarly, Matilda's cousin usurps her place on

the throne despite her genealogical right to rule and the earlier support by the barons. Geoffrey is careful to avoid commenting directly on this situation, aside from his shifting dedications; however, the text continually articulates themes of legitimacy and betrayal, especially in familial contexts. Tatlock claims that Geoffrey shows his support for Matilda by identifying the treacherous Modred as Arthur's nephew, just as Stephen was Henry I's nephew and Matilda's cousin (426). Tatlock's contention seems too strong for Geoffrey's *HRB*, especially considering that the text predicts an ending for this conflict—Arthur is grievously wounded and leaves this world. Geoffrey certainly would not suggest that this is the expected outcome for the civil conflict between Matilda and Stephen. However, Henry's scheming nephew did take the crown from the rightful heir, an act of familial treachery, which is always rebuked in Geoffrey's historical world. These family dynamics in the text might be the closest Geoffrey comes to commenting on current events, but they are quite effective in transforming history into this figurative literary plane where right and wrong are more firmly established.

Conclusion: Establishing a Historical Voice

The conclusion to Geoffrey's *HRB* displays how he wishes to be read in conversation with other major historians of the period. Geoffrey writes,

> Reges autem eorum qui ab illo tempore in Gualiis successerunt Karadoco Lancarbanensi contemporaeno meo in materia scribend permitto, reges uero Saxonum Willelmo Malmesberiensi et Henrico Huntendonensi, quos de regibus Britonum tacere iubeo, cum non habeant librum illum Britannici sermons quem Walterus Oxenefordensis archidiaconus ex Britannia aduexit, quem de historia eorum ueraciter editum in honore

praedictorum principum hoc modo in Latinum sermonem transferre curaui. (XI 208.601-607.281) [60]

The Britons are the sole property of Geoffrey and his mysterious source. The Welsh can be explored by his friend Caradoc, and the Saxons may be explored by William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntington. Interestingly, Geoffrey mentions not only the Britons and the British language, but also Brittany, the source of this ancient book. The various people and locales mentioned in this final paragraph cast a wide net for Geoffrey's interest, from the Britons (early Welsh) to the Normans, leaving the others to produce a political history of the Saxons. Such a methodological program gives him the ability to build up the Normans in his history while silencing any opposition to their domination in his narrative, thus solidifying his chances of being the authoritative voice of the new Anglo-Norman Britain.

Yet, there is something to Geoffrey's tone that must be investigated. Otter notes, "This playful (or perhaps aggressive?) challenge to his most eminent fellow historians has often been taken as one indication that Geoffrey's *Historia* is at least in part parodic, an explanation that has seemed attractive to many since it promises a way to deal with Geoffrey's clearly non-historical material" ("Functions" 119). Perhaps this final word is meant to suggest a playfulness to this history, which may very well be the case. If Geoffrey is working off a purely imagined source, then he might not take the historical veracity of his *HRB* to heart and therefore makes a teasing nudge to his contemporaries and rivals in the historiographic field.

---

[60]The Welsh kings who succeeded one another from then on I leave as a subject matter to my contemporary, Caradoc of Llanacarfan, and the Saxon kings to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon; however I forbid them to write about the kings of the Britons since they do not possess the book in British which Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, brought from Brittany, and whose truthful account of their history I have here been at pains in honor of those British rulers to translate into Latin. (XI.208.282)

However, a parodic tone to his piece (or merely its conclusion) does not mean Geoffrey is any less serious about his goals as a historian. Geoffrey's claim to ownership suggests that the Britons are his property, not as part of his own ethnic background, but part of his professional space. If he is to make a name for himself as a historian and to garner the attention of the Norman aristocracy, he must carve out a niche in the already full literary landscape of medieval historiography. This is why he singles out his most prominent literary rivals, William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntington, in his parting words, as they had much more obvious claims to historicity and accuracy in their works.

Regardless, it seems less important what group Geoffrey supported when rhetorically analyzing this history. His dedication indicates a willingness to switch sides in the civil conflict to receive a better patron. Although, he seems to clearly favor Matilda and Robert with his numerous dedications to the latter and the coded references to the former in the narrative and only one possibly hastily altered version to Stephen. The most important characteristic of the conclusion to the *HRB* is Geoffrey's interest in politics and nationalism. This is not a didactic or ecclesiastical history like the works of Bede or Gildas. Like many other twelfth-century historians, Geoffrey attempted to enter the political scene through his writings, but he did so in a way that made him less indebted to a specific side, leaving his loyalties and intentions deliberately ambiguous. He composed a British history, but what does British mean at this point in history? The ambiguity of the term "British," the pre-nationalism of the medieval period, as well as the political unease of Geoffrey's time make it easier for the piece to maintain its indistinct position. In essence, Geoffrey hoped to work in concert with other writers of the time, but, like many authors, he also wanted to stand out. Geoffrey knew the work of his

contemporaries, and he shows the reader exactly how his *HRB* fits into this complex and

contentious historiographical tradition.

Chapter 2 –Translating and Transforming Arthurian Historiography in Laȝamon's *Brut*

Geoffrey's *HRB* greatly influenced the historiographical landscape from the time of its publication and distribution well into the later centuries of medieval and early modern Britain. The impact of the most famous British historical text not only shaped the history and mythology of the island but also created a slew of imitative texts that used this history to form a new commentary on the state of British identity. One such work, Laȝamon's *Brut*, continued the delicate balance of infusing the historiographic narrative of Britain with elements of post-colonialism, as the *HRB* did. In his book *Laȝamon's Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History*, Tiller notes, "The paradigm of historiography-translation-conquest characterizes the situation of historical writing in post-Conquest England, as the need of the Anglo-Norman ascendancy for a legitimate historical pedigree led to the extensive translation of Old English (OE) historical texts into Latin historical narrative – and in later generations, into French…to anchor Anglo-Norman legitimacy in a revised version of insular history" (11). Geoffrey attempted to create some legitimacy for the Normans through his "translation" of an ancient Welsh history, using it to elevate the Normans by justifying the inescapability of conquest and colonization. Laȝamon's *Brut* is an English translation of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, which is itself based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB*.

Wace created a verse history from the materials presented in the *HRB* as a 14,886-line Norman poem. Laȝamon translates Wace's work into a 16,095-line poem written in Middle English. Both Geoffrey and Laȝamon confront the problems of nationalism, ethnicity, and historiography in twelfth-century England. The history of the Britons, as represented in Geoffrey's *HRB*, is used to ultimately legitimize Norman rule, while Laȝamon's *Brut* represents culture as a heterogeneous mixture of Norman, British, and Anglo-Saxon. The multiple layers of

historical influences and linguistic translation between the *HRB* and the *Brut* make these texts prime examples of the ways histories of the period reflect the new cultural hybridity of England, one which transcribes its history over the older historiography. The *Brut*, more than the *HRB*, represents a vision of the cultural hybridity of the island through Laȝamon's fully developed character of King Arthur and reflects an effort to facilitate the movement from Saxon to Norman, and ultimately to the modern Middle English–speaking British (a combination of both the Saxons and the Normans).

Twelfth-century English historical writings seek to mediate the conflict between what the country was and what it might become. Following the Norman Conquest and the subsequent colonization of Anglo-Saxon Britain, historians created a vision of a post-colonial Britain, which involved a process of legitimizing Norman rule while de-legitimizing the previous political regime partially as a means to curry favor with the new ruling class. This process of translating British and Saxon identity into the new English culture of post-Conquest England begins with Geoffrey's *HRB* but reaches its fruition in Laȝamon's *Brut*. Laȝamon continues the historiographical aims of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but his focus is less on his own reputation and success with patronage and more on appropriating the native Briton historiography and mythology and blending the Normans into this history. His *Brut* becomes a representation of cultural hybridity and the remaking of English identity, blending the Norman, British, and Saxon cultures.

The text represents a transition from earlier forms of historical writing into romantic traditions, blending elements of romance, epic, and chronicle into a pseudo-history—rather like what I have shown in Geoffrey's *HRB*. Moreover, the *Brut* is the first English post-Conquest history. Laȝamon composed the *Brut* in Early Middle English, itself a significant marker of the

hybridized culture of Anglo-Norman England. As Tiller mentions, "[T]he Normans sought to represent themselves as English, redefining (translating) themselves as the new English" (*Laʒamon's* 7). This process was undertaken not only by building over and transforming the British landscape with Norman structures and castles but also by writing over the histories of the British and inscribing themselves into it like "a historiographic palimpsest" (Tiller, *Laʒamon's* 7). Laʒamon's decision to write in the post-colonial language of Middle English indicates the transformation of the British culture. By combining the language of the Anglo-Saxons with the mythology of the Welsh, Laʒamon creates a chronicle that narrates the post-colonial tradition of England and inscribes the Normans into an already culturally diverse British identity.

Laʒamon's Sources

Laʒamon's *Brut* is clearly indebted to Wace's *Roman de Brut* as its primary source; a close reading of the *Brut* reveals that the majority of Laʒamon's poem is translated from Wace. Wace's text, written around 1155, added to the rich British history originally composed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, taking Geoffrey's *HRB* and transforming it into a romantic verse history. Indeed, Geoffrey's *HRB* should also be considered a source for the historical matters of Laʒamon's *Brut*, as much of the historical matters first presented in the *HRB* are related in Laʒamon's text. Interestingly, despite the many layers of authorial influence on the *Brut*, Laʒamon still manages to create a vision of English history that is wholly unique from those of his predecessors, as I examine below.

Wace composed his verse history *Roman de Brut* in Old French shortly after the success of Geoffrey's *HRB*, around the time that the civil war between King Stephen and Empress Matilda was finally resolved with the death of King Stephen in 1154. Much of what is known about Wace's life comes from his own lines in his companion history, the *Roman de Rou*, which traces

the history of the Normans.[61] Each of Wace's historical projects was clearly influenced by his background. Born on the island of Jersey around 1110, Wace moved as a young boy to Caen in Brittany to study Latin and in preparation for his service in the Church (Weiss xi). As a young man, Wace spent his life working in Caen before eventually journeying to England sometime around 1150 (Weiss xi). The complex political climate of the time (the civil war between Matilda and Stephen) became an interesting backdrop to his historical aims. Depending on the exact date of his travel to England, Wace would have been witness to some of the more tumultuous events of the war between the feuding heirs.

Wace refers to his occupation at times as a *clerc lisant* in the *Roman de Rou*, suggesting multiple meanings.[62] However, in closely examining each use of the term in both Wace's and Gaimar's[63] writings, M. Dominica Legge's contention that the term refers to "a clerk in Holy Orders, not necessarily a priest, capable of writing, composing, and reading aloud" seems the most sensible (555). Many of Wace's works suggest that the author was very concerned with presenting his work to a broader, lay audience. His vernacular religious writings, *La Conception de Notre Dame* and *La Vie de Saint Nicolas*, suggest a desire to provide religious instruction and entertainment to the laity. The popularity of Geoffrey's *HRB*, a secular work, undoubtedly contributed to Wace's decision to translate it, knowing that it would gratify his Norman audience and increase his own popularity as an author. Indeed, his Anglo-Norman version of Geoffrey's Latin history made him a favorite of the House of Plantagenet. Wace was treated generously by

---

[61] Part three of the *Roman de Rou* contains most of the biographical information on Wace and his relations with his patrons.

[62] For a detailed discussion of the complexity of meaning tied to the term, see M. Dominica Legge's "Clerc Lisant" (full bibliographic information in Works Cited).

[63] Geffrei Gaimar, an Anglo-Norman chronicler and author of *Estoire des Engleis*, is explored in Chapter 4.

Henry II and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine [1122-1204], receiving not only valuable gifts but also a place in court (Weiss xii).

There are about 32 extant manuscripts and fragments of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, each varying in their faithfulness in translation to their source,[64] the *HRB*. Yet, it is important to remember that the process of translation during the medieval period does not carry the same meaning it does today. Judith Weiss's edition of Wace's text reiterates this fact in the introduction: "'Translate' in the Middle Ages did not have the narrow meaning it does today, and Wace, in bringing in Geoffrey's 'history' to yet a larger audience unversed in Latin, felt free to amplify and embellish his chronicle. Yet he stuck very closely to the outline, and often even the detail, of the events there" (xviii). Wace's *Roman de Brut* can easily be read as the French perspective of British history because the Latin text is transformed into a piece easily read or listened to by the Norman elite. To that end, Wace only adds two incidents to Geoffrey's *HRB*, the making of the Round Table and an expanded discussion on the death of Arthur and his place in Avalon. Wace's version of the "matter of Britain" operates as a verse literary history that Laȝamon can revisit, expand, and contract[65] into his own revision of the *HRB*. Laȝamon translates Wace's work into English, although he is obviously less concerned with capturing the French style, and expands, embellishes, and re-creates the English aspects of the story.

---

[64] This is partially due to the fact that only nineteen of the surviving manuscripts are complete or near-complete (Le Saux, *A Companion* 85). Another reason for possible deviations in the manuscripts is the fact that over half were copied in continental France, which could account for differences in the text. Continental copies tended to highlight the Arthurian romance, while English versions included materials of interest to the local populace like Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis* (Le Saux, *A Companion* 86). In addition, Françoise Le Saux's *A Companion to Wace* lists the numerous differences between Wace's *Roman de Brut* and the *HRB*, which are likely the result of Wace's use of the variant version of the *HRB* (91-93).

[65] According to Le Saux's *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and Its Source*, there are three primary categories for omissions or contractions of Wace's text in the *Brut*, "(a) the omission of technical description; (b) omission of redundant material, or material not of direct relevance to the plot; (c) omission of details inconsistent with the portrayal of a given character or episode" (33). Her chapter on "From Wace to Laȝamon" expands on all three points with specific examples from the siege of the Trojans in Tours to the change of the speeches of Tonuenee during the Belin and Brennes battle.

Laȝamon's revision of Wace's text involves more than two changes to the basic outline provided by Geoffrey. Laȝamon reimagines the story from the English perspective, rejecting the French influences, especially those involving the courtly traditions surrounding women. In examining scenes involving violence against women, female characters are hardly as idealized and revered as in Wace's *Roman de Brut*. For example, when Ursele, a noblewoman, sets sail to Brittany but is overtaken by Melga and Wanis in lines 6027-6045, her kinswomen are murdered, and she is raped by Melga before he passes her on to his men. This brutality against women in Laȝamon's *Brut* is echoed later in King Arthur's court. After a riot breaks out in court during dinner, Arthur restores order by commanding that not only should the man who first started the fight be punished but also "Þa wifmen þa ȝe maȝen ifinden; of his nexten cunden, / kerueð of hire neose; & heore wlite ga to lose" (11399-11400). [66]

In Wace's vision of Arthur's court, female characters are normally the subject of adoration, as in the tradition of French literature. Wace focused on the chivalry of the Arthurian story more so than Laȝamon does in the *Brut*: "It was Wace's poem…which gave the Arthurian court a chivalric identity by presenting it in terms of the personal and social values of contemporary society, ascribing to Arthur and his followers in concrete detail the fashionable manners and chivalric ideals of contemporary courts" (Barron and Weinberg xv-xvi). In this way, Wace's verse follows a more romantic (and somewhat nostalgic) tradition than Laȝamon's version. Laȝamon relates the same material from this verse history, but gives more emphasis to how the events shaped the current political climate of England. Nevertheless, the use of Arthurian material, already heavily mired in the French romantic style, makes it difficult for Laȝamon's

---

[66] "The women of his immediate family whom you can find, cut off their noses and let their looks be ruined…"

work to attain the same level of historical gravity as the texts created by his predecessors—

Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis—in the mid-twelfth century.

Laʒamon's translation works to re-create Wace's history in his own language[67] and on his

own terms. Tatlock contends, "Lawman has translated not only his language and style, but also

his cultural background, from those expected among mid-twelfth century Normans to those of

more primitive people; he seems in comparison, to a modern audience, simple-minded and

culturally inexperienced" (489). The author took a more "simplistic" approach to the material

according to Tatlock, excising much of the French courtly tradition. This excision might have

been a product of his own inexperience with French culture or of his "poetic tact in adapting to

an audience which would have found it unintelligible and disturbing" (489). Although Tatlock

may be correct in assuming that Laʒamon wished to avoid alienating his audience—a mostly

English-speaking, Anglo-Norman group—there is no evidence to suggest that the author was

somehow "simple-minded" or culturally naïve. Indeed, he shows great rhetorical skill throughout

his work and incredibly creative ingenuity in transforming Wace's 14,866 lines into 16,095 lines.

Keeping close to the source for his "translation," Laʒamon recounts all the historical materials

presented in Wace's *Roman de Brut*, but expands mostly on the Arthurian material. The narrative

of King Arthur takes on a much more thematic presence in Laʒamon's *Brut*; Laʒamon continues

expanding the added episodes from the *Roman de Brut* like the Round Table (more on this

below) to indicate how Arthur becomes a representation of the blending of Saxon and Norman

traditions. Laʒamon's work moved the context of the history away from a mostly Norman

audience and toward a more culturally hybridized one, using characters like King Arthur as

symbols of this change. Examining the surviving manuscripts, biographical details offered in the

---

[67] See "Regional Context and the Language of the Brut" below for more on the differences in style and language.

prologue, language, and regional context of the text provide insight into this shift in the tone and focus of Laȝamon's history.

<u>The Manuscripts</u>

Laȝamon's *Brut* exists in two manuscripts (MSS) currently held at the British Library: Cotton Caligula A.ix and Cotton Otho C.xiii. The first critical edition of the manuscripts was compiled by Sir Frederic Madden in 1847. More recently, G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie compiled the standard edition of Laȝamon's *Brut* in 1978 for The Early English Text Society, using both the Caligula and Otho MSS; additionally, Barron and Weinberg created an edition with translation of the Caligula in 1995. The Caligula manuscript contains 259 leaves and a number of Middle English and French pieces (both prose and verse), including Laȝamon's *Brut* on 192 leaves.[68] The Otho was thought to be lost in a fire on October 23, 1731, in the Ashburnam House, but the text survived, although badly damaged by the flames. It consists of 145 leaves but lacks the preface to the poem.[69] The Otho MS is significantly different linguistically, with more use of French vocabulary, and much shorter, suggesting it was probably written by a different scribe than the Caligula. While each text exhibits some adherence to the linguistic traditions of the region in which it was likely composed,[70] the Otho MS seemingly modernizes the archaic expressions of the author's supposed southwest Midland's vocabulary, which will be examined below. According to Barron and Weinberg, "The indications are that both texts are independently derived from a common version which cannot have been the author's original; so at least three copies of this vast work must once have existed" (ix). Neither manuscript is the

---

[68] For a detailed description of the Caligula MS, including notes on scribal handwriting, marginalia, etc., see Brook and Leslie's two volume edition or Elizabeth J. Bryan's "Layamon's *Brut* and the Vernacular Text" in Allen, Roberts, and Weinberg's *Reading Laȝamon's Brut* (full bibliographic information in the works cited).

[69] For a detailed description of the Otho MS, see Allen, Roberts, and Weinberg's *Reading Laȝamon's Brut* (full bibliographic information in the works cited).

[70] See below, "Regional Context," for an analysis of Laȝamon's residency in Worcerstershire.

work of the author, Laȝamon, but of different scribes who may have copied from the same manuscript or possibly even the author's original work. Le Saux indicates that "though the Otho and Caligula versions both descend from extremely close originals, and may have been copied from the same manuscript (possibly even from Laȝamon's holograph), because of the very principles which guided the scribal teams in their work, the Caligula text must be considered as most faithful to the authorial copy" (*Laȝamon's Brut* 13). Because of the stylistic and linguistic changes (as well as the abridging of the text), most scholars agree that the Otho MS is inferior to the Caligula MS, which seems to follow the original holograph more closely.

Indeed, as Lucy Perry indicates, there appears to be a critical bias against the Otho MS. While Perry's comparisons of the unique stylistic qualities of the Otho MS indicate a text worthy of critical analysis, there is no indication that the Otho is a better resource for studying the *Brut* than the Caligula. Perry concludes, "The aesthetics of Caligula have overshadowed Otho, but we should recognize that Otho has its own aesthetic, an aesthetic that lay behind its creation, and one that is part of the process of interpretation" (83). The aesthetic features of the two manuscripts— poetic style, language, meter—are distinct enough to warrant critical discussion on which to use in analyzing the context and purposes of the author's original work. Indeed, the Otho has value in terms of both the historical and romantic traditions; however, I believe that the Caligula, utilizing the linguistic characteristics one would expect of the author's regional context,[71] provides a much better model for understanding the nationalistic goals of the author. As Donald Bzdyl contends, "An analysis of the differences between the two manuscripts suggests that Caligula more accurately reflects Laȝamon's original text, while Otho's is apparently a version of Caligula, or a manuscript much like it, revised to make the language less archaic and to

---

[71] See sections on "Regional Context" below.

eliminate much of the poetic elaboration" (8). The changes between the two texts[72] make the

Caligula more suited to this analysis, as well as the fact that many scholars argue it reflects the

original holograph more closely.

<u>Date of Composition</u>

One of the biggest problems for a text like the *Brut* remains the difficulty in ascribing a

specific date of composition, which relates to the specific audience for the text. Laȝamon wrote

within a particular historiographical context, reading and responding to the writings of his

contemporaries like all of the authors explored in this dissertation. As Barron notes in "The

Idiom and the Audience of Laȝamon's Brut," "The two issues [dating and audience] are

interrelated in that identification of the audience would allow us to assume that the idiom of the

poem is that of a particular geographical area and social milieu, whereas a positive date of

composition would serve to define the period at which that idiom was current" (157). Laȝamon's

text may have been composed at a later date than those of Henry, Geoffrey, and Gaimar, but how

much later? Earlier estimates of his *Brut* place it at the end of the twelfth century, while others

place it from the mid- to late-thirteenth. How far removed historically was Laȝamon from these

other historians? His historical context matters when establishing the historiographical tradition

that he may have been accepting or rejecting. Indeed, the question of the date of this work

matters not only when establishing Laȝamon's specific historiographical context and tradition

but also in understanding the specific cultural and political factors that would influence his

rhetorical goals. Clearly, his work is striving to create some kind of national identity, but in

---

[72] According to J.P. Oakden's investigations, in 1100 of 1200 cases where the Otho is altered from the Caligula the reviser replaced a word from the Caligula with a less archaic English word or a French word (II 172-173). Henry Cecil Wyld also shares a long list of words and phrases replaced in the Otho from the Caligula (2-23). In addition, although portions of the Otho were lost in the fire, what remains suggests that the text was originally shorter than the Caligula, representing some omissions from the history.

response to what significant historical events? Those reigning monarchs would surely affect his decision to compose a history based upon the Arthurian model established by Geoffrey. The window for the possible date of completion of the Brut spans almost the whole of the thirteenth century; it is difficult given such indeterminacy to point to a specific political or cultural event that influenced Laȝamon's authorial choices. If Laȝamon's *Brut* represents the fruition of the cultural blending between the English and the Normans, at what point did this occur?

Problems arise when trying to assign a specific date to the work precisely because the original text no longer exists; thus, most critical examinations of the date of composition focus on the two surviving manuscripts and their relationship to Laȝamon's holograph. As Le Saux rightly points out, "The dating of the two manuscripts takes on great importance in considering the *Brut*, for internal evidence as to the date of composition of the poem is limited" (*Laȝamon's Brut* 2). There are references to events in the poem that some might considering "contemporary," providing some clues to a date of original composition. Naturally, a period of time would have passed between the composition of the original text and its copying into these two different manuscripts; however, the original holograph could not have been produced before 1155, the date of compostion for Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Laȝamon's source material. A.C. Gibbs, in *The Literary Relationships of Laȝamon's Brut*, posits, "[The Otho scribe's] alterations are brought about by sheer incomprehension as well as desire to bring the work up-to-date. He preserves the old style by default, in that he had not the confidence or the inclination to carry through his modernizing process on large enough scale" (250). In Gibb's assertion that the scribe attempted to bring the language "up-to-date," it is clear he believes the Otho (and Caligula by extension) would have been copied at a date late enough to effect linguistic change. His claim that the passage of "sixty or seventy years," an arbitrary period of time, occurred "between the

composition of the *Brut* and its copying by the Otho scribe" provides an interesting perspective on the relationship between the dating of the manuscripts and the composition of the poem (Gibbs 250). First, it is necessary though to examine the debate surrounding the dating of the Caligula and Otho to determine a possible window of time in which Laȝamon would have composed the *Brut*.

Madden provided the first widely accepted argument regarding the *Brut*'s date of composition and the context of the author using such references. Madden opens up the first debate regarding the *Brut*'s date of composition, suggesting different dates for both the Caligula and Otho texts. He divides the Caligula into two portions, the first containing the *Brut* and the second comprised of other English and French works, because he believes the *Brut* was probably written sometime in the early thirteenth century, while the latter portion was probably composed around the end of the reign of Henry III [1207-1272], citing specific textual and historical references to support this date[73] (xxxiv-xxxv). Naturally, the debate about the composition of both the original holograph and the surviving manuscripts has become quite crowded with new theories since Madden's assertion over 150 years ago, and his techniques and assumptions have been challenged and criticized by a number of critical authors. Of the many scholars who have weighed the textual and contextual evidence surrounding each MSS, I will explore the arguments

---

[73] For example, the city of Leicester, and its ruined state, is mentioned in lines 1457-59 of Laȝamon's *Brut*. Madden claims these lines "no doubt refer to its [Leicester's] destruction by the forces of Henry II under the Justiciary Richard de Lucy, in the year 1173" (xviii). In addition, Laȝamon's brief allusion to the change in the pronunciation of York in lines 1335-37 as having happened "not many years" earlier suggests a period of time later than 1180. Madden also points to lines 15949-64 as a reference to King John's [1199-1216] refusal to pay the "Peter-pence" (xix). Madden believes the proem substantiates his inferences because of Laȝamon's use of past tense when mentioning Queen Eleanor [1122-1204]. The use of "wes" suggests that at least Henry was dead by the time of the poem's composition, and Eleanor might have been as well. Her death in 1204 accords with the reference to King John in 1205. With all of this evidence, Madden concludes: "… it would appear most probable that it was written or completed at the beginning of the thirteenth century" (xx). Madden finds a date much later than his contemporaries, placing Laȝamon's authorship during King John's [1199-1216] reign, rather than during the reign of Henry II [1154-1189] or Richard I [1189-1199].

and dates provided by N.R. Ker, Tatlock, H.B. Hinckley, Herbert Pilch, E.G. Stanley, and, finally, Le Saux. Some authors discuss the paleographic evidence for the Otho and Caligula to date the materials as accurately as possible, and others remark on the textual evidence present in the *Brut* to ascertain the date of composition for the original poem. Dates for manuscripts greatly affect the dating of the original poem, as the Caligula and Otho would naturally be copied down years after Laȝamon composed his poem.

For one, N. R. Ker challenges Madden's textual evidence for his differing dates for the Otho and Caligula; Ker's paleographic examination of *The Owl and the Nightingale*, found in the Caligula MS, suggests both were composed in the second half of the thirteenth century (ix). Ker revises Madden's rather vague dating of the Caligula MS to a more specific window of time. Also, Ker clearly states that this date applies to all the works in the Caligula: "Cotton's habit of binding unrelated manuscripts together is known, but in the present instance, the similarities of script, layout, and number of lines suggest strongly that ff. 195-261 belonged from the first the 'Hystoria brutonum' (Laȝamon) on ff. 3-194" (ix). Ker's paleographic work on the Caligula provides a later date for the MS and treats the materials found in the Caligula as originating in the same time period, c.1250. Ker also challenges Madden's claim that the Caligula was written earlier than the Otho, using paleographic evidence to indicate both were written in the same time period (ix-xvii). Therefore, both texts would have originated in the latter half of the thirteenth century.

Outside of paleographic research, Hinckley and Tatlock examine the textual evidence for contextual clues regarding the poem's composition. Hinckley points to evidence of a much earlier date for the composition of the poem and manuscripts than Ker. He claims the lines regarding Eleanor suggest the poem was written before her rebellion against her husband in 1173

because she would no longer have been regarded as the noble queen of King Henry after that

point (Hinckley 49). He believed the poem would have been composed sometime after Wace's

Roman de Brut was completed (around 1157) until about 1165 while the Queen was still a

devoted, child-bearing wife (56-57). However, there is not much support for Hinckley's claim,

mostly because of the subjectiveness of his interpretation of the lines regarding Eleanor.

Likewise, Tatlock's *Legendary History of Britain* argues that Madden's evidence is insufficient

and instead points to lines concerning Arthur's passing to Avalon, a passage expanded by

Laȝamon from the earlier versions presented by both Geoffrey and Wace: "Bruttes ileuðe ȝete

þat he bon on liue, / and wunnien in Aualun mid fairest alre aluen; / and lokieð euere Bruttes ȝete

whan Arður cumen liðe" (14290-14292).[74] According to Tatlock, "It is impossible not to see an

allusion to Arthur of Brittany (1187-3 April, 1203), posthumous child of Geoffrey, Henry II's

third son…and murdered as historians believe by King John" (504). King Richard [1157-1199],

having no children of his own, named Arthur his heir, passing over his brother John [1166-1216].

Upon his murder and Richard's death in April of 1199, Tatlock believes, prince Arthur would

have symbolically been represented as the "Breton hope," King Arthur (505). In order for the

"Arthur" of the text to be a symbolic representation of the real Arthur, the text would have been

composed during Richard I's reign somewhere between 1190-1199, before the date provided by

Madden.

Although many scholars believe the poem had to be composed at the turn of the thirteenth

century (and the manuscripts shortly after), Pilch challenges these assumptions and argues the

work was produced much earlier in the twelfth century by returning to textual evidence to

determine the historical context of the poem's original composition. References to Queen

---

[74] The Britons yet believe that he is alive, and dwells in Avalon with the fairest of all fairy women; and the Britons still await the time when Arthur will come again.

Eleanor in the past tense do not suggest to Pilch that Henry II was dead when Laȝamon wrote the poem, only that the prologue may have been written after the poem. The strongest piece of evidence Pilch provides relates to Arthur's final resting place in Avalon instead of Glastonbury, as Giraldus Cambrensis claims the grave of Arthur and Guinevere was discovered in 1191; therefore, Laȝamon could not have been aware of the "historical" burial place of Arthur and used the mythological island of Avalon (16). In addition, the dependence on OE and archaic expressions in the text[75] convinces Pilch that the text is from an earlier time period than c. 1200.

These earlier dates of composition were, however, challenged by Stanley's "The Date of Composition of Laȝamon's *Brut*." Stanley finds Tatlock's evidence unconvincing, arguing, "the phrase *an Arður* might perhaps be said to provide a little point of possible supporting evidence; in itself it surely cannot be looked upon, as it is by Tatlock, as a chief ground for dating the poem" ("The Date" 87). The majority of Stanley's essay points out, quite rightly, that much of the evidence provided by every scholar cannot point to a specific date of composition, only a window of time in which the text could have been composed. However, Stanley provides no definitive conclusion to the date debate. He can only surmise that no evidence exists "that precludes a date of composition in the thirteenth century" ("The Date" 88). All of the evidence provided by his own analysis and that of other scholars like Madden, Ker, and Tatlock does not *prove* the text was written in any of the dates given, nor does it exclude the notion that the *Brut* might be a thirteenth-century literary work.

Perhaps the most compelling discussion of the dating of the *Brut* comes from contemporary scholar Françoise Le Saux in *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and Its Source*. Le Saux notes that modern analysis and paleographic research have only established a very broad timeline for the

---

[75] Explored below in "Regional Context and Language"

poem's composition, between 1190 and 1275 (*Laȝamon's Brut* 7). Extending over a period of eighty-five years, this timeline provides little clarity on the Henry referred to in the prologue or any necessary contextual information about the author. The uncertainty regarding the date clouds any analysis of possible rhetorical themes. As Le Saux notes, "The revised date of Caligula, however, extends the possible period of composition over the reign of five kings, two of whom were called Henry" (*Laȝamon's Brut* 9). The key reference to a King Henry is integral to the dating of the poem, but which Henry? Indeed, that both Henrys had queens named Eleanor makes it even more difficult to reduce the window of composition.

From this point of confusion, Le Saux makes the most plausible argument of all the critics when she finds herself using Stanley's critical examination of the *Brut* and *The Owl and the Nightingale*: "it emerges that the poem was written after the death of Henry II in 1189. Since King Henry is not referred to as 'old King Henry', or by some similar distinguishing mark, it is clear that the poem must have been written before the accession of Henry III in 1216" (Stanley, *The Owl* 19). Stanley posits that the way in which Henry is referred to in the text suggests that he must have recently passed away, but based on other textual evidence, the poem could not have been written after Henry III's ascension in 1216 or there would be some indication of his newly appointed status and/or youth. Le Saux adds to Stanley's argument, stating, "if Laȝamon had written under Henry III, one would expect the poet to have differentiated the Henry of the Prologue from the reigning monarch" (*Laȝamon's Brut* 9). Both Le Saux and Stanley look for the poet to provide some distinction between the two Henrys, which would be necessary if Laȝamon was writing during the reign of the second most recent monarch to bear the name. All of this textual evidence leads to Le Saux's ultimate conclusion:

This argument is all the stronger in the case of the *Brut* as the reference to King Henry is embedded in what was obviously thought of as a serious piece of historical writing, while the 'king Henri' of *The Owl and the Nightingale* appears in a tale told by the birds, as fiction within fiction. If the king in *The Owl and the Nightingale* could conceivably refer to Henry III (supposing that the date of composition of the poem was roughly the same as that of the Caligula manuscript), the "Henry" of the Prologue of the *Brut* can only refer to Henry II, husband of Eleanor of Aquitaine. (*Laȝamon's Brut* 9-10)

In navigating the quagmire of issues relating to the ambiguity of the Henry referred to in the prologue, Stanley and Le Saux find a much more manageable historical window for the *Brut*'s composition. Le Saux believes the text must have been composed between 1185 and 1216, shortly before King Henry II's death but before the reign of Henry III. I will use this timeline as the basis for my understanding of the historical context of Laȝamon's *Brut*, as this smaller period of time will be helpful to understanding the historical and regional context of the piece. While still broad, these dates provide a more specific political context in which to analyze the cultural and social influences on the writer and any possible constraints. Most significantly, it will provide an interesting perspective in which to view the language of the *Brut*.

Regional Context and the Language of the *Brut*

A more precise window for the date of composition helps the analysis of Laȝamon's own personal and political motivations and also provides necessary insight into the regional context in which the poem was composed. Although information about the poem's original holograph is scarce, the opening of both manuscripts outlines the specific regional context of the poet. In the proem to the Caligula MS, Laȝamon offers a few lines of introduction: "An preost wes on leoden Laȝamon wes ihoten: / he wes Leouneaðes sone, -liðe him beo Drihten! / He wonede at Ernleȝe,

a aeðelen are chirechen / vppen Seuaren staþ – sel þar him þuhte - / onfest Radestone; þer he bock radde" (1-5).[76] Interestingly, the Otho MS provides a slightly different opening to the text: "A prest was in londe. Laweman was hote. / he was Leucais sone. lef him beo Driste. / He wonede at Ernleie wid þan gode cniþte. / uppen Seuarne. merie þer him þohte. / faste bi Radistone þer heo bokes radde" (Otho 1-5).[77] There are obvious differences between the two prologues, which will be discussed below. But, these descriptions seem to offer some information on the regional and occupational context of the author, giving insight into his historical goals, source material, and possible motivations. His location of "Ernleȝe" or "Ernley" is the modern Areley Kings, a village in Worcestershire on the Severn. There is no evidence that Laȝamon was born in Areley [Ernleȝe] or the nearby Redstone, but the prologue's remark on "reading books" suggests some scholarly and/or religious pursuits in the city of Areley. Barron and Weinberg comment on the area referenced in this prologue as important to some of the Arthurian material added to the text: "living where he did (Areley Kings was near the Welsh marshes) it is not unreasonable to assume he drew upon Welsh sources for additional details of early British history" (xvi). Areley Kings in Worcestershire County is close (about 90 miles) to the Welsh border. Similarly, Bzdyl comments on the town and church referenced in the prologue, agreeing with the assessments of its present-day location. He also contends that "the village appears to have been relatively insignificant and Layamon's church, despite the prologue's reference to it as 'noble,' was probably not more than average in size and wealth" based on the fact that the neither appear in the Worcestershire *Rotuli Hundredorum* (9).[78]

---

[76]There was a priest in the land who was called Laȝamon; he was the son of Leovenath – God be merciful to him! He lived at Areley, by a noble church on the bank of the Severn, close to Redstone – he thought it pleasant there; there he read books.

[77] A priest was in the land. He was called Laweman. He was Leuca's son – God be merciful to him. He lived at Areley with a good knight. In the upper Severn, close by Redstone / there he read books and felt merry.

[78] A list of public records on taxes and tithes during the reigns of Henry II and Edward I.

Laȝamon's residency in Areley in the time period of 1185-1216 reveals much about the "books" referred to in the proem as well as the various literary influences (and possible sources) for his own writing. In "Towards a Regional Context for Lawman's *Brut*: Literary Activity in the Dioceses of Worcester and Hereford in the Twelfth Century," John Frankis offers more conclusive information about how the regional context of the area might have affected Laȝamon's linguistic choices. The prologue of the *Brut* gives some description of the environment in which Laȝamon worked as a priest. He claims to live in a church near Redstone, under the nearby medieval dioceses at Worcester. Frankis claims that the nearby Worcester and Hereford probably afforded the author access to a number of OE texts. Of the Cathedral Priory at Worcester, he writes, "The cathedral held an unusually large number of manuscripts wholly or partly in Old English; most of these were preserved from the pre-conquest period, but some were post-conquest copies of Old English texts, attesting to a continuing interest in the preservation of these texts" (Frankis, "Towards" 55). In Hereford, Frankis finds much less evidence for the possibility of English literary influences on the author, although there are some famous authors who can be ascribed to the area, such as Simon of Freen[79] ("Towards" 63). The majority of the texts Laȝamon had access to in this church would have been written in OE, which might explain why his language feels more like a relic of pre-Conquest England mixed with some French vocabulary. The region itself saw less Norman influence, therefore the language and texts show fewer transitions to French.

Laȝamon's historical and geographical contexts contribute to the most distinguishing feature of the *Brut*—its language. As noted above, the Caligula MS is often considered closer to the original holograph and therefore closer to the original language used by the poet. In examining

---

[79] Simon of Freen (Simund de Freine) [ca. 1140-1210] flourished in Hereford around 1200 and authored an Anglo-Norman poem called *Le Roman de Philosophie*, a work inspired by Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*.

just the proem, the alterations to the language and content are evident. The Otho uses more traditionally Middle English (and French-influenced) words than the Caligula. Otho's *merie* and *faste* in comparison to the Caligula's *sel* and *onfaste* indicate what some scholars call a "modernizing" of the text. Despite the Anglo-Saxon language losing cultural currency after the Norman Conquest, both copies of the poem principally utilize Anglo-Saxon vocabulary and the stylistic features of Anglo-Saxon poetry. As a poem of the later twelfth/early thirteenth century, the *Brut*'s language is obviously influenced by foreign languages, especially that of the Normans. Henry Cecil Wyld's multi-part "Studies in Diction of Layamon's *Brut*" performs an extensive examination of the linguistic choices of the text, tracing their English and French roots. Madden originally claimed to have found over fifty French words in the *Brut* (xxii), but Wyld's list of French vocabulary shared between the Caligula and Otho only lists about twenty, including: *canelé, admirale, catel, and latimer* (22-24).[80] J.P. Oakden finds the lack of dependence on French or Scandinavian words most interesting as it suggests "the vocabulary is almost entirely native in origin.…[M]any of Laʒamon's words are both archaic and poetic, that is to say, they represent survivals of words which even in Old English times were largely confined to poetry" (II, 172). He remarks on the archaisms in the Caligula of words like "*holm, madmes, scucke, uðen, weored*," words consistently replaced by the Otho scribe with modern English or French words.

The metrical structure of the *Brut* also emulates OE poetry, favoring (a sometimes uneven) alliteration over rhyming; however, there are rhyming couplets in the text also, a sign of French

---

[80] The list in its entirety also includes "those French words which O [Otho] substitutes for others of English (or Scandinavian) origin occurring in the C [Caligula] text" along with words found in both MSS (22). The whole list can be seen on pages 22-24 of the first section of "Studies in Diction of Layamon's *Brut*." See full bibliographic information in works cited page.

influences. For example, in the Caligula, the first three lines rhyme *ihoten*, *Drihten*, and

chirechen. In lines 6-9, the poet uses a combination of alliteration and rhyme:

> Hit com him on mode; & on his mern þonke.
>
> þet he wolde of Engle; þa æðelæn tellen.
>
> wat heo ihoten weoren; & wonene heo comen.
>
> þa Englene londe; ærest ahten
>
> æfter þan flode; þe from Drihtene com."[81]

These lines show some alliteration in line 8 with *wat, weoren*, and *wonene*, and repetition of the

terminal sounds of *tellen* and *comen*. Edward Donald Kennedy claims some of these French

influences were no doubt the result of Laȝamon's French source, Wace's *Roman de Brut* (2613).

Oakden performed a comprehensive study of the language and poetic forms in the *Brut* in

comparison to traditional OE poetry, commenting: "Whereas in Old English poetry there is one

poetic compound in every three lines…in Laȝamon's *Brut* the average is one in forty lines; in

making comparison, however, it must be remembered that The Brut is a poem of 16,000 lines, so

the average number of compounds per line might naturally be less" (II 114). His extensive study

of the poem compares its use of nominal poetic compounds not only to older OE poetry but also

to other Middle English alliterative poetry.[82] These compounds, consisting of a simple word

merged with an adjective or some other descriptor, are common to OE. In *Brut*, these compounds

are found littered throughout the text, like *feðerhome* in line 1436 or *eorð-hus* in 15323.

Indeed, Laȝamon's use of mostly Anglo-Saxon poetical traditions in his *Brut* seems to

Stanley, in his "Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments," more like a deliberate rhetorical attempt to

---

[81] It came into his mind, an excellent thought of his, that he would relate the noble origins of the English, what they were called and whence they came who first possessed the land of England after the flood sent by God…

[82] Oakden includes a lengthy table of the poetic compounds found in the *Brut* and other Middle English alliterative poems on pages 117-129.

imbue the text with a certain nostalgia or antiquity, perhaps giving more credibility and authority

to the author (25-26). That may be the case, as Kennedy notes that Laȝamon is at times rather

sloppy in his reproduction of Anglo-Saxon literature: "his alliteration is irregularly placed or

sometimes absent, and he frequently uses similes, which are not a feature of Anglo-Saxon

poetry. He appears to have made little effort to produce consistently the formulas, vocabulary

and rhythm of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, and he seldom uses devices such as kenning and

litotes that one associates with Anglo-Saxon poetry" (2615). In trying to imbue the text with an

"antique coloring," Laȝamon appears inconsistent and careless to Stanley. However, Laȝamon

might not be making a calculated attempt to accurately and reliably create a mostly Anglo-Saxon

poem.

Instead, I believe that Laȝamon's use of Anglo-Saxon vocabulary and poetic traditions is

merely meant to point to both his connection to Worcestershire and that learned Saxon tradition

deposited there, as well as his attempt to direct his British history to an English audience, not a

Norman one. His complex use of language relates quite clearly to both the date of composition

and the regional context in which the poem was produced. Laȝamon's language and use of

Anglo-Saxon poetic traditions was probably less a deliberate antiquating of the language, as

Stanley suggests, and more a reflection of the language or dialect of the area. The dialect of

Laȝamon's text seems to validate Frankis' assertion about Laȝamon's literary influences: "Both

extant versions, in varying degrees, show sufficient traces of a south-west Midlands dialect to

suggest that the original was written in Worcestershire. This corresponds with Laȝamon's own

statement in the Caligula proem that he was a priest at Areley Kings, a parish situated some ten

miles from Worcester" (Barron and Weinberg ix). The corpus of OE literature available to

Laȝamon in Worcester, ten miles from Areley, suggests he could have been merely using his

own dialect to compose the history of the Britons; however, there are some archaisms to the language that require further explanation. Kennedy explores the complexity of the dialectal peculiarities of the *Brut* in *The Manual of Writings in Middle English: 1050-1500*. In the eighth volume of the work, Kennedy examines the *Brut* chronicles, noting: "Caligula appears to be closer to Laȝamon's text with language more archaic than that of other West Midland texts of the second half of the thirteenth century. Although some of the apparent archaisms may represent dialectal peculiarities of Worcestershire in the later thirteenth century, most represent Laȝamon's attempt to write an ancient form of English" (2613). The "dialectal peculiarities of Worcestershire" include an adherence to OE vocabulary despite the prominence of Norman French, the language of the elite for more than a hundred years, which would be odd in the later thirteenth century. However, as the work was composed in the first half of the thirteenth century, Kennedy's "peculiarities" might not be so strange after all.

In fact, Laȝamon's reliance on OE words over those of a Romance origin (e.g., French) in the entire work suggests the area's resistance to losing much of the language while blending it with Norman French. The numerous copies of OE manuscripts, both from before and after the Norman Conquest, extant in the Cathedral library shed some light on the language of the *Brut*. The influence of his environment might even be an indication Laȝamon's poem reflects the vernacular language of this area, one altered very little despite more than a hundred years of Norman influence and probably still in use in the speech of the elite and other less rural areas. The area also might have affected the use of Anglo-Saxon themes as surely as it motivated the author to emulate the meter and alliteration of OE works. Kennedy notes, "Writing in an alliterative style and using epic formulas and a predominantly English vocabulary, Laȝamon was

attempting to imitate native meters for an English audience at a time when most secular writing was in Anglo-Norman or Latin" (2615).

Perhaps some of these linguistic choices were part of Laȝamon's motivation for translating and transforming Wace's poem into his own version. In transforming the history of the British from its roots in Geoffrey's Latin text through Wace's French *Roman de Brut*, Laȝamon's *Brut* offers a more Anglo-Saxon vision of the Britons. As discussed above, the indeterminacy of the poem's composition date makes contextualization a difficult task. However, as the poem had to be written after Wace's *Roman de Brut*, sometime between the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the language of England was undergoing massive changes throughout this period. The Norman elites who brought their French language and customs to England required a system of governance that needed Norman French, which mitigated the use of the Anglo-Saxon language. This change to the political and legal structures of the island also changed the manner of composing literary pieces. Anglo-Norman patrons were unlikely to support writers of Anglo-Saxon literature. This linguistic change caused a cultural shift in post-Conquest England so that the majority of texts were written in either French or a more French-influenced version of English. However, Laȝamon's text suggests that OE was evolving rather organically outside the importation of the French language in the rural areas of the southwest Midlands.

Both the author's adherence to "antiquated" OE poetics and his immersion in an area of Britain that still retained some of the English (Saxon) linguistic styles shaped the language and poetics of the *Brut*. The Anglo-Saxon tradition does not have to be re-created perfectly for the audience to understand that this history is less concerned with the Norman influences on British history or the romanticized courtly literature associated with King Arthur, but more focused on mediating the inclusion of the Normans in British history by using Saxon literary traditions.

Laȝamon's language definitely indicates his predilection for OE poetics, but his content seems more inclined to the blending of OE and French romantic themes. Perhaps more information about the author and his allegiances (both personal and political) could further illuminate his linguistic and thematic decisions; however, there is little that can be definitively stated about who Laȝamon was.

Laȝamon

Biographical information on Laȝamon is crucial to understanding how political and historical factors influenced the composition of the *Brut*. However, Laȝamon the author is somewhat of a mystery. Between the Otho's and the Caligula's prologues there are some distinctions between the references to the author; some spellings have been altered between the two texts. Laȝamon becomes Laweman, and his father's name alters from Leouneaðes to Leucaishe. Also, the notion that Laȝamon lived with "a good knight" in the Otho text supplants the Caligula's description of Laȝamon living at a "noble church." Both of these alterations can change interpretations of Laȝamon's background and occupation. In more recent editions of the text and other scholarship, the details provided in the Caligula and Otho MSS are scrutinized for vital information about the text's author. Brooks and Leslie's 1978 edition of the text does combine both the Otho and Caligula texts for a side by side comparison of the openings; however, the editors spend little time discussing the details revealed about Laȝamon's life and focus primarily on the reproduction of the manuscripts into a more modern form. Scholarship has uncovered very few details about Laȝamon's life, and there is not much that can be definitively asserted about him. However, many critical readings of this opening prologue can color the interpretation of the text and its author's possible motivations.

Interestingly, the question of who wrote this biographical prologue has been raised in newer scholarship of the text. Kelley Wickham-Crowley's *Writing the Future: Laȝamon's Prophetic History* argues that at least the Otho's prologue was written by a scribe and not the author (15-19). She mentions the clear distinction between the prologue and the text provided in the Otho, noted in Brooks and Leslie's version by the openings "*Incipit hystoria Brutonum*" in the Caligula and "*Incipit Prologus libri Brutonum*" in the Otho, indicating how the biographical information is to be received as either the start of the history (*hystoria*) or the start of a prologue (*prologus*). Wickham-Crowley also returns to those differences in the texts as further evidence for her claim: "Caligula proceeds to tell us there was a priest 'on leoden' called Laȝamon; in Otho, he is 'in londe.' While the distinction is minor, the stress on a people (*leod*) is important to Laȝamon's work, as is the link between the people and the land (*lond*). The confusion or substitution is interesting" (17). The distinction in wording between the two versions provides an interesting point of comparison between how the author himself and the scribes identify and define the poet.

Even though the author identifies himself as a *preost* in the opening lines of the Caligula MS, Laȝamon's actual profession has been subjected to scrutiny by various scholars. Most of the debate stems from the author's name—Laȝamon, or Lawman. Based on this appellation, the author's occupation should involve the law in some way as he is quite literally a "law man." Tatlock's investigation into the origins and uses of the name, both Laȝamon and Lawman, finds about twenty references to individuals with the former name and over a hundred with the latter (510-514). Tatlock also uncovers some of the etymology associated with the name:

> The name Laȝamon, Lawman, is purely Scandinavian in origin…. The office of lawman (lögmað) was one of the oldest in Iceland, lasting from 930 to the loss of independence, and changed form in the present day. It was acquired by popular election, though

sometime also by inheritance. The lawman originally declared the law, gave legal

opinions and presided at the legislative assembly. Lawmen are often mentioned in the

sagas and elsewhere as performing their official functions; and indeed, being of the

educated class, are known as authors of sagas and other literature. (512)

The author's name implies a connection to a Scandinavian ancestry, important in both a legal and

literary context. Bzdyl even contends the connection with the Norse *lögmað* "may indicate that

the poet was not a native of Worcestershire," as the name was rather uncommon after the

eleventh century (9). Rosamund Allen has argued that "Laȝamon" does not refer to the author's

name but his profession in legal activities (xxii-iv). Frankis adds to Allen's argument by showing

that "a class of lawmen established in the late Anglo-Saxon period to mediate in legal disputes

between the Welsh and English (six from each community) in the territory of the *Dunsæte*

(between the lower Severn and Gwent)" was well-known throughout Worcestershire through the

thirteenth century ("Laȝamon" 110). The location fits with the Areley Kings area that Laȝamon

mentions in his proem (see earlier discussion). Yet, after enumerating the different potential

interpretations of the proem (including its use as surname or as a reference to his occupation as

"legislator"), Frankis can only conjecture as to the usefulness of this information since it is

dependent on the date of composition. Simply put, the name Laȝamon would have only had these

legal connotations in this area in the early part of the thirteenth century but not in the latter half

(Frankis, "Laȝamon" 124). As such, Frankis cautions readers to leave both possibilities open.

Using Le Saux's timeline of 1185-1216, there is a possibility the text is referring to a priest who

also engages in legal activities. However, with such scant biographical evidence on Laȝamon as

an author, like that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, I believe what is found in the proem; information

provided by the author provides the best opportunity for analyzing the author's occupation and

regional context. Therefore, as Laȝamon identifies himself as a priest living at a church in Areley near Redstone, that must be the part of his identity most relevant to a reading of his work.

Outside the discussion of the author's name and occupation is the detailed information provided about his regional context. Tatlock provides a little more conjecture about the alteration in the Otho text, contending, "There is good reason to think someone concerned with the Otho prolog had inside information about the poet; not because of the later form of his name (Laweman), but because his father is here called seemingly by a nickname (Lueca)" (483). However, Tatlock points out that the various inconsistencies between the texts indicates the unreliability of the Otho text. In addition, Laȝamon's description of the building as *æðelen are chirechen* suggests an affinity for his chosen profession and its nobility. Despite being from a small town, the author, Bzdyl argues, must have been well-traveled, as the prologue indicates: "Laȝamon gon liðen; wide ȝond þas leode. / bi-won þa æðela boc; þa he to bisne nom" (14-15).[83] Yet, how "widely" the poet wandered is still up for conjecture. Bzdyl believes "[t]he geographical references in the *Brut* suggest that Layamon knew southern Wales and south and southwest London well; of the north and east he seems to have had little more than hearsay knowledge" (10). Familiarity with areas near Wales and London would make sense given his proximity to Wales and the necessity to travel to the capital for various sections in his history. And, as explored above, Laȝamon's proximity to Worcester provided him with access to a corpus of OE texts that inspired his own writing.

The poem was written between 1185 and 1216 in this regional context, but Laȝamon was also responding to a specific political context that influenced his decision to blend both the Old and Middle English traditions. These dates mean that the author was probably most influenced

---

[83] Layamon travelled far and wide throughout this land, and obtained the excellent books which he took as a model.

by the political actions of Kings Richard and John. Obviously, their predecessors would still be considered an influence on the author's conception of Britain in a nationalistic sense; Henry II is significant enough to garner mention in the proem, and Laȝamon is re-creating a text that originated in the great conflict between King Stephen and Matilda. However, Richard and John would provide the cultural catalyst for creating an epic of English identity and nationalism. Interestingly, the anxiety regarding Richard's successor, coupled with the general ill will assumed to exist between brothers Richard and John, provides a tense historical context in which Laȝamon decided to translate and revise the history of the British people.

Richard and John

King Richard I succeeded his father, Henry II, on 6 July 1189. History has tended to remember Richard as a pious crusades hero, accepting the mythology associated with his title, the Lionheart (*Cœur de Leon*). Indeed, Richard's legacy stems from his numerous campaigns during the Crusades, and as Gillingham points out, "Richard was very like the figure of romance.... He was a king who led from the front, who inspired admiration because he was so often to be found in the thick of the fray" (*Richard* 6). However, his legendary status as a war hero can sometimes obscure the fact that, as a king of England, he spent very little time in England. For the majority of his life, Richard was either at war or in the duchy of Aquitaine. Richard was born in Oxford on the 8 September 1157, the third legitimate son of King Henry II, "a Frenchman from Anjou," and Eleanor, "Duchess of Aquitaine, the duchy which her forefathers had ruled since the tenth century" (Gillingham, *Richard* 24). For an English king, there was very little English in Richard's ancestry. Gillingham states, "To find an English ancestor it was necessary to go a long way back in Richard's genealogy—to one of his great-grandmothers, Edith, wife of King Henry I" (*Richard* 24). His father, Henry II, took the throne

following King Stephen's usurpation and the ensuing civil war over the succession. Interestingly, Henry II dealt with problems of succession and familial strife that rivaled those of his mother and cousin, Empress Matilda and King Stephen, respectively.

As the third son (after William and Henry the Younger), it would seem unlikely that Richard would succeed his brothers and take the crown from his father. However, circumstances and marital discord led Henry II to make Richard his heir. Richard was made Duke of Aquitaine in June of 1172, at which time his parents became increasingly estranged. Eleanor's court in Poitiers became synonymous with the idea of courtly love, and there is some speculation that her advancement and encouragement of this behavior indicated problems within her own marriage. For example, Gillingham notes the significance of this courtly tradition when seen through a political and social lens: "Some literary historians...see it as a revolutionary and subversive moral doctrine. To glorify love felt for another man's wife was to flout contemporary notions of obedience and authority, the authority of the church as well as the authority of the husband" (*Richard* 60). Whatever tensions existed between Henry and Eleanor did not outwardly affect Henry's kingship until his decision to give young John a number of castles enraged Henry the Younger King, crowned King of England in 1170, who "had never been assigned any lands from which he might maintain himself and his Queen in their proper estate" (Gillingham, *Richard* 63). Henry the Younger, along with his mother and brothers Richard I and Geoffrey II [1181-1186], rebelled against his father in 1173. The revolt caused a significant strain for the family, especially with regards to the issue of succession. As John was the only son to side with his father Henry, due to his young age, it was thought that he would be the heir. However, Richard's defection from the rebellion allowed him to take control over many of the more insubordinate barons and strengthen his position, although the terms of his reconciliation with his father did not

leave him much power or money. After the death of his elder brother, Henry the Younger King, Richard was next in line for the throne, but his father demanded instead that he relinquish control over Aquitaine. Richard joined forces with Philip II of France [1165-1223] and attempted to usurp Henry II. As these two political allies defeated Henry's armies, Henry was forced to name Richard the successor shortly before his death in 1189.

All the familial feuds and fighting over succession (most of which took place outside of England) left the people of England wholly divorced from their rulers. The fact that the king's wife and sons would battle against their sovereign must have had quite an impact, especially on the educated men of the clergy, who must have taken sides in the dispute just as the barons did. The recent civil war between Matilda and Stephen may have seemed less dramatic than the revolt between Henry II and his family based solely on the fact that a wife turned against her husband and sons against their father—the closer familial bonds perhaps making the betrayals more significant to the people. The English dealt with generations of familial conflict in their rulers, as well as being used as a means to support King Richard's Crusade efforts.

Richard's lack of concern for his people extended beyond his disconnect from their physical presence, language, cultures, and customs. Despite knowing the problems with succession that befell his ancestor Henry I, who died without an acceptable male heir, Richard was almost never in the same country as his wife, Berengaria of Navarre [c. 1165-1230], as he was constantly at war, and therefore never produced a child. Uncertainty over rulership continued to plague the English because, although Richard's brother John might have seemed the most likely to succeed him, there was obviously controversy with this decision due to John's alignment with their father in the earlier conflicts and his own rebellions against Richard.

John, the youngest of Henry's sons, remained in his father's favor until Henry's death, even though he was not named the heir. Under his brother Richard's reign, John unsuccessfully attempted to rebel when Richard was captured during the Third Crusade. Having left the political authority of England in the hands of Bishop Hugh de Pusiet and William Mandeville, Richard joined the Third Crusade after making his brother promise not to visit England during his absence. Richard relented when his mother Eleanor requested that John be allowed to visit, but John's disagreements with Richard's chancellor, William Longchamp, provided an opportunity for John to lay claim to the throne as Richard's only living heir (Warren, W.L. 40-41). When his brother did not return from the Crusades, John formed an alliance with Philip II, declared Richard most likely dead, and fought against Richard's supporters. However, Richard was only temporarily detained, taken prisoner on his way to England and held for ransom by Emperor Henry VI [1165-1197] in Dürnstein, Austria. Upon his return, Richard forgave his brother, and John maintained the outward appearance of loyalty to his king after his attempt failed and, despite his thwarted usurpation, was named king after Richard's death.

John is unfavorably remembered as one of the most ineffective kings of England. From the loss of Normandy around 1204 to the Baron's Revolt that led to the signing of the *Magna Carta* in June of 1215, John's reign was filled with disappointments but also significant social changes. The mismanagement of his barons was one of the biggest criticisms of King John, as Ralph Turner indicates: "Any successful medieval monarch had to keep his barons contented if he was to govern successfully, and English kings in the later Middle Ages often created a 'court party' of favoured nobles. Yet John recruited only a handful of great men for his household, and mutual mistrust characterized his relations with his barons" (175). The mistrust between John and his barons unfortunately affected his ability to gain support and resources for his campaigns to

recover Normandy, which he lost in a disastrous campaign from 1202 to 1204 against Philip, and govern his people. Eventually, John's continual request for funds and the enmity between himself and nobility led to a civil war in the spring of 1215.

The rebellion of baronage was only slightly quelled when John was forced to agree with the *Magna Carta* at Runnymede on June 15, 1215. The Great Charter significantly limited the power of the monarchy in England, influencing the political future of the island and eventually becoming the foundation of constitutional law, even though it was initially annulled by Pope Innocent III. The original 1215 draft contained sixty-three chapters "aimed at remedying specific problems, not at applying philosophical principles" (Turner 240). In essence, the charter asserted certain liberties for citizens (landholding individuals, nobility, and knights) and compelled John to admit that his will as king was not arbitrary. Unfortunately for the barons, John resisted instating the *Magna Carta* and died while continuing the fight against his noblemen. His death, however, did assure the survival of the charter and its influence on the English political landscape. This event, like Richard's protracted time in France and in the Holy Land, provides a rich historical backdrop for the composition of Laȝamon's *Brut*.

Political turmoil, familial betrayals, battles over succession, and courtly plots littered the reigns of both Richard and John, not unlike the world of the Arthurian court reproduced in Laȝamon's poem. For example, Mordred's attempted usurpation of the throne again mirrors a familial betrayal in the ruling dynasty, only this time it represents the rebellions of Richard against his father Henry and of John against his own brother. Also, more significantly, Guenevere's betrayal of Arthur is amplified in the *Brut*. As in Geoffrey, Guenevere is taken by Mordred, but Arthur is much more hurt by her seeming loss of resolve in Laȝamon's telling. The knight who carries the devastating news of Mordred's usurpation of the throne must also contend

with Arthur's utter disbelief in his wife's betrayal: "no Wenhauer mi quene; wakien on þonke. /

nulleð hit biginne; for nane weorld-monne" (14039-14040).[84] Once he is assured that she has in

fact become Mordred's queen, Arthur's anger turns violent against his once beloved Guenevere:

"forð ich wulle buȝe; in to-ward Bruttaine. / and Moddred ich wulle s[l]an; & þa quen for-berne.

/ and alle ich wulle for-don; þa biluueden þen swike-dom" (14065-14067).[85] That the queen's

disloyalty is highlighted more in Laȝamon's work than in Geoffrey's suggests the author might

be motivated by Queen Eleanor's treachery against King Henry II and wishes to show the

consequences of a wife's betrayal.

Arthurian legends had become a key part of the historical and romantic literary traditions of

the period, and Laȝamon made a conscious decision to revise the Arthurian story again in his

poem. In this way, the historical tensions associated with the Normans, from the Conquest to the

anarchy to the Plantagenet familial problems, are eased through the creation of a chronicle that

highlights the hybridity of Norman plus Saxon instead of emphasizing one aspect of English

identity. This hybridity is best represented through the character of King Arthur, and as I argue

below, he becomes a perfect example of the all the best Norman and Saxon attributes.

<u>Inscribing the Normans into English History</u>

Laȝamon approaches the matter of Britain from an English perspective, but he does so in a

way that integrates the disparate cultures of Norman, Welsh, and Saxon. In essence, Laȝamon

uses the history of the Britons to inscribe the Norman aristocracy, leaders from William through

John, into the historiography of England. Such a move necessitates the use of features from all

the differing cultural traditions. For the Welsh, Laȝamon integrates their mythology (mostly in

---

[84] …that Guenevere my queen would weaken in resolve; never would she do so, not for any man on earth.
[85] … I will set out towards Britain, and I will slay Mordred and burn the queen, and I will destroy all who approved that treachery.

reference to Merlin and Arthur). The Saxons are reflected through the use of the "archaic"

English language. But for the Normans, the process becomes a little trickier. The effects of

Norman Conquest and the shifting of English identity are mostly referenced through the ways in

which Laȝamon reinterprets the texts of his predecessors, translating and transforming them into

a new English history.

Laȝamon's project is translating Wace's French text into the English vernacular, which

becomes a symbolic representation of the transformation of English identity. His history marks

one of many steps in the translating and transforming of British history to reflect the

amalgamated Anglo-Norman culture. Tiller notes that histories like the *Brut* involve translation

of both the language and the culture of the subjugated peoples, in this case the Britons; in the

process of translating, some appropriation of elements of the conquered culture can occur

(*Laȝamon's* 2). So, Geoffrey, who calls himself Geoffrey of Monmouth (*Galfridus*

Monemutensis), appropriating, at the very least, a geographical association with the Welsh (the

Britons' successors), translates their British tongue into Latin, the language of educated currency

during the twelfth century. Wace takes Geoffrey's Latin translation of the British tongue and

makes it even more accessible to the Norman audience by translating it into French; ultimately,

Laȝamon uses these two sources to create a Middle English text that successfully bridges the

historical and linguistic gap between the Britons and the Anglo-Norman English. He is actually

recounting a colonial vision of Briton's history, which mirrors his contextual situation quite

clearly:

> Laȝamon's self-conscious historio-linguistic construct exposes the translation of history
>
> as displacement of cultures and appropriation of their historical traditions. As a history of
>
> translation itself, then, the *Brut* ultimately dramatizes the English language's suppression

and lays the foundations for its re-emergence. It calls for a reassessment of the English

language and English ethnic identity in the face of Anglo-Norman and Angevin literary

traditions that threaten to eclipse both. (Tiller, *Laȝamon's* 31)

In choosing Wace and Geoffrey as his sources and attempting to re-create the Anglo-Saxon

linguistic style in his chronicle, Laȝamon enacts the history of the English people through the

composition of the *Brut*. The text brings Anglo-Saxon and Welsh cultural influences to bear on

the history of Britain even as both cultures are being marginalized, resisting the eradication of

these identities through the representation of a hybridized history and culture.

Colonizing Albion

Formulating a hybridized version of English history involves explicitly commenting on the

anxieties and tensions relating to the repetitive patterns of colonization in Britain. Colonization is

the means by which these cultures come into direct contact with one another and eventually

unevenly coalesce to form the hybrid culture of Britain. As such, Laȝamon begins his history

with the first episode of colonial aggression against the native inhabitants of Albion, choosing to

emphasize the supernatural predestination of the first Britons. Laȝamon's *Brut* expands upon

many of the episodes provided in Geoffrey's *HRB* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*, including the

lineage of Brutus, which is quite important to the formation of British identity. Expansion is a

key difference between Geoffrey and Laȝamon, signifying the way in which Laȝamon integrates

the historical and cultural influences of his context and adds to Geoffrey's history. John P.

Brennan argues that Laȝamon's adaptation of Geoffrey's and Wace's versions the history of the

Britons "turns the legendary dynastic history of Britain into the national epic of England" (19).

The story of Brutus's dream-vision from Diana is also inflated by Laȝamon, highlighting the

importance of divine providence:

Þa þuhte him on his swefne þar he on slepe laei

þat his lauedi Diana hine leofliche bhieolde

mid wnsume leahtren. Wel heo him bihihte,

and hendiliche hire hond on his heued leide,

and þus him to seide þer he on slepe lai:

"Biȝende France, i þet west, þu scalt finde a wunsum lond…

Wuniað in þon londe eotantes swiðe stronge.

Albion hatte þat londe, ah leode ne beoð þar nane

þerto þu scalt teman and ane neowe Troye þar makian." (613-625) [86]

In this vision, Diana seems much more agreeable to the British founder, greeting him "lovingly with pleasant smiles." Her pleasantness suggests a more overt affection for the Britons not found in earlier versions of the story, like Geoffrey's, which indicates that Brutus and his descendants have the good will of the gods on their side and a divine right to the land. Diana's prophecy is much more detailed in Laȝamon's version, even mentioning the one detail that Geoffrey's Diana leaves out—the giants. This land, although destined for Brutus, contains a population of "eotantes" that must be dealt with for the Britons to properly claim their new Troy.

Laȝamon seems to be making a clear point about colonial existence in the early medieval period with these giants. Diana cannot promise Brutus a completely empty island, and these brutish giants can be seen as the native inhabitants, even if they are not identified as humans. Although Laȝamon claims no one lives on the island, the point remains that no new territory is ever uninhabited, as there are giants that occupy the land. History thus becomes a repetitive

---

[86] It seemed to him in his dreams as he lay asleep that his lady Diana looked upon him lovingly with pleasant smiles. She promised him good fortune, graciously laying her hand upon his head and spoke to him thus as he lay asleep: 'In the west, beyond France, you shall find a pleasant land.…In that land there dwell most powerful giants. That land is called Albion, but there are no people there. You shall go to that land and build there a new Troy.'

process of conquest, colonization, and appropriation. The episodes with the giants signify the inability to escape the colonial atmosphere of the period, which leads to disruption and destruction. The giants cause problems for the new inhabitants, resisting the colonizing efforts of the Britons:

> Hit ilomp on ane daʒe; þat Brutus & his duʒeðe.
>
> makeden halinesse; mid wrscipen heʒen….
>
> blisse wes on hirede.
>
> wes al þat folc swa bliðe; swa heo neoren nauer er on liue.
>
> Þa comen þære twenti; teon of þan munten.
>
> eotendes longe; muchele & stronge.
>
> Heo tuʒen alle to-gadere; treon swiðe muchele,
>
> heo leopen to Brutus folke; þer heo hurtes duden.
>
> In are lutle stunde; heo slowen fif hundred. (911-921) [87]

The giants interfere with the Britons' efforts to create a home with happiness and enjoyment of their religious rites. The giants resist a colonial force that seeks to establish its own religious and cultural principles, and they do so with deadly force.

The Britons turn their attention to eradicating the hostile native population and are mostly successful, except when it comes to Goemagog. However, he is vanquished by Corineus, who throws him over a cliff. The moment seems like a celebration of the Britons' supremacy over the natives, but curiously, Goemagog still becomes inscribed on the landscape of Britain: "Nu and

---

[87] It happened one day that Brutus and his followers were performing holy rites with solemn ceremony….there was joy among the people; that whole company was happier than they had ever been. Then there came, drawn from the hills, twenty tall giants, massive and of great strength. Each one of them bore a very large club; they attacked Brutus's followers, inflicting injury upon them; within a short space of time they killed five hundred.

æuermare haueðe þat clif þare / nome on ælche loedoe þat þat weos Geomagoges lupe" (964-965). [88] The giants cannot be completely eradicated from the island or its history because their metaphoric existence continues. In this way, they are inscribed into the identity of the land through the act of naming, which places them into the oral and written history of England. The same idea applies to the cultural traditions that preceded the Norman Conquest: Welsh and Saxon cultures, traditions, names, and figures cannot be completely eliminated from the island or the historical tradition, but they can be absorbed into the new culture.

This same theme is also reflected in Laȝamon's preoccupation with names and naming, especially geographic names. Laȝamon marks the important moment when Albion's name is transformed to reflect its new rulers: "He wes ihaten Brutus, þis lond he clepede Brutaine; / and þa toinisce men þa temden hine to hærre / æfter Brutone Brutuns heom cleopede; / and ȝed þe nome læsteð and a summe stude cleouieð faste" (978-981). [89] Laȝamon takes the time to inform his readers that the name Britain still persists to this day, suggesting that although Britain has transitioned into an Anglo-Norman territory, it still retains markers of its original identity, all the way back to its Trojan roots. Brutus wishes to be remembered, as do his followers, the Britons. Their culture may be subjugated by the end of this history, but their name remains as a symbolic resistance to the destruction of their identity.

The episode regarding the naming of Britain's major city, New Troy, also reflects the ever-changing quality of colonial existence, although it portrays a less positive outlook on this condition. Laȝamon's text provides more information on the frequent name changes of the city than Geoffrey's *HRB* and even includes a justification for the constant re-labeling. After

---

[88] Now and evermore the cliff there, because of Goemagog's leap, is known by that name among all men.
[89] He was called Brutus, this land he called Britain; and the Trojans who deferred to him as leader called themselves Britons after Brutus; and the name endures still and persists unchanged in some places.

describing the name change from New Troy to Lud, Laȝamon continues his narration into a more

contemporary context:

> Seoððen comen Englisce men and cleopeden heo Lundene.
>
> Seoððen comen þa Frensca þa mid fehte heo biwonnen,
>
> mid heora leo-ðeawe and Lundres heo heten.
>
> þus is þas burh iuaren seððen heo ærest wes areræd;
>
> þus is þis eitlond igon from honde to hond
>
> þet alle þa burhȝes þe Brutus iwrohte
>
> and heora noma gode þa on Brutus dæi stode
>
> beoð swiðe afelled þurh warf of þon folke. (1029-1036) [90]

Laȝamon's commentary seems to validate Tiller's claim that "[t]he repeated conquest and

reconquest of Britain led to a belief that continual conquest was endemic to the isle, and hence

must be the result of divine judgment" (*Laȝamon's* 10). While Tiller makes an excellent point

with regards to the continuous pattern of conquest related in this passage, I believe Laȝamon's

use of divine figures does not necessarily indicate the same preoccupation with moral judgment

found in both Geoffrey's *HRB* and Henry's *HA*.

Divine judgment and predestination are important to the history of the Britons, but mostly as

a literary trope. Laȝamon builds upon the work of his predecessors, who saw the ruin of each of

these cultures as part of God's judgment. He includes these divine episodes as part of the

historiographic tradition but is more concerned with the transformative effect of the constantly

changing names, which reflect a constantly shifting cultural identity. The act of renaming the

---

[90] The Englishmen came and called it Lunden. Next came the French who conquered it in war and, according to the usage of their country, they called it Londres. Thus has this city fared since it was first built; thus has this island passed from hand to hand so that all the cities which Brutus founded have been brought low and their proper names which they bore in the days of Brutus obliterated through changes in the population.

island becomes more than just an act of remembrance; it is also a way of re-inscribing the identity of the island. The place and its inhabitants have been conquered; therefore, they cannot continue to operate under the same label. Albion transforms, or is translated, into Britain, signifying the new culture and language of its conquerors. Similarly, cities like New Troy will be altered under the direction of the new rulers. Rather than overwriting the cultural impact and memory of the previous inhabitants, these changes enhance the identity of the place by adding another layer of history.

<u>King Arthur</u>

Although the *Brut* uses Anglo-Saxon language for its structure, the poem focuses much of its attention on a mostly Breton hero. As Tatlock points out, "The poem is also an imposing marker for a great transition. The derivation of its matter is purely French, its manner purely English" (485). Arthur's reign takes up more than a third of the *Brut* and represents the fruition of the dynastic prophecy given to Brutus. As a character, Arthur gets slightly reworked in Laȝamon's text, transforming the lone savior of the Britons in Geoffrey's work into a symbolic representation of cultural hybridity. Geoffrey's historical project seems motivated by a desire to not only elevate but also lament the condition of the Britons. However, he is obviously critical of the Welsh, whom he sees as the unworthy successors of the Britons. In the end, the Britons are no great opposition to the Saxon invasion, and Geoffrey's history only seems to highlight what Faletra calls their "innate defeatedness" ("Narrating" 82). The expanded and exaggerated Arthur of Laȝamon's *Brut*, however, represents the dynastic authority of the Britons and their modern-day counterparts, the Welsh.

Like his earlier incarnation, this Arthur has a touch of the mythical in both his conception and upbringing. The magical machinations of Merlin allow Arthur's father, Uther, to seduce

Arthur's mother, Ygerne, in the guise of her husband, Gorlois. Once Arthur is born, a flock of

fairy creatures bestow upon him all the necessary gifts to assure a long and successful kingship:

> Sone swa he com an eorðe; aluen hine iuengen.
>
> heo bigolen þat child; mid galdere swiðe stronge.
>
> heo ȝeuen him mihte; to beon bezst alre cnihten.
>
> heo ȝeuen him an-oðer þing; þat he scolde beon riche king.
>
> heo ȝiuen him þat þridde; þat he scolde longe libben.
>
> heo ȝifen him þat kine-bern; custen swiðe gode.
>
> þat he wes mete-custi; of alle quike monnen.
>
> þis þe alue him ȝef; and al swa þat child iþæh. (9609 -9616)[91]

This episode is entirely absent from Geoffrey's account but does seem to reference the legendary

Welsh folklore surrounding the hero. In imbuing the character with these "fairy gifts," Laȝamon

makes Arthur a more romantic hero with godlike qualities and superhuman potential.

This King Arthur is not just a Brittonic hero; he also represents the ideal model of Anglo-

Saxon kingship,[92] symbolizing a hybrid of both of the conquered British people, the Welsh and

the Saxons. In one description of Arthur as a king, Laȝamon writes: "Þa þe Arður wes king;

hærne nu seollic þing / he wes mete-custi; ælche quike monne / cniht mid þan bezste; w[u]nder

ane kene / he wes þan ȝungen for fader; þan alden for frouer / and wið þan vnwise; w[u]nder ane

sturnne. / woh him wes wunder lað. and þat rihte a leof; / Ælc of his birlen; & of his bur-þæinen.

/ & his ber-cnihtes; gold beren an honden. / to ruggen and to bedde; iscrud mid gode webbe"

---

91 As soon as he came upon earth, fairies took charge of him; they enchanted the child with magic most potent; they gave him strength to be the best of all knights; they gave him another gift, that he should be a mighty king; they gave him a third, that he should live long; they gave him, that royal child, such good qualities that he was the most liberal of all living men; these the fairies gave him, and the child thrived accordingly.

92 In general, the trope of the *god cyning* involves a figure who displays great courage, loyalty, and, most importantly, generosity.

(9946-9954).[93] As an archetypal Anglo-Saxon king, Arthur generously gives gold to his retainers and servants, keeping them in fine clothing and comfortable lodgings. Arthur is Beowulf-like in his boldness and dedication to doing what is right. In fact, Laȝamon goes so far as to specifically echo *Beowulf* when establishing Arthur as an Anglo-Saxon *god cyning*: "Þe king heold al his hired; mid hæȝere blise / & mid swulche þinges; he ouer-com alle kinges. / mid ræhȝere strengðe; & mid riche-dome. / swulche weoren his custes; þat al uolc hit wuste. / Nu wes Arður god king; his hired hine lufede / æc hit wes cuð wide; of his kine-dome" (9957-9962).[94] Arthur contains elements of the fantastical Welsh mythology and magic blended with all the strength and generosity of an Anglo-Saxon king. He becomes the perfect model of hybridity, demonstrating all the best qualities of each culture.

As a representation of this blending of Welsh and Saxon characteristics, Laȝamon's Arthur conveys that same sense of political and cultural hybridity to his kingdom. After spending the beginning of his reign avenging his father, repelling the Saxons, and conquering Ireland, Arthur enjoys twelve years of peace before his kingdom is disrupted by rivalries and in-fighting: "Þat folc wes of feole londe; þer wes muchel onde. / for þe an hine talde hæh; þe oðer muche herre" (11355-11357).[95] Arthur's thanes from various lands find themselves warring for supremacy over each other, causing turmoil instead of peace. Arthur's response to the rivalries is to build his famous Round Table:

> …moni þer feollen.

---

[93] When Arthur was king—now listen to a marvelous matter—he was generous to every man alive, among the best of warriors, wonderfully bold; he was a father to the young, a comfort to the old, and with the rash extremely stern; wrong was most hateful to him and the right was always dear. Each of his cup-bearers and his chamberlains and his footmen bore gold in hand, wore fine cloth on back and bed.

[94] The king kept all his followers in great contentment; and by such means he surpassed all kings, by fierce strength and by generosity; such were his virtues that all nations knew of it. Now Arthur was a good king; his followers loved him and it was known far beyond his kingdom

[95] Those men were from many lands: there was fierce rivalry because the one accounted himself great, the other considered himself greater.

for heore mucchele mode; morð-gomen wrohten.

and for heore hehȝe cunne; ælc wolde beon wið-inne.

Ah ich þe wulle wurche; a bord swiðe hende.

þat þer maȝen sitten to; sixtene hundred & ma.

al turn abuten; þat nan ne beon wið-uten.

wið-uten and wið-inne. mon to-ȝæines monne. (11431-114367)[96]

At this table, all people are represented equally; the round table guarantees that no one leads the group at the head of the table and ensures everyone can be easily seen. Arthur's conception of the round table also reflects an ideal of cultural hybridity, in which each ethnicity is equally represented and none is privileged over another. Arthur emphasizes that each "noble lineage" is significant but not more significant than any other that helped to bring together this peaceful kingdom. Laȝamon's Arthur indicates the author's desire to point out the importance of each colonized and colonizing culture, while being mindful not to single out one particular ethnicity as dominant over another.

Composing after the *HRB*, the *Brut*'s author also has the ability to include elements of the future of King Arthur's representation in his British history. The author witnessed the transformation of Geoffrey's historical hero into a literary celebrity. Laȝamon writes about the continued presence of Arthurian content throughout numerous British works, commenting on their alterations and exaggerations to the story of the Briton king. He states:

Ne al soh ne al les þat leod-scopes singeð;

ah þis is þat soððe bi Arðure þan kinge.

---

[96] …having engaged in deadly play out of their excessive pride, each expecting by right of his noble lineage to be included there. But I will make you a very fine table round, the full extent of which sixteen hundred and more may be seated, one man facing another round the outside and the inside, so that none shall be excluded.

Nes næuer ar swulc king, swa dui þurh alle þing;

for þat soðe stod a þan written hu hit is iwurðen,

ord from þan ænden, of Arðure þan kinge,

no mare, no lasse, buten alse his laȝen weoren.

Ah Bruttes hine luueden swiðe and often him on liȝeð,

and suggeð feole þinges bi Arðure þan kinge

þat næuere nes iwurðen a þissere weorlde-richen. (11465-11470)[97]

Arthur becomes a metaphor for "historical translation" (Tiller, *Laȝamon's* 188). Over time, the

transmission of his story has been altered, expanded, rewritten in such a way that the character

embodies the positive traits most exalted by his authors and their cultural backgrounds. The

eventual conquest of the Britons is just a natural part of medieval civilization, as is the process of

history writing. This particular episode represents the importance of historiography to the

national identity of the island and Arthur's participation in this process of creating a history that

does not privilege one culture over another but celebrates the uniqueness of each colonized

ethnic group. Tiller mentions:

> Arthur's struggle to resist the territorial displacement of the Britons by foreign invaders
>
> and the replacement of British history by foreign history comes to reflect Lawman's own
>
> resistance to the historiographic paradigm used by Anglo-Norman historians in their
>
> attempts to legitimize their domination of England—a paradigm that depended upon the
>
> appropriation and reinterpretation of English historical material. (Tiller, "The Truth" 29)

---

[97] What minstrels sing is not all truth nor all lies; but this is the truth about King Arthur. Never before was there such a king, so valiant through thick and thin; for the truth of what befell king Arthur from beginning to end has been recorded in the writings, his acts just as they were, no more, no less. But the Britons loved him greatly and often tell lies about him, and say many things of King Arthur which never happened in this mortal world.

Laȝamon's history is not about asserting Norman dominance over the Welsh and the Saxons but about widening the historiographical tradition to include the cultural influences of these ethnic groups.

The death of King Arthur provides another moment for Laȝamon to reiterate the importance of the Welsh to the history of England. Arthur's departure for Avalon is expanded from what Geoffrey provided in his *HRB*, and these changes should be noted as part of Laȝamon's rhetorical strategies to aggrandize the Welsh and portray them sympathetically: "Bruttes ileueð ȝete; þat he bon on liue. / and wunnien in Aualun; mid fairest alre aluen. / and lokieð euere Bruttes ȝete; whan Arður cumen liðe /…Bute while wes an witeȝe; Mærlin ihate. / he bodede mid worde; his quiðes weoren soðe. / þat an Arður sculde ȝete; cum Anglen to fulste" (14291-14298).[98] There is an interesting change here, not just to the story of King Arthur but to Laȝamon's labeling of the Britons. Arthur's people are referred to as the "Bruttes," but those who wait for "an Arður" are the people of England, the "Anglen." Brennan notes this particular shift: "The change to 'Anglen' from the earlier reference to the 'Bruttes' is not a clumsy slip from the quill of a rustic English clergyman.…Laȝamon in effect transfers the hopes of the ancient Britons to the contemporary English, who—at least as the narrator represents them— yearn for an Arthur to restore the kingship now in 'alien' hands" (Brennan 22). The "Bruttes" are now the English, which invokes the blending of the Welsh and Saxon cultures of the island. Laȝamon accepts this change to the naming of the island and its inhabitants and implicitly connects the Welsh to the Saxons, as both cultures have seen and will see their colonization of the island overtaken by an invading force. As such, Arthur becomes not only a Briton hero but

---

[98] The Britons yet believe that he is alive, and dwells in Avalon with the fairest of all the fairy women; and the Britons will await the time when Arthur will come again…But there was once a seer called Merlin who prophesied—his sayings were true—that an Arthur should come again to aid the people of England.

also a Saxon hero. He represents the desire to not be forgotten or eradicated from the history of the island and hope, not of restoration but of reclamation. Reclaiming the Welsh and Saxon parts of British identity becomes necessary for the narrative of Anglo-Norman identity.

Laȝamon's end to his long history also takes care to avoid marking the Welsh as somehow responsible for their own defeat, as they seem to be in Geoffrey's *HRB*:

> Þæs Bruttes on ælc ende; foren to Walisce londe.
>
> and heore laȝen leofeden; & heore leodene þæuwen.
>
> and ȝet wunie[ð] þære; swa heo doð auere-mære.
>
> & Ænglisce kinges; walden þas londes.
>
> & Bruttes hit loseden; þis lond and þas [leoden]
>
> þat næuere seoððen mære; kinges neoren here.
>
> Þa ȝet ne com þæs ilke dæi; beo heonne-uorð alse hit mæi.
>
> i-wurðe þet iwurðe; i-wurðe Godes wille. (16089-16096)[99]

Laȝamon avoids the moral upbraiding offered by Geoffrey and merely recounts the redistribution of the Britons to Wales. He does not blame them for their condition, nor does he make any comments on their depravity. In fact, the Britons live in accordance with "laws and customs." Laȝamon also leaves open the possibility for their recovery of the island. The day for their sovereignty has passed and has not come again—*yet*. If that event should come to pass in the future, it would be God's will.

---

[99] The Britons flocked from every region to Wales, and lived according to their laws and customs of that nation; and, what is more, will live there, as they now do, for evermore. And English kings gained sovereignty over these lands, and the Britons lost it, lost this land and the sovereignty of this nation, so that never since that time have they been kings here. Such a day has not yet come, whatever may come to pass hereafter; come what may, let God's will be done.

Conclusion: Transforming England

Laȝamon's efforts to put the Britons back into the English history may have a slightly pro-Welsh perspective, especially when he does not completely suppress the possibility of the Welsh being restored to their previous domination of England. However, this should not suggest that the *Brut* is anti-Norman. Faletra, in "Once and Future Britons: The Welsh in Lawman's *Brut*," indicates that Laȝamon is merely commenting on the uncertainties of existing in a colonial environment. None of the ethnic groups who laid claim to Albion, Britain, and England have held onto it forever. At the hopeful moment at the end of the *Brut*, Laȝamon leaves the future in God's hands since the natural state of the island is one of conquest and colonization, the result of divine judgment.

In addition, Faletra argues, "The poet's deliberate archaism is in fact consistent with the political teology of his vernacular verse history" ("Once" 2). As we have seen, the poet's language, whether deliberately or habitually archaic, represents a fondness and loyalty to a poetic style the author was familiar with because of his regional context. This poetic choice should not be considered evidence that Laȝamon opposed the Norman elites. Despite the tense anxiety relating to problems of succession and ruling with the Norman kings, Laȝamon expresses a clear desire to reflect the culture of an Anglo-Norman England, one that represents all the best aspects of England's long history. His affection for histories, as mentioned in his proem and evidenced by his use of Arthurian tales, indicates a preoccupation with the importance of the historiographic tradition. Faletra correctly claims, "The *Brut* represents political struggle in its resistance to totalizing historiographies that produce histories of Britain to maintain Norman insular hegemony" ("Once" 2). This history does not seek to place any particular group as the dominant culture in English identity. The work as a whole becomes about the historical process

of translating the past into the future. Taking the work of an early twelfth-century historian like Geoffrey, who is writing during a period of intense civil upheaval, and moving into his current context, Laȝamon can accurately transform Geoffrey's Britain into an England that has moved beyond the strict designations of Welsh, Saxon, and Norman and into a more hybridized and post-colonial island.

Chapter 3 – Henry of Huntingdon's Historicizing of the Present

"Vbi autem floridius enitescit uirorum fortium magnificentia, prudentium sapientia, iustorum iudicia, temperatorum modestia, quam in rerum contextu gestarum?" (Prologue 2).[100] From the very beginning of his *Historia Anglorum* (*HA),* Henry of Huntingdon establishes his love of history, as it provides the best reflection of the human condition. Unlike other historians of the twelfth-century, Henry avoids Arthurian material and its folkloric traditions, instead focusing on the mostly documented events of both the ancient and recent past. Writing between 1123 and 1154, Henry continually revises the *HA* throughout his lifetime, updating it to bring contemporary events into his worldview. The fact that Henry not only updates the *HA* but also creates a comprehensive history that runs from the Roman era into what he deems *Hoc Presenti*/Present Time makes his history the only one to attempt a complete account of the formation of British identity. It presents a clear evolution of the British people, politics, and culture with every changing sovereign, beginning with the occupation of the Romans and ending with the death of King Stephen.

In addition, the *HA* becomes a nationalistic history that embraces the ecclesiastical aims of Bede's historiographic tradition. In Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*HEGA*), Britain is transformed from a place of diversity and disorder into a unified construction of the "English People" through the conversion to Christianity. The Romans' introduction of Christian faith to the pagan natives paves the way to homogeny. Although Bede's *HEGA* adopts the perspective that it is only religion that can unify the disparate tribes of the island, a nation antithetical to the creation of patriotism and nationalism,[101] Henry's history successfully blends

---

[100] Where does the grandeur of valiant men shine more brightly, or the wisdom of the prudent, or the discretion of the righteous, or the moderation of the temperate, than in the context of history? (Prologue 3)

[101] See more on this concept in the introduction, and also Galbraith's "Nationality and Language" (full bibliographic info on works cited page)

the Baedan ecclesiastical model of history with the nationalistic. His prologue outlines how

history provides a model for religious standards: "Vide quomodo sancta doceat historia morum

instituta, dum Abrahe iusticiam assignat, Moysi fortitudinem, Iacob temperantiam, Ioseph

prudentiam" (Prologue 4).[102] Henry's motivations and goals as a historian are quickly presented

to the audience, making it easier to understand the primary purpose for his *HA*—that is, to

establish a religiously moral national history. History for Henry is "sacred," providing lessons on

virtuous behavior and creating important distinctions between the pious, rational historical

figures and the brutish, immorality of the historically ignorant: "Habet quidem et preter hec

illustres transactorum noticia dotes, quod ipsa maxime distinguat a brutis rationabiles. Bruti

namque homines et animalia unde sint nesciunt, genus suum nesciunt, patrie sue casus et gesta

nesciunt, immo nec scire uolunt" (Prologus 4).[103] For Henry, knowing one's roots (origins,

ethnicity, and history) is an essential part of maintaining that distinction between man and brute.

Without a sense of history and identity, religious morality cannot be achieved. With this in mind,

I believe morality and identity are inextricably linked in Henry's work, and the historical figures

and events presented in his history shape the moral and national landscape of England. In this

way, Henry is able to order the past and craft a history of a population united not by their cultural

backgrounds but by their belief in one morally righteous leader. I argue that his final work, a

series of continually revised versions of the history of England, not only becomes a moral vision

of the history of the island but also successfully narrates the blending of two disparate cultures

into one national identity.

---

[102] See how sacred history teaches the moral code, giving the attributes of justice to Abraham, fortitude to Moses, temperance to Jacob, and prudence to Joseph. (Prologue 5)

[103] The knowledge of past events has further virtues, especially in that it distinguishes rational creatures from brutes, for brutes, whether men or beast, do not know—nor indeed do they wish to know—about their origins, their race, and the events and happenings in their native land. (Prologue 5)

Henry of Huntingdon

A historian's exegesis and rhetorical aims are usually motivated by personal inclinations or background. Therefore, Henry's biographical details provide insight into possible motivations for his *HA* as well as how his own personal politics, whether religious or ethnic, help him develop his vision of English history. Indeed, from the start of the *HA*, Henry proclaims his intentions to Bishop Alexander of Lincoln: "Hec ergo considerans, huius regni gesta et nostre gentis origines, iussu tuo presul Alexander, qui flos et cacumen regni et gentis esse uideris, decurrenda suscepi" (Prologue 4-6).[104] His intention to write the history of "*nostre*/our" people necessitates a clear understanding of what people he means; although this is an English history (*Anglorum*), Henry might mean the English, the Normans, or some blended combination of both identities. In addition, this is an identity he claims to share with Alexander[105] in referring to it as the history of "our" people. Luckily, unlike the other historians explored in this dissertation, there is actually a substantial amount of surviving information about Henry, from his early life and education through his time as Archdeacon of Huntingdon from 1110 to 1156. Most of the information about Henry's life can be found in his numerous letters and writings, as collected by Greenway in her extensive 1996 edition and translation of the *HA*. The most telling biographical information can be gleaned from his *De Contemptu Mundi (DCM)*,[106] a letter composed to Walter, archdeacon of Oxford (and colleague of Geoffrey of Monmouth[107]), which recounts his early life and spiritual journey.

---

[104] With these considerations in mind, therefore, and at your command Bishop Alexander, I have undertaken to narrate the history of this kingdom and the origins of our people, of which you are regarded as the highest and most splendid ornament. (Prologue 5-7)

[105] Bishop Alexander of Lincoln was the nephew of Roger, Bishop of Salisbury. He was made bishop of Lincoln in April 1123, which most likely, according to the *ASC*, was because of Henry I's love of his uncle Roger (Irvine 253). This familial connection would seem to indicate that Alexander was Norman.

[106] The *DCM* provides an aging Henry's recounting of his life, his recollections of his past misdeeds and those of his contemporaries, and his ultimate rejection of the material world.

[107] See the chapter on Geoffrey of Monmouth

Interestingly, much information about Henry's kinship with both the Norman and English can be deduced from his familial connections. Nancy Partner believes Henry's father Nicholas, archdeacon of Huntingdon and a canon of Lincoln until his death in 1110, was likely native to Huntingdon or nearby Cambridgeshire, as he "was a canon of Lincoln Cathedral and held the archdeaconry of Cambridge, Huntingdon, and Hereford" (*Serious* 11-12). Interestingly, despite being a canon, Henry's father, Nicholas, obviously did not practice clerical celibacy, an issue which will be explored below. Working as a cleric in these areas would suggest some affinity for the location, possibly by birth. In his time as archdeacon, Nicholas donated volumes of the bible to the Lincoln Cathedral and was present for the translation of Saint Etheldreda in Ely along with many other prominent bishops. Partner also suggests that Nicholas must have been incredibly influential as he secured his son's position as the future archdeacon of Huntingdon when Henry was only 25 (12).

Henry seems to have great affection for his father, as is evident from the way in which he inserts commentary about Nicholas into the *HA*. Henry writes a brief note for his father, the former archdeacon of Huntingdon, marking the year of his death during his recounting of the reign of Henry I:

> Eodem anno Nicholaus, pater illius qui hanc scripsit historiam, mortis legibus concessit, et sepultus est apud Lincoliam. De quo ita diximus:
>
> > Stella cadit cleri, splendor marcet Nicholai,
> >
> > Stella cadens cleri splendeat arce Dei.

Hoc ideo scriptor suo inseruit operi, ut apud omnes legentes mutuum laboris optineat,

quatinus pietatis affectu dicere dignentur, 'Anima eius in pace requiescat Amen.'

(VII.27.458).[108]

This inserted obituary, placed to solicit prayers from the reader for his father's soul, represents a

moment of personal reflection that indicates a strong bond and affection for his father. The

reference to Nicholas as a fallen star of the clergy indicates his moral superiority; his death is

equated with the loss of light or spirituality. This same affection can be seen in the *DCM* when

Henry describes his father: "Quo nullus erat corpore formosior nec moribus corpori multum erat

absimilis" (4.590).[109] Henry compliments his father's personal appearance as well as indicating

that his personal attractiveness did not exceed his moral character. Indeed, it seems that his

appearance was more a reflection of his beautiful inner state.

The bond between Henry and his father suggests Henry may have had more affinity for his

Norman ancestry. Nicholas had ties to other Norman figures and patrons, some located in

Brittany. In an earlier version of the *DCM* (found in version 3 of the *HA* completed by 1138[110]),

Henry mentions his kinship with William de Glanville, which indicates a familial tie to a

Norman family even though this reference was never printed.[111] William de Glanville was "the

founder of the Cluniac priory of Broomholm in Norfolk" c. 1113, and his father was "Robert de

---

[108] In the same year [1110], Nicholas, the father of the man who has written this History, yielded to the law of death, and was buried at Lincoln. Of him I have said this: The star of the clergy falls, the light of Nicholas fades: may the clergy's falling star shine in God's citadel. The writer inserted this in his work to gain as reward for his labor that his readers might consider it fitting to say, in a spirit of piety, 'May his soul rest in peace, Amen.' (27.459)

[109] None was physically more handsome, and his looks did not belie his character. (4.591)

[110] Greenway traces the complex textual history of each version (1-6, completed in early 1129, late 1129, 1138, 1146, 1149, and 1154, respectively). See her table on page cxviii of her edition of the *HA*, as well as her description of each MS on the subsequent pages, cxix-cxliv. Version 3, also known as α, can be found in full in three extant manuscripts: London, BL, Additional MS 24061; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 280; and London, BL, Egerton, MS3668. Portions of the α version can be found in Glasgow, University Library, Hunter MS U. 6.6 and Durham, Ushaw College, MS 6.

[111] According to Greenway, the passage never appeared in print, but an early version of the *DCM* "survives as a separate item in the BL, Cotton Domitan viii" and it contains "a passage about Henry's kinsmen, William and Bartholomew de Glanville, which is not found in α (or subsequent versions)" (lxxiv).

Glanville, who appears in the Domesday Book as a tennant in 1086 of the honours of Eye and

Warrenne in Suffolk" (Greenway, *HA* xxiii). Greenway conjectures that Henry's father Nicholas

could be Robert de Glanville's brother or cousin, making Henry and William "some degree" of

cousin (xxiv).[112] The Glanvilles originated in the Arrondissement of the Pont l'Evêque in

Calvados in Brittany, which now bears their name (Loyd 46). In England, the Glanvilles received

patronage from the "Malet lords of Eye, whose Norman lordship was the Pays de Caux, to the

north of Glanville" (Greenway, *HA* xxiv). Henry's father, too, as an archdeacon of the bishopric

of Lincoln was connected to a patron in Pays De Caux. Nicholas became archdeacon of

Huntingdon in the mid to late 1070s, solidifying Henry's ties with the area of Huntingdon and

Cambridgeshire and the position of archdeacon that he would receive in 1110. Henry's family

would have then been patrons of the Normans in Henry's youth.

 This paternal tie would seem to solidify Henry's ethnic background as Norman; however, his

mother may have been an Englishwoman. His mother's name is unknown, and Henry never

identifies her in the text, nor does he provide any similar insertions into his history about her as

he did with his father. Nancy Partner suggests one possibility for this exclusion: "Clerical

marriage, although common enough, was uncanonical by the late eleventh century, and efforts to

enforce celibacy, a central part of the Gregorian reform program, were growing frequent and

increasingly stringent during Henry's lifetime" (*Serious* 12). Henry's silence on the subject of his

mother might relate to these shifting attitudes on clerical marriage and also reflect his own desire

to avoid questions about his own fatherhood and displeasure with idea of clerical celibacy.

Partner claims that Henry "was not pleased with notions of clerical celibacy that some, in

---

[112] See Greenway's family tree on page xxv of her edition.

increasing numbers during his lifetime, chose to call reform" (Partner, "Henry" 467). Henry

mentions in Book VII the origins of this movement toward clerical celibacy:

> Eodem anno ad festum sancti Michaelis, tenuit Anselmus archiepiscopus concilium apud
>
> Lundoniam, in quo prohibuit uxores sacerdotibus Anglorum antea non prohibitas. Quod
>
> quibusdam mundissimum uisum est quibusdam periculosum, ne dum mundicias uiribus
>
> maiores appeterent, in inmundicias horribiles ad Christiani nominis summum dedecus
>
> inciderent. In illo autem concilio, multi abbates qui adquisiuerant abbatias suas, sicut
>
> Deus noluit, amiserunt eas, sicut Deus uoluit. (24.450) [113]

His entry seems a bit ambivalent at first, but his comment that this ban on clerical marriage was

not prohibited before seems critical of the change in clerical rules. Henry's only other comment

is the fear of "some" that such a provision could lead them to *inmundicias horribiles* when

denied the ability to marry. Perhaps Henry does not offer much in terms of written criticism of

the rule, but the fact that he outright disregards the provision in his own life indicates his opinion

on the subject. W. H. Hart's edition of the *Cartularium monasterii de Rameseia*[114] contains

records for Henry's son, grandson, and great-grandson; therefore, Henry clearly did not practice

celibacy as archdeacon of Huntingdon. Indeed, Henry's lack of attention to his mother in the *HA*

would not necessarily be a result of his rejection of this family tie but a more nuanced response

to a change in the perception of clerical duties.

Henry may not have been willing to disclose his own familial history to avoid highlighting or

drawing attention to his father's lack of clerical celibacy, but his mother's ethnic background

---

[113] In the same year (1102) Archbishop Anslem held a council in London at Michaelmas (29 September), in which he forbade English priests to have wives which had not been prohibited before. This seemed to some to be the greatest purity, but to others there seemed a danger they might fall into horrible uncleanness, to the utter disgrace of the Christian name. In that council many abbots who had acquired their abbeys against God's will lost them, as God willed.

[114] A collection of legal, ecclesiastical, and financial records from Ramsey Abbey from 974-1436.

could be as important to his coloring of English history as his father's. As shown below, Henry's use and translation of the poem on the battle of Brunanburh indicate he knows English. This could indicate that his mother is English. Gillingham's "Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation" posits that Henry's Englishness came from his mother and his upbringing (123-144). His mother may have been the reason for his appreciation and knowledge of English. Nick Webber claims that Henry's native language must have been English, an indication that Henry was both English and Norman (155). Having an English mother does not signal that Henry would have identified himself as English over Norman: "All of these suggestions are based on sensible presumptions about the role of mothers, but of course that means that any attempt to use these examples to prove that mothers could influence their children would be to engage in circular reasoning….If these hypotheses are correct, they would indicate that women might play a very important role indeed in identity and culture" (Thomas, *The English* 154). Having an English mother would not necessarily make Henry identify as English, but the suggestion that his familiarity with the English language and any pro-English sentiments expressed in the *HA* (as shall be explored below) could be due to his mother's influence does strengthen the role of the mother in the twelfth-century English household. Regardless, Henry's personal motivations in constructing his English history may reflect his own bifurcated ancestry: his father was Norman and his mother very possibly English.

While Henry's familiarity with the English language is suggestive, such evidence cannot conclusively determine his mother's ethnicity or his own. More telling is Henry's earlier use of the "*nostre*/our" when dedicating his work to Bishop Alexander. If Henry believes his history is the history of his and Alexander's shared ancestors, then Henry must consider his ethnic identity as similar to Alexander's. Indeed, Gillingham points out that "Henry might have meant

something like 'I and my friends but not necessarily you, bishop' but here the pairing of *regnum*

and *gens* (twice over) must surely mean that in Henry's eyes Alexander was one of us"

("Henry," 134-135). For Gillingham, Henry clearly identified himself as an Englishman. In spite

of Henry's decidedly Norman father, "the fact that he lived in England and had spoken English

from birth, along with the conceptual distance from Normandy created by the residence in

England of at least one generation of his family, caused him to identify himself as English"

(Webber 155). However, Alexander was clearly descended from a Norman bishop, Roger of

Salisbury [d.1139] (Chibnall 128). The designation of "our" people then would not indicate that

both were English but that, at this point in history, such designations of national identity as

Norman and English, as determined by ancestry, no longer matter. Henry is of mixed ancestry

and Alexander is Norman; therefore, "Henry's definition of 'English' included not only those

whose descent was of pure or even partial English origin, but instead included all those people

who made England their home at the time he was writing" (Webber 155). Location becomes the

identifying feature of national identity. Henry's use of both ancestries as part of the same

nationality is the first sign that Henry is composing a history that focuses on the blended cultural

identity of England. However, his aim also includes focusing on and crafting a moral history of

England, which might be related to his upbringing.

Part of this moralizing motivation can be seen in the partly biographical *DCM*. Although the

text mostly addresses Henry's childhood as he expresses his "thoughts on contempt for the

world," the text was written by a much older Henry nearing the end of his life, and it provides

intriguing insights into the author's recollections of his own life and the purpose and causes that

he finds most important for his work. The *DCM* also provides a much needed timeline for what

Henry characterizes as the past and his own contemporary period. Henry was raised in the

wealthy household of the Bishop of Lincoln, Robert of Bloet [1093-1123], but he spends time

musing on Robert's predecessor, Remigius. Henry clearly states, "Sed non loquimur nisi de

auditis et uisis, eum autem non uidimus. Clericos autem uenerabiles quos in ecclesia primos

imposuit omnes uidimus" (*DCM* .3.588-590).[115] Remigius died in May of 1092; as such, Henry's

assertion that he never saw the former bishop indicates that Henry was either not born or still a

young child at the time of Remigius's death. In addition, his assertion that the events recounted

in his history are from his firsthand experience provide further evidence for his possible birth

year. In Book VII, "On the Kingdom of the Normans," Henry makes a point of notifying his

reader, "Hactenus de his, que uel in libris ueterum legendo repperimus, uel fama uulgante

percepimus, tractatum est. Nunc autem de his, que uel ipsi uidimus, uel ab his qui uiderant

audiuimus, pertractandum est" (VII.1.412).[116] As this section begins with the ascension of King

William Rufus [1087-1100], Henry's lived experience of history starts around 1087. This date

suggests that Henry was probably born no later than 1088, so history from before this time would

be drawn from his sources,[117] and events after this point, he claims, are from his own personal

experience. This timeline suggests the "lived" history Henry wishes to add to his *HA* and the

specifies which factors influence his vision of English identity and history.

Henry's biographical information coupled with his regional context also provide some

understanding of his motivations. The *DCM* and the *HA* provide enough evidence to indicate

what areas Henry held some affinity for. His affection for these areas plays into his history when

he chooses to highlight them in his *HA*. According to Greenway's biography of the twelfth-

---

[115] I am not speaking of what I have not heard or seen, and I did not know him. But did see all the reverend clergy to whom he gave the first appointments in church. (*DCM*.3.589-591)

[116] Down to this point the matters discussed have been those that I have either discovered from reading the books of the ancients or learned from common report. Now, however, the matters to be studied are those that I have either seen for myself or heard about from those who did see them. (VII.1.413)

[117] See section below on "Sources"

century historian, "Henry's early childhood was spent in the fenland, probably at Little Stukeley, Huntingdonshire, which was a tenancy of the abbot of Ramsey. Little Stukeley was to be Henry's home and that of three generations of his descendants" (Greenway, "Oxford"). While Henry does not mention his time in Little Stukeley, records from the *Cartularium monasterii de Rameseia* show that his son Adam took over the estate from his father (iii.275). The *Victoria County History*'s second volume on Huntingdon mentions that the 1,523-acre parish is near the center of the county "some three miles north-west of the county town; it is a narrow strip of land, bounded mainly by the parishes of Great Stukeley and Alconbury" (Page). In addition, "At the time of the Domesday Survey (1086) two knights, Richard and Hugh, held three hides of the abbot. Possibly one of these knights was father of Nicholas, archdeacon of Huntingdon (ob. c. 1110) …. We know Henry the archdeacon had houses on the demesne of the abbot and held Stukeley at fee farm" (Page). At Stukeley, Henry built the church of St. Martin and resided in the parish community throughout his time as archdeacon of Huntingdon. Little Stukeley contained Henry's house and estate, and it this location that he and his family claimed as their home.

Although Henry later settled in Little Stukeley, the *DCM* indicates that he spent most of his boyhood in the household of Bishop Robert Bloet, chancellor to King William Rufus. In this environment, Henry was exposed early on to what he later regarded as the trappings of wealth and the temptations of the material world. And this is where Henry learned the value of contempt for materialism that features so heavily in his *HA*. As Partner notes, "As a child, youth, and young man, he lived in the wealth and extravagant splendor of England's richest episcopal court" (*Serious* 12). In his advanced age, Henry cannot help but look back with bitterness at his immaturity and sinful nature as a young boy, which also becomes a rather disapproving reflection on Robert's household:

Cum namque puerulus, cum adolescens, cum iuuenis, Roberti presulis nostri gloriam

conspicerem, scilicet equites decentissimos, adolescentes nobilissimos, equos

pretiosissimos, uasa aurea et deaurata, ferculorum numerum, ferentium splendorem,

uestes purpureas, et bissinas, nichil nimirum beatius estimare potui...si quis tunc michi

hec pulcherrima, que omnes ammirabamur, contempnenda diceret, quo uultu, quo animo

ferrem? (*DCM*.1.586)[118]

As a boy, Henry admired these material possessions and believed they reflected the worthiness

of the individual who possessed them. As he grew up, he learned an important lesson about

connecting wealth with character.

Reflecting on his earlier childish perspective on the Bishop, Henry realizes that splendid

possessions do not translate into great moral character: "Vir tamen effectus, narrationem audiui

de turpissimis omnino conuiciss ad eum dictis, que si michi, nichil habenti, in tanta audientia

dicta fuissent, semimortuum me ducerem. Cepi ergo illam inestimabilem beatitudinem minoris

pendere" (*DCM*. 1.586).[119] It seems Bishop Robert was not as popular as Henry believed as a

boy, and the author makes much of Bloet's subsequent downfall as a result of his materialistic

nature.[120] Recounting the story of Bloet's eventual social lowering and his monetary challenges

---

[118] For when, throughout my boyhood, adolescence, and young manhood, I saw the glory of Robert, our bishop – I mean his handsome knights, noble young men, his horses of great price, his golden and gilded vessels, the numbers of courses, the splendour of those who waited upon him, the purple garments and satins – I thought that without a doubt nothing could be more blessed...if anyone had said to me then that those beautiful things that we all admired ought to be despised, with what kind of expression or humour would I have received it? (*DCM*. 1.587)

[119] But when I had become a man, I heard an account of the utterly vile insults directed at him, which if they had been said before such an audience to me, who have nothing, I should have reckoned myself half-dead. So I began to put a lower value on that inestimable happiness. (*DCM*. 1.587)

[120] Henry recounts the bishop's eventual decline into destitution due to his materialism: "Qui iusticiarius tocius Anglie et ab omnibus summe formidatus fuerat, in ultimo uite sue anno bis inplacitatus est a rege, per quendam iusticiarium ignobilem, et dampno grauissimo cum dedecore bis afflictus. Vnde tanto stupore mentis angariatus est, ut cum ego iam archidiaconus eius inter prandium iuxta eum recumberem, lacrimas eum fudisse uiderim...Dum igitur puer uel adolescens uel iuuenis conspiciunt beatos, precogitent quam sit eorum finis ambiguus, et in hoc etiam mundo marcescere incepturi sint in miseriis. (*DCM*.2.586-588) [Towards the end of his life, he who was justice of all England and greatly feared by everyone, was twice sued by the king before a low-born judge, and twice suffered heavy damages and disgrace. He was so anguished and bewildered, that once, when I was his archdeacon and was

later in life provides a valuable lesson for Henry. Despite the fact that no evidence exists to confirm Henry's assertion that charges were brought against Bloet, the tale indicates Henry's preoccupation with the folly of placing his trust in men. In looking back at the extravagance, he once admired, "he did learn to feel, about the world and its pleasures and their passing, a certain recoil of distrust which he called *contemptus mundi*, and that feeling pervades much of his literary work" (Partner, *Serious* 13). Indeed, it was mostly later in life that he began to understand the error of extravagance, but the archdeaconry of Huntingdon did afford opportunities for monetary gain, as explored below.

The *DCM* provides a portrait of Henry's childhood from the author's own perspective, and aside from the spiritual lessons he reflects on in the letter, the *DCM* also delivers valuable information about his spiritual and secular education, an influencing factor on his lifelong project, the *HA*. Much of Henry's time as a boy and a young man would have been spent in Lincoln with Robert Bloet. The cathedral at Lincoln was one of a growing number of secular schools of study. Kathleen Edwards' *The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages* points out that the earliest division between secular cathedrals, like Lincoln, and monastic ones related to the possession and division of private property from church property, leading them to be labeled as secular canons or clergy (5). Secular canons (so named by the code of statutes or canons they followed) occupied many roles of governance and education in the cathedral: dean, precentor, chancellor, treasurer, archdeacon, and others. By the time of Henry's education at Lincoln, Edwards argues, "[c]hanges in the structure of society and in the centres of civilization, the growth of towns and of education, were creating demands which Benedictine monks or

---

sitting next to him at dinner I saw that he was shedding tears...So when the boy, adolescent, or young man gazes on the fortunate, let him consider how uncertain their deaths may be, and that even in this world they may begin to be worn down by misfortunes.]

clerks living a semi-monastic life in their cloisters could not meet" (6). In Henry's time, education and life at the Lincoln Cathedral would follow a different structure than the monastic cathedrals of the period. And as indicated by his musings on the extravagant surroundings of his youth, "the educational emphasis in such a setting was one on the acquisition of courtly manners and political skills" (Greenway xxx). Henry's education would have been divided into three separate classes of study: grammar, song, and writing. As Edwards research reveals, "at secular cathedrals the acceptance of the need for a separate teaching of grammar and song was emphasized by assigning the charge of the grammar and song schools to different dignitaries" (167). These skills provided the necessary framework for his later life's work in composing the history of the English.

This education likely prepared Henry not only for his historical writing but also to fit in with his academic mentors and fellow clerics. In the *DCM*, he recounts his early experiences with Albinus of Anjou, his *magister quippe meus* (3.590). While Henry does not mention much about Albinus' academic interests, he mentions, "Cuius fratres honestissimi et consocii mei, qui trino pollebant habitu, scientia profundissima, castitate clarissima, innocentia summa, occulto tamen Dei iudicio lepra percussi sunt, sed iam purgamento mortis mundati sunt." (*DCM*.3.590).[121] His associates and friends were learned and devout, therefore Albinus must have shared these traits. More is shared about the second generation of clerics at Lincoln:

> Among Henry's contemporaries…were Gilbert, archdeacon of Buckingham, who 'wrote
> very polished verse and prose,' and Alber the Lombard, archdeacon of Lincoln…Walter,
> archdeacon of Oxford, described as a 'supreme rhetorician', has been identified with

---

[121] His virtuous brothers, my friends, who were renowned for their attaintments – most profound learning, purest chastity, and supreme innocence – were nevertheless, by God's secret judgment, stuck down by leprosy, but now they have been cleansed by the purification of death. (*DCM*.3.591)

> Walter who was provost of St. Geoffrey's collegiate chapel in Oxford in 1146…The
>
> second is another Walter, the archdeacon of Leicester, to whom the letter *De contemptu*
>
> *mundi* is addressed. He was Henry's friend from their youth when Henry had written for
>
> him a book of epigrams and a poem on love. (Greenway xxxii)

The emphasis of this education seems to be on rhetoric and writing, as many of Henry's peers,

and the man himself, continued with prose, poetry, and other styles of writing. This group of

peers, valued by Henry as men of great skills and rhetorical gifts, formed the early audience for

Henry's *HA*. They shared the same educational background as Henry, and they would have

formed an important contextual influence for the writer at a young age. In addition, the small

number of texts at Lincoln indicates that the scholars had private collections donated by canons

and bishops. Most of the texts were biblical, with some sermons and a few classical texts like

Priscian and Isidore's *Etymologies* and Virgil.[122] The small library also suggests Henry must

have had his own texts for studying purposes, but he does make quite a liberal use of biblical

quotations and allusions in the *HA*.

Henry as a Canon and Archdeacon

Henry's upbringing and education display his interest in history, rhetoric, and writing, but

most importantly, the *DCM* indicates how religious morality becomes a focus of the older

Henry's writing. His position as archdeacon would seem to be one of the reasons for his concern

with moral matters in his history. It was Robert Bloet who placed Henry in his position as

archdeacon of Huntingdon around 1110. Partner indicates, "He was also a canon of Lincoln and

thus one of the *familia* of the bishop of Lincoln—first Robert Bloet, later Alexander, and for a

long time, Robert de Querceto—attached by family tradition and gratitude to the interests of

---

[122] R.M. Thomson's *Catalogue of the Manuscripts in Lincoln Cathedral Library* lists the forty-four titles (with some omissions) on pages v-ix (full bibliographic information on works cited page).

lavish and powerful ecclesiastical men" (*Serious* 13). No doubt, Henry's occupation as the archdeacon of Huntingdon and his connection to these bishops greatly influenced his historical project. Henry himself was in a position of great power that afforded him many opportunities for pecuniary advantages: "By the twelfth century, those archdeacons who, like Henry, had been assigned a specific area of jurisdiction, often corresponding to a county, were local powers backed by the full delegated authority of the bishop; the scope and detail of their business made them often rich and never well liked" (Partner, *Serious* 13). Partner's suggestion that Henry may have used his position as archdeacon for monetary gain has merit, especially when his office is examined within the context of his peers. However, Henry never provided much information about his occupation as archdeacon, therefore "his share in the traditions peculiar to his order cannot be fairly assessed" (Partner 14). Greenway includes a chronological summary of Henry's duties and appearances in the charters on pages clxvi-clxxii of her edition. The majority of his works include being present at dedications of abbeys, consecrations of bishops, and witnessing the confirmation of various charters. All that can be accurately ascertained is his acceptance into some high-powered ecclesiastical circles based upon his familial connections, respectability, skill as a writer, and fine literary tastes. All of these circles of connections centered in a specific regional context—Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, and Huntingdon.

While Henry considered the smaller parish town of Little Stukeley his home, he held great affection for the city of Huntingdon that was the center of his ecclesiastical work. In a passage in his *HA*, recounting the year 1010, he writes, "Huntedona uero, id est mons uenatorum, loco Gudmundeceastrie, nobilis, quondam urbis, nunc uero uille non inambilis ex alia parte fluminis sita, castris duobus predictus tam situs fulgore quam sui decore, tam predictarum paludium

uicinitate quam ferarum et piscium fertilitate, longe preminet" (VI.6.348).[123] This example is one

of a few times when Henry's authorial objectiveness gives way to partiality and fondness for the

land of his archdeaconry. At the time that Henry ascended to his new position, Huntingdon was a

well-established town: "By the middle of the tenth century Huntingdon had a mint, and in 1066 it

was a flourishing market town, with over 1,250 burgesses. It was the administrative centre of its

shire; the earl and the sheriff both had houses there, and two years after the Norman Conquest a

castle was built" (Greenway, *HA* xli). Norman influences on the architecture of the area and the

economic stability of the period indicate that the city was positively affected by the political shift

of the Norman Conquest. Indeed, Huntingdon Castle was erected two years after the Conquest,

in 1068.

Henry died sometime between 1155 and 1164.[124] Over the course of his time in Lincoln and

as the archdeacon of Huntingdon, Henry's largest project, the *HA*, became his life's work. The

HA was probably commissioned sometime after Bishop Alexander was appointed in 1123, as

Henry concluded the epilogue by 1130. Clearly, Alexander had an interest in supporting the

work of historians, as he had also requested the *Prophetiae Merlini* (*PM*) from Geoffrey of

Monmouth around this time. After reading Geoffrey's shorter version of the prophecies of

Merlin, Alexander urged Geoffrey to publish a separate text of just these prophecies, as he found

the character intriguing. Geoffrey's Arthurian history provided a different cultural perspective

than Henry's work, with an emphasis on the Britons, Saxons, and the magical wizard, Merlin.

Indeed, Alexander's requests from both Henry and Geoffrey indicate an interest in literary and

---

[123] This Huntingdon, or 'the hill of the hunters', on the site of Godmanchester, formerly a noble city and now an attractive town situated on the other side of the river, is far superior to the two other said strongholds, for the splendour of its site and for its beauty, as well as for its proximity to the said marshes and for the abundance of its wild beasts and fish. (VI.6.349)

[124] Henry ends the *HA* at the coronation of King Henry II [December 19, 1154] and was succeeded in his position as archdeacon by Nicholas de Sigillo between 1164-1165 (*Letters of John Salisbury*, ii, no. 140). Henry could have died anytime between 1155 and 1164.

historical traditions of the British and the English. Alexander's literary project for Henry was much more focused on the history of the English than his request from Geoffrey of Monmouth, so Henry likely was very concerned with making his *HA* as authoritative as possible with his use of reliable sources.

Historia Anglorum: The Manuscripts and Versions

Henry attempted to keep his history as up-to-date as possible, constantly revising the work to reflect the changing monarchs and evolving political identity of England, which makes an examination of his textual history important to following his vision of English identity through history. Tracing the numerous manuscripts of the *HA* is complicated by the curious history of the text. The first edition of the text were Sir Henry Savile's in 1596, followed by Thomas Arnold's in 1879. Arnold made one of the first attempts to trace the complex MSS history of the *HA*.[125] Arnold posits five possible versions of the *HA*, first composed over a period of time between 1125 and 1130 and revised with new additions (books and revisions) up until Henry's death sometime after the ascension of Henry II. His textual history mostly uses data gleaned from the extant MSS, postulating which of the surviving copies best represent each version based upon the information contained therein as well as dates ascribed to the manuscripts by both the scribes themselves and other contextual factors.[126] Mostly, Arnold describes the various versions based upon the year in which they end, representing Henry's "present time" at the point of completion. The first edition continues up until 1129, the second picks up from there and continues to 1135, with the third "bringing the narrative of events down to the end of 1138" (Arnold xi-xii). The fourth version, according to Arnold, did not really update the history so much as it added more

---

[125] Arnold does mention F. Liebermann's article "Heinrich von Huntingdon" (full bibliographic information provided in the bibliography), which provides an examination of the MSS history and transmission.
[126] This edition provides an in-depth analysis of the five versions on pages xi-xvi.

supplemental materials like letters between Henry and his personal friends, as well as including

Book IX, "The Miracles of the English." For this edition, Arnold postulates a composition date

of 1145 based upon dates in the MSS (xiii). The final version updated the *HA* to the point of

Stephen's death and the succession of Henry II around 1154. Arnold believes that perhaps the

author intended to further expand the *HA* before his death:

> There is, as may be seen on reference to the passage, some evidence that the author did
>
> not intend to stop here, but contemplated the addition of a new book, which would have
>
> probably embraced the events of the first five or six years of the reign of Henry II. As this
>
> design, if entertained, was never carried out, it seems reasonable to infer that Henry, who
>
> must have been at least seventy years old at the time of Henry's accession, died soon
>
> after the event which he had so enthusiastically welcomed. (Arnold xvi)

Arnold's discussion of the textual history provides some evidence for the possible dates of

Henry's composition but fails to analyze the complex relationship between each MSS as it

relates to the various versions of the *HA* in circulation. His assumptions regarding missing

prologues and epilogues assume they were simply left out by a scribe or lost instead of being

indicative of the textual tradition for that version. Thus, his dating does not add as much clarity

to the process of composition and revision that Henry undertook with the *HA* as Greenway's

1996 version.

Greenway's more contemporary edition and translation expands upon the textual history

provided by Arnold, suggesting not five but six distinct versions of the *HA*. These six versions

are comprised of forty-five extant manuscripts, all detailed and categorized in Greenway's

edition of the *HA*.[127] Greenway disagrees with Arnold's textual history, as it focuses its attention

---

[127] From pages cxviii-cxliv, Greenway provides descriptions of the surviving manuscripts and a graphic illustrating each manuscripts' relationship to the six different versions (revisions).

more on the manuscript evidence, scribal dates, and the inclusion of certain

books/prologues/epilogues, instead of attempting to discern the author's complex revision

process. She claims, "[T]he variations between the versions are primarily attributable to the

author's activities and not to those of editors or scribes. But because the division into six

versions is determined by the number of distinct texts witnessed by surviving copies, it allows

only a partial and imperfect view of the stages of composition: behind the versions is the

complex process of continuing composition and revision by the author" (Greenway, *HA* lxvii).

Greenway assumes that the variations in texts derive from the author's additions and revisions,

but she also suggests that what survives is still an incomplete portrait of the author's writing

process since some copies and versions did not survive. From Greenway's position, tracing the

manuscript history of each variant text, "It is possible to trace the evolution of the *HA* through

six different versions, with endings at [year] 1129 (versions 1 and 2), [year] 1138 (version 3),

[year] 1146 (version 4), [year] 1149 (version 5), and [year] 1154 (version 6) …" (Greenway, *HA*

lxvi). The sixth version became final the version, as Henry died shortly after making this last

revision. The dates of possible composition of the six different versions or revisions only

indicate the dates when these manuscripts would have been in circulation; however, there is no

way of knowing exactly how much time and how many different variations Henry composed

because the surviving manuscripts provide only part of the story of Henry's extensive revision

process. I agree with Greenway's contention that the variations found in the numerous versions

are more the result of the author's revision process and less about scribal errors and editorial

interference. Clearly, as both Greenway and Arnold have found, Henry intended to make his

history a constant work in progress so as to keep it as up-to-date as possible, including a shifting

perspective on contemporary events that will be explored below. This provides a rich opportunity to explore the *when* and *why* of Henry's decision to return to his work.

The Structure of the *HA*

The original text of the *HA* is comprised of a prologue, seven books, and an epilogue. Each book is dedicated to one historical epoch of England, the first being dedicated to "The Kingdom of the Romans in Britain." The remaining books follow British history through the ascension of Henry II, with the following topics: "The Coming of the English," "The Conversion of the English," "The Kingdom of the English," "The Danish Wars," "The Coming of the Normans," and "The Kingdom of the Normans." Although the text as a whole is quite long, the divisions allow for easier reading of the text, with the average length of each book around 8,000-10,000 words, although Book VIII (a later addition in a revised version) has 15,000 words. Indeed, the sheer length of the combined sections indicates Henry's determination to create the most comprehensive English history. In later editions, Henry includes a book on "Exalted Matters," "The Miracles of the English," and a final section on "The Present Time." The text was fairly popular during its composition, so much so that some copies were made before Henry had even finished his revisions on the newest versions that followed the death of King Stephen and the coronation of Henry II in 1154 (Greenway, *HA* lxi). The popularity of Henry's work caused the historian to circulate copies before he had completed his full vision of English history. However, that same popularity made it possible for him to return to the work, revising and adding to it as the populace clamored for accurate and reliable histories. It is in these later edits, revisions, and redactions that Henry's motivations and goals become clearer.

HA Sources

    For such a large undertaking, Henry, like all other historians of this period, depended greatly on the work of his predecessors to formulate the earliest parts of British history. In his prologue, Henry's address to Bishop Alexander mentions one specific source that had the greatest influence on his work: "Tuo quidem consilio Bede uenerabilis ecclesiasticam qua potui secutus historiam, nonnulla etiam ex aliis excerpens auctoribus, inde cronica in antiquis reseruata librariis compilans, usque nostrum ad auditum et uisum preterita representaui" (Prologue 6).[128] Bede's *HEGA* provided the framework for many historians in the Anglo-Norman period, so Henry's use of the text should not be surprising. As Greenway points out, Henry's extensive use of this source material sometimes makes his *HA* seem quite derivative:

> In taking material from the *HE*, Henry uses two methods of verbatim quotation and précis. About twenty-five chapters of the *HE* are taken over virtually complete into the *HA*, and another twenty-five or so appear there in very substantial verbatim extracts. About eighty chapters of the *HE* are abbreviated: Bede's own words are retained here and there, but largely the composition is Henry's, though it is remarkably faithful to the sense of Bede's text. (Greenway lxxxvi-lxxxvii)

In keeping with Bishop Alexander's request, Henry was compiling all the acceptable British histories into one main source. While the integration of the source material seems more like borrowing (or stealing), especially given the sheer volume of material taken from Bede, Henry is meticulous in his choice of what material to take from Bede.

---

[128] On your advice I have followed the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* where I could, selecting material also from other authors and borrowing from chronicles preserved in ancient libraries, and I have described past events down to the time of our own knowledge and observation. (Prologue 7)

In examining the titles of Henry's books on early British history, Bede's influence becomes quite apparent from the very start. Henry reproduces Bede's opening nearly verbatim. In Bede's version, the history begins with a description of the island: "Opima frugibus atque arboribus insula, et alendis apta pecoribus ac iumentis, uineas etiam quibusdam in locis germaninans, sed et auium ferax terra marique generis diuersi" (*HEGA* I.16).[129] Henry repeats much of the same language when opening his *HA*, with a similar description of the island: "Britannia igitur beatissima est insularum, fecunda frugibus et arboribus, copiosa riuis et nemoribus, iocunda uolucrum et ferarum uenatibus, ferax auium multi et diuersi generis, terra et mari et fluuiis" (I.1.10).[130] In both histories, there are mentions of the numerous dolphins, seals, and mussels "quibus sepe inclusam margaritam omnis quidem coloris optimam inueniunt, rubicundam scilicet et iacinctinam, purpuream et prassinam, sed maxime candidam" (I.1.10).[131] The language in both is nearly identical, indicating how indebted Henry is to Bede's *HEGA* for not only his narration of early English history but also the larger themes of his work. Although I agree the work can seem quite derivative at times, as Greenway argues, Henry's dependence on Bede indicates how important morality and Christianity were to his vision of English history. Henry was also performing his duty as a historian, giving due credit to those who came before him as a show of humility and credibility.

In addition to his opening, Henry's focus on the English (Anglo-Saxons), their conversion, and the subsequent unification of disparate tribes models Bede's focus on the civilizing effects of Christianity on the island and the transformation of the island from division into a proto-national

---

[129] The island is rich in crops and in trees, and has good pasturage for cattle and beasts of burden. It also produces vines in certain districts, and has plenty of both land- and waterfowl of various kinds.

[130] Britain, then, is the most blessed of islands, rich in crops and trees, with plentiful streams and woodlands, delightful for its hunting-grounds of wildfowl and game, and teeming with many different kinds of land, sea, and river birds. (I.1.11)

[131] ...in which excellent pearls are frequently found enclosed, of every colour—red, blue, purple, and green, but especially white. (I.1.11)

state. Books I-IV and Book IX ("The Miracles of the English") are extremely dependent on Bede's *HEGA* as a source. Augustine's conversion efforts in England are a large part of the third book's focus on the shift from paganism to Christianity. The miracles of healing under the reign of St. Oswald the blessed king feature in both texts. Bede recounts the creation of the sacred space of "Heuenfeld": "In cuis loco orationis innumerae uirtutoes sanitatum noscuntur esse patratae, ad indicum uidelicet ac memoriam fidei regis. Nam et usque hodie multi de ipso ligno sacrosanctae crucis astulas excidere solent, quas cum in aquas miserint, eisque languentes homines aut pecudes potaureint siue asperserint, mox sanitati restituuntur" (*HEGA*.III.2.216).[132] Henry again uses this scene nearly verbatim. Overall, the liberal borrowing from the areas of the text most concerned with the religious conversion of England indicate Henry's Christian inclinations in his *HA*.

Henry may find a lot in common with his predecessor, but he does distinguish himself in some key ways. Outside of the religious concerns of the text, Henry is also preoccupied with the early ordering of the island's many disparate tribes, as was Bede. However, the two authors approach the organization of England into the Heptarchy in different ways:

> The relation between Books II and III shows Henry's rather insistent orderliness. Where Bede composed a complex, interwoven mesh of military and Christian events in gradual progression toward a kingdom united under one rule and one Church, Henry arranges a clear separation of political and ecclesiastical history. He sifts out the various conversions of the heptarchy kings and makes Book III concurrent in time with, but distinct in theme from Book II. (Partner, *Serious* 23).

---

[132] In that place of prayer, innumerable miracles are known to have been performed, doubtless as a token and memorial of the king's faith. And even to this day many people are in the habit of cutting splinters from the wood of this holy cross and putting them in water which they then give to sick men or beasts to drink or else they sprinkle them with it; and they are quickly restored to health.

Henry creates clear divisions between the Christian conversion of the land and the establishment

of the different kingdoms of England, devoting whole books to the kingdoms of the Romans,

English, and Normans as well as one separate book (III) to the conversion. These events are

blended together in the *HEGA*, indicating the precedence religion takes over nationalism in

Bede's history. While the religious or moralistic concerns are indeed part of Henry's motivation,

this history must create a clear narrative of the leadership and cultural shifts of the island. For

Bede, unity comes through religious conversion; Henry sees the ordering of the island as a result

of the moral righteousness of the leadership of differing ethnic groups, and, as shown below, the

trouble which results from a lack of morality in that leadership.

There were other influences on Henry's *HA*. Although not directly mentioned, "Nennius,

Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, and Jerome and Gregory the Great (for the early books), with the

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the Peterborough compilation for events after the time of Bede were

what 'chronicles kept in old libraries'" are incorporated in less overt ways than Bede (Partner,

Serious 20). Henry had to rely on more than just the *HEGA* to complete the *HA*, so while "about

25% of the History came from Bede," the remaining 75% came from other reputable sources,

like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*) (Greenway lxxxv). Referred to as the "writing of the

ancients" or "the books of the ancients," the *ASC*'s entries provide an extensive source for

Henry's history. Notably, Henry's borrowings from the *ASC* indicate that he was more than

likely using a version close to the Peterborough MS, the E recension, Bodleian, MS Laud Misc.

636. Elements from Book II's "The Coming of the English," "The Kingdom of the English" in

Book IV, and "The Danish Wars" in Book V are obviously indebted to the *ASC*, as they are

events from the Anglo-Saxon period of England. Even those post-Conquest, like the death of

William the Conqueror and the ascension of William II, are dependent on one of the only historical sources available in the period.

In using the *ASC*, Henry remains faithful to the text, but as is common with a medieval historian, he does add embellishments to some of the less exciting entries. For example, Henry takes a simple entry from 761 in the *ASC*— "Her wæs se myccla winter; Moll Norþymbra cining ofsloh Oswine æt Ædwinesclife on octauo iuds Augusti" (39)[133]—and builds a narrative around it. In Book IV, the events are narrated as, "Anno uero sequente, Mol rex Nordhymbre interfecit Oswine fortissimum ducum suorum. Qui committens prelium erga dominum suum apud Eadwinescliue, iure gentium spreto, iure Dei occisus est" (22.248).[134] Moll's actions against Oswine become inflated in the *HA*, with Henry pointing out the misdeeds of Oswine and justifying his punishment as part of the "law of God." Like any historian using the *ASC*, Henry has to use the scant information provided to make inferences about non-narrated events and make assumptions about causal relationships between certain historical events. These assumptions, exaggerations, and causal relationships (sometimes faulty) between chronological events, along with some mistranslation, alter the history of the English as presented by Henry and the *ASC*. Some dates are mixed up as well as the misunderstanding of some OE letters. At one point, in Book IV Section 9, Henry mistakenly writes the "Ecgfrith" when the proper name is "Ecgberht," though these could also be errors by scribes copying Henry's *HA*. However, as R.G. Morse points out, "Admixtures of invention, elaboration, and embellishments were a method of stylization in order to make the past comprehensible" (87). Whatever errors Henry

---

[133] Here was the big winter; and Moll, the Northumbrian King, killed Oswine at Edwin's Cliff on 6 August.
[134] In the following year [761], Moll, king of Northumbria, killed Oswine, the most powerful of his commanders, who, engaging in battle against his lord at 'Edwin's Cliff,' scorning the law of peoples, was killed by the law of God. (IV.22.249)

made, he was attempting to make a coherent narrative out of the sparse information of some of the entries in the *ASC*.

Henry uses other smaller chronicles and histories to fill in the historical gaps between Bede and the *ASC*. For example, Paul the Deacon's *Historia Romana* helped Henry amplify his section on the kingdom of Romans in Britain. The Trojan origins of the Britons is explored in Henry's other source, the anonymous *Historia Brittonum*, but, in Book IX, Henry incorrectly identifies the author of the piece as Gildas. Henry also made use of the narratives of the saints' lives for his "The Miracles of the English." Also, Henry draws from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB*, although he omits much of the Arthurian material. As a source for the Romans of Britain, Henry avoided Geoffrey's history, preferring to use the work of Paul the Deacon or the inaccurately ascribed Gildas's *HB*. Perhaps the criticism of Geoffrey's fictionalization of early British history had something to do with Henry's decision to omit and rewrite sections of the *HRB*. Regardless, Henry's use of these main texts was supplemented by other, smaller annals and histories, and occasionally by oral tradition and French vernacular pieces (Greenway cv-cvi). Those gained from oral tradition would have been stories handed down in his childhood and adulthood, mostly from what he calls "The Present Time."

Most interestingly, once Henry reaches the contemporary period, he is more dependent on his own abilities as a researcher and historian, as he has no sources to follow. After 1128, Henry's narration of the "Present Time" is mostly constructed from his own observations as well as information gathered from other contemporary anecdotes and stories. Henry does interject elements of his own understanding of history as gained through oral traditions before his so-called contemporary period. At one point in Book VI, Henry embellishes an event from 1010 about the massacre of the English by the Danes in Balsham, Cambridgeshire. His account adds

some detail probably handed down by the people of Cambridgeshire: "Quidam uero fama dignus extenta in gradus turris templi, quod adhuc ibidem stat, ascendit. Et tam loco quam probitate munitus, ab omnis solus exercitu se defendit" (VI.6.348).[135] The "local legend" of a man resisting the Danes single-handedly does not appear in any annals of the period and, thus, must be part of an oral tradition of the area, an area a little more than thirty miles from Huntingdon. From this episode, it seems evident that Henry was not averse to using local sources as well as the more traditional historical sources.

It is this "present time" period that distinguishes Henry as a historian and indicates his own personal motivations. Even though Henry mentions that "usque nostrum ad auditum et uisum preterita representatui" (Prologus.6),[136] it would be incorrect to assume that the more contemporary events of the *HA* are derived completely from firsthand accounts and other observations. As mentioned above, Henry does claim at the start of Book VII that the events from William II's [1087-1100] reign onward are based upon first-hand experience. However, it is unlikely he witnessed much in the way of William Rufus's reign, as he was only born in 1088. Instead, Henry seems to be marking his own "presence" in history, since he would have been alive at this point. Henry has shown that he will insert personal experiences, such as his own father's death, into his history, and it makes sense that he would like to mark his birth by relating it to the current king's reign. However, Henry would have grown from a child to teenager under William II's kingship, which would give him some firsthand knowledge of the king's leadership and history in relation to his larger narrative. Therefore, Henry is right to claim this period as his own lived experience of history. As seen below, the way Henry reflects on current events and

---

[135] But one man, worthy of widespread renown, climbed the steps of the church tower which still stands there, and strengthened both by the place and his prowess, defended himself, one against the whole army. (VI.6.349)

[136] I have described past events down to the time of our own knowledge and observation. (Prologue.7)

revises his history as he lives through the contemporary political climate distinguishes him from other historians; he is much more present in his historical narrative.

<u>Henry as a Historian</u>

One of the biggest problems with analyzing a work like Henry's *HA* is the unoriginal nature of the extensive history. As discussed above, in copying exactly from his sources or in abridging them, as he did with Bede and the *ASC*, Henry's work can seem derivative and without merit in the larger tradition of Anglo-Norman historians. Henry, under Bishop Alexander's direction, compiled all the histories he had access to into one main source for his audience. However, as discussed with Geoffrey of Monmouth, medieval historians often built their own credibility and the reliability of their historical retellings by taking (quite liberally) from their source material and presenting it anew as if it were their own. Any good historian in this period would have referenced the sources that inspired and guided his work to draw upon the *auctoritas* of that earlier writer. Using sources in this manner did not exclude the historian from directing the material to suit his own rhetorical goals. Henry had a point of view to express through this history—the blending of disparate cultures through religious unity—and, although he is very clear about his motivations and aims, Henry's historical context also illuminates some of the author's other rhetorical concerns. As Greenway argues in "Authority, Convention, and Observation in the *Historia Anglorum*," Henry applies the rhetorical and grammatical skills he gained at Lincoln Cathedral to his sources, granting authority to Bede, and also utilizes the rhetorical practices of abbreviation, translation, and amplification to insert his own authorial agency.

Henry composed his history as other contemporary Anglo-Norman historians completed histories on the same subject, working in a similar historical context although affected differently

by the period. William of Malmesbury [1095-1143], Orderic Vitalis [1075-1142], and even

Geoffrey of Monmouth [1100-1155] all produced histories during the twelfth-century concerned

with the origins of the English people. Of all the historians of the period, Henry seemed to have a

closer connection to Geoffrey of Monmouth due to their similar ties to Bishop Alexander. This

suggests that the two authors might have been aware of each other through this mutual patron.

Even more compelling is the moment Geoffrey directly address both Henry and William of

Malmesbury in the epilogue of his *HRB*. Asking both authors to refrain from writing on the

subject of Britons since they did not have Geoffrey's all-important ancient British book,

Geoffrey creates a strange literary connection to his contemporaries. Tatlock finds the notation

interesting and suggestive: "Neither William nor Henry had shown any disposition to expatiate

on the kings of the Britons – quite the contrary – and the personalness and intimacy of

Geoffrey's remark is almost unparalleled in medieval historians...it certainly suggests some sort

of personal relation between the men, which might be anything between chaffing and hostility"

(431). Henry was definitely cognizant of the work of his contemporaries and the thematic

elements each one instilled in their work: "What was important for success in this task was the

cumulative weight of many men working on similar material for similar purposes in many

different places. It was this that gave consistency to the historical work of the period" (Southern

249). In creating his *HA*, Henry has a clear purpose like his contemporaries, which involves not

only moralizing history like Bede's *HEGA* but also using the history of England to highlight the

importance of *regnum*, kingdoms and order. The use of the Heptarchy blended with the

borrowing from Bede and the *ASC*, as well as his own perspective on contemporary events, helps

him achieve this goal.

Henry's religious ideals, as indicated in the *DCM* [137]and evident in his admiration of patrons

like Bishop Alexander, mark him as less secular and more concerned with the larger

philosophical implications of his actions, including the work of his history of Britain. Partner

sees Henry as a historian "with a well-developed sense of order" (*Serious* 22). But Henry's type

of order is a Christian conceit, in which God subjects the people to chaos before restoring order.

It is important to consider that this is not a new theme; examples of this moral vision of history

can be found in Bede and Gildas (as well as countless others). For example, in Gildas' *DECB*,

the Britons lose God's favor because of their sins and the ineffective religious leadership of their

clergy. The divine approval then passes on to the next conquering invader, the Saxons. Henry

follows a similar model but, obviously, moves further along in history. As indicated below,

Henry is quite dependent methodologically on the model of God's intervention in history and the

passing of his favor from one righteous group to the next.

<u>Moral Motivations</u>

Religion is central to Henry's method of narrating history; issues of legitimacy and the

conversion to Christianity are integral to the narrative, especially as it relates to the morality of

the rulers. Henry alludes to and quotes from the Bible frequently. Henry's extensive use of

biblical materials may have been a medieval convention for historians of the period, but he also

remarks pointedly on his beliefs about history in the prologue to the *HA*. Henry writes, "Cum in

omni fere litterarum studio dulce laboris lenimen et summum doloris solamen dum uiuitur

---

[137] In the first section of the *DCM*, Henry recounts the initial sins that arise out of boyhood, a sign of those most egregious sins he wishes to avoid and uses to judge the figures of history: "Igitur a puericia omnia fere uicia preter luxuriam pullulant. Inter que cacumen erigit rigidissimum et principatur nimius amor presentium. Cum autem etatis naturali bono malal multa puericie uacuentur, uelut inscientia, leuitas, mutabilitas, et alia, hoc predictum, quod iocundius est ceteris, et melle uenenato conditur, remanet et crescit." (1.586) [From boyhood almost all the vices—except concupiscence—put forth their shoots. The hardiest one, that rears itself up the highest and dominates the rest, is excessive love of the present world. When, however, the natural improvement of maturity clears away the many evils of boyhood, such as ignorance, levity, changeableness, and so on, this one evil, which is more pleasing than the rest and is seasoned with poisoned sweetness, remains and develops].

insitum considerem, tum delectabilius et maioris prerogatiua claritatis historiarum splendorem

amplectendum crediderim. Nichil namque magis in uita egregium, quam uite calles egregie

indagare et frequentare" (Prologus 2).[138] History writing, for Henry, is a superior literary form

that he enjoys and practices from both an aesthetic and educational standpoint. Indeed, Henry

presents himself as the inquisitive author, seeking to familiarize himself with the world and its

events for his own betterment as well as establishing his own *auctoritas*. Such a statement no

doubt reflects his expectations for his audience as well. In the a letter to Walter, archdeacon of

Oxford, at the end of the *DCM*, Henry writes, "loquendo omnino simpliciter ut pateat pluribus

(id est minus doctis)" (584),[139] indicating his audience may be a simpler group than those he

lived and worked with in Lincoln. And yet, Henry still maintains a noble aspiration for his work

and the less educated who encounter it.

It is through this simpler audience that Henry's first goal of finding the moral lesson in

history really takes shape. Similar to his own reflections in the *DCM*, Henry looks back upon

past events to record the patterns of judgment over the righteous and the immoral. His prologue

continues: "Sic etiam in rebus gestis omnium gentium et nationum, que utique Dei iudicia sunt,

benignitas, munificentia, probitas, cautela et his similia, et contraria, non solum spirituales ad

bonum accendunt et a malo repellunt, sed etiam seculares ad bona sollicitant et in malis minuunt.

Historia igitur preterita quasi presentia uisui representat, futura ex preteritis imaginando

diiudicat" (Prologus 4).[140] He likens the "recorded deeds" of history to "que utique Dei iudicia

---

[138] It is my considered opinion that the sweetest relief from suffering and the best comfort in affliction that this world affords are to be found almost entirely in the study of literature, and so I believe that the splendour of historical writing is to be cherished with the greatest delight and given pre-eminent and most glorious position. For nothing is more excellent in this life than to investigate and become familiar with the course of worldly events. (Prologue 3)

[139] ...I shall speak with utter simplicity, so that it may be clear to the many (I mean to the less educated)(585)

[140] Yes, indeed, in the recorded deeds of all peoples and nations, which are the very judgements of God, clemency, generosity, honesty, caution, and the like, and their opposites, not only provoke men of spirit to what is good and deter them from evil, but even encourage worldly men to good deeds and reduce their wickedness. History therefore

sunt," finding religious truth in the stories of those punished for their "wickedness" or rewarded for their "clemency" or "generosity." Most telling is his assertion that knowing the past allows one to judge the future. These judgments of the future are rather like predictions or prophecies (similar to Merlin's in the *HRB*), which do not actually seek to foresee the future, but to use the future as a means of criticizing the mistakes of the present and the follies of British rulers. The events recounted in the *HA* clearly have a moral purpose, with each invasion by Romans, Saxons, or Normans labeled as a punishment for wicked behavior. History, therefore, becomes a perfect model for the present generation to look back on the mistakes of the earlier kingdoms and avoid the mistakes of the past. As Henry puts it, "Hic reges populosque uides, quos alea fati / Extulit et pressit, sed ab his metire futura. / Aspice, magne pater, quo deuenere potentes, / Aspice quam nichili sit honor, lux, gloria mundi" (Prologus 6-8).[141] With the hindsight of history, Henry sees how those who valued the glory of worldly honor are always conquered by God's will in the end.

Henry is drawing on this moral tradition as an organizing principle. His thematic concerns appear rather obvious when examining key passages in his text. From the very start, Henry's first book set ups his moral structuring of history, rather like a thesis for his entire work:

> Quinque autem plagas ab exordio usque ad presens immisit diuina ultio Britannie, que non solum uisitat fideles, sed etiam diiudicat infideles. Primam per Romanos, qui Britanniam expugnauerunt sed postea recesserunt. Secundam per Pictos et Scotos, qui grauissime eam bellis uexauerant, nec tamen optinuerunt. Terciam per Anglicos qui eam

---

brings the past into view as though it were present, and allows judgement of the future by representing the past. (Prologue 5)

[141] Here you see kings and peoples whom the lottery of fate has raised up and put down, but judge the future by them. See, great father, what has become of the powerful: see how the honour, the lustre, the glory of the world come to nothing. (Prologue 7-9)

debellauerunt et optinent. Quartum per Dacos, qui eam bellis optineurunt, sed postea

deperierunt. Quintam per Normannos, qui eam deuicerunt et Anglis inpresentiarum

dominantur. (I.4.14-16) [142]

For Henry, the believers are punished as severely as those who lack faith. In each of the plagues,

save the final Norman one, the punishment is being invaded and conquered as a form of "divine

vengeance." Those who remain "unbelievers" in the face of Christianity bring down a plague of

vicious, and sometimes unholy, invaders. When the Normans arrive, there appears to be less

judgement of their power over the island. The Picts and Scots "grievously beleaguered the land"

while the Danes "conquered it by warfare," but the Normans simply "conquered it and have

dominion over it." There are no moral judgments on these last invaders, but they are still referred

to as one of the five plagues of England. So, while Henry provides no outward moral outrage at

their conquering of the island, he does set up some moral judgement on their dominion for later

on. As seen below, this judgement is placed more squarely on specific rulers rather than the

Normans as a whole.

Henry also appears to be echoing the pattern of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB*. In a scene

similar to one of Geoffrey's, the Britons are justly punished by God for their sinfulness. In the

HRB, the Britons fall into civil strife, envy, and some other vague sinfulness after Arthur's death.

They lose sight of what made them great through fruitless in-fighting, which for Geoffrey was

probably a means of decrying the civil war between Matilda and King Stephen. Henry focuses on

the Roman era of the Britons and shows how the island's residents are just predisposed to moral

---

[142] From the very beginning down to the present time, the divine vengeance has sent five plagues into Britain, punishing the faithful as well as the unbelievers. The first was through the Romans, who overcame Britain but later withdrew. The second was through the Picts and Scots, who grievously beleaguered the land with battles but did not conquer it. The third was through the English, who overcame and occupy it. The fourth was through the Danes, who conquered it by warfare, but afterwards they perished. The fifth was through the Normans, who conquered it and have dominion over the English people at the present time. (I.4.15-17)

failings early on in their history. Following the Britons' victory over the Picts and Scots, God

sends an abundant harvest as a test: "Probatique Deus utrum omnimoda prosperitas redderet

gratiosos, quos nulla aduersa reddierant correctos. Illi tunc uero omnia scelera transacta

superantes, in luxuria furere et in omnium lue scelerum sine respectu Dei ceperunt" (I.47.74).[143]

Without hardship, the Britons forget their allegiance to God and immediately take up their

wicked habits. Not even a plague can push them into reforming their ways, so God decides to

end these sinful people. None of this is new to a scholar of medieval history, but Henry's *HA*

uses the thematic framework of his predecessors to organize and order his vision of history.

Henry's *HA* does stand out when it examines portions of history beyond Gildas' or Bede's

reach and ignored by Geoffrey's *HRB*. Henry's history comments specifically on the

contemporary climate and his own lived events in a way Bede and Gildas cannot, and Geoffrey

will not. Henry's moralistic perspective on history becomes more notable when he reaches more

contemporary events. Up until his "Kingdom of the Normans" and "Present Time" sections,

Henry has built a model of history based upon the past judgments of God over the people of

Britain like many of his predecessors and his contemporaries. Bede, Gildas, Geoffrey, and even

Laȝamon end with the Saxons conquering the Britons, a fitting punishment for their wickedness,

but Henry's narrative moves beyond that point, into the invading Normans, their conquest of

Britain, and the establishment of Anglo-Norman society. His narration of the history unfolding in

his own time period makes him a unique historian, especially as his perspective on history is

revealed. Interestingly, he does not abandon his plague-oriented structure. His seventh book, on

the "Kingdom of the Normans," which he specifically says comes mostly from first-hand

---

[143] God tested whether those of whom no adversity had reformed would be softened by complete prosperity. But they then surpassed every crime they had previously committed, going mad in riotous living, and succumbing to a plague of wickedness with no regard for God. (I.47.75)

experiences, prepares the Normans for their own eventual punishment at God's hands:

"Declaratum quidem constat quomodo Dominus salutem et honorem genti Anglorum pro meritis

abstulerit, et iam populum non esse iusserit. Patebit amodo quomodo et ipsos Normannos

uindices quidem suos uariis cladibus afficere inceperit" (VII.1.412-413).[144] In this moment,

Henry uses what he has already proven to be the cyclical pattern of humanity—stability,

wickedness, and punishment—to guide his history of the Normans and their contemporary and

future behavior, making reference to disasters that will also befall the Normans.

Just what are the "various disasters" of the Norman kingdom? The first section of Book VII

creates an alarmingly long list of feuding, fighting, and various misdeeds related to the rebellion

against William II [1056-1100], or William the Younger, led by supporters of his brother Robert

Curthose [1051-1134], the Duke of Normandy from 1087-1106. Henry's opinion of the dispute

over kingship is revealed through his narration of the events: "Omnes namque nobiliores

procerum in Willelmum iuniorem non sine periurio bella mouentes, et Robertum fratrem suum in

regnum asciscentes suis quique prouinciis debacati sunt" (VII.1.412).[145] Henry calls this

rebellion a faithless one, as the Normans split over which king to support. The kingdom of the

Normans begins with this feud, causing many causalities until Bishop Wulfstan calls on God's

intervention: "Wlstanus episcopus santcus quendam amicum familiarem summis in

necessitatibus compellauit, Deum uidelicet excelsum, cuius ope coram altari iacens in oratione,

paucis militibus emissis, quinque milia hostium uel occidit uel cepit" (VII.1.414).[146] God's

---

[144]It has already been made very clear how the Lord deservedly took away from the English race their safety and honour, and commanded that they should no longer exist as people. From this point it will be shown how He began to afflict the Normans themselves, His own avengers, with various disasters. (VII.1.413)

[145] For all the higher nobility faithlessly raised wars against William the Younger, and adopting his brother Robert for kingship they all raged furiously in their own districts. (VII.1.413)

[146] The saintly Bishop Wulfstan, in his dire need, called on a certain familiar friend, namely the most high God, by whose help, as he lay in prayer before the altar, having sent out only a few soldiers, he either killed or captured 5,000 of the enemy. (VII.1.415)

intervention to help William the Younger indicates where God's favor lies. The king is restored to his rightful position and Robert is made Duke of Normandy, but his fighting with his brother continues. The reign of William II ends up dividing the Norman kingdom early on, and this civil strife becomes one of the sins of the Normans, much as it was for the Britons in Geoffrey's *HRB*.

In another more interesting example, Book VII narrates the drowning of Henry I's eldest son and heir in the White Ship disaster. This tragedy is explained as part of God's justice: "

> Sed in ipso maris transitu, duo filii regis—Willelmus et Ricardus—et filia regis, et neptis, necnon multi proceres, dapiferi, camerarii, pincerne regis, et Ricardus consul Cestrie, naufragati sunt. Qui omnes, uel fere omnes, sodomitica labe dicebantur, et erant irretiti. Ecce coruscabilis Dei uindicta! Deperierunt etenim et omnes fere sepultura caruerunt. Inprouise igitur mors absorbuit emeritos, cum mare tranquillissimum uentis careret" (VII.32.466).[147]

Because many (but not all) were sinners, sodomites[148] according to Henry, God punishes the Norman king with the loss of his sons and other kin. The Normans are clearly not immune from God's punishments for their sins.

Book VII ends with the death of Henry I, and before delving into the problems of succession that were unfolding during the historian's life, Henry makes the following book an epilogue that muses on the idea of time, the constraints of humanity, and the inevitability of death:

> Cogitate de nobis, qui modo clari uidemur, quia scilicet, quidam miseri, nos reuerentur. Cogitate, inquam, quo deuenerimus. Dicite, precor, quid nobis profuerit, si magni uel

---

[147] But in the same seas-crossing, two of the king's sons, William and Richard, and the king's daughter and his niece, as well as many of the king's nobles, stewards, chamberlains, and butlers, and Earl Richard of Chester, were shipwrecked. All of them, or nearly all, were said to be tainted with sodomy and they were snared and caught. Behold the glittering vengeance of God! And so death suddenly devoured those who had deserved it, although the sea was very calm and there was no wind. (VII.32.467)

[148] Henry's use of the term sodomy is generally meant as homosexuality. Henry may be echoing the narration of Orderic Vitalis' narration of the events in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

clari fuerimus? Nichil prorsus nisi in Deo claruerimus. Si enim nunc in eo claremus, et

uestro tempore clarescemus, cum Domino nostro domini celi et terre milibus milium qui

in celis sunt collaudabiles. Nunc autem qui tanto tempore antequam nascamini de uobis

mentionem iam uestro tempore puluis in hoc opere feci, si contigerit—quod ualde

desiderat anima mea—uestras ut in manus hoc opus meum prodeat, precor ut Dei

clementiam inexcogitabilem pro me miserrimo exoretis. (VIII.4.496)[149]

He reiterates his point from the *DCM* about the fruitlessness of pursuing fame and the

materialism of the world. In a self-reflective moment, Henry comments on his own eternal

judgement and reaches out to future readers for their prayers with his moral lesson. This would

have been the first end to his history before moving into the contemporary period, which

showcases Henry's focus on the future of Norman rule. It is a melancholic, but fitting, epilogue

and eulogy for King Henry, especially as the previous book dealt with the kingdom of the

Normans, seemingly indicating an end to the strength of Norman rule.

When he takes up his historical goals again in Book X, "The Present Time," Henry clearly

has not forgotten the theme of righteous punishment. He begins, oddly enough, with an obituary

of sorts for Henry I, followed by a disturbing portrait of the former ruler's decaying corpse.

Henry's death, the result of eating an excessive amount of lampreys according to the historian,

occurred during his campaign against rebellious barons in southern Normandy.[150] His body was

taken from Lyons-la-Forêt to Rouen where it was eventually embalmed before being taken to

---

[149] Consider us, who at this moment seem to be renowned, because, miserable creatures, we think highly of ourselves. Reflect, I say, on what has become of us. Tell me, I pray, what gain has it been to us to have been great or famous? We had no fame at all, except in God, by the thousands who are in the heavens. Now, however, I, who will already be dust by your time, have made mention of you in this book, so long before you are to be born, so that if— as my soul strongly desires—it shall come about that this book comes into your hands, I beg you, in the incomprehensible mercy of God, to pray for me, poor wretch. (VIII.4.497)

[150] William III, the Count of Pontheiu [c.1093-1172] led a rebellion against Henry when the king refused to cede castles in Normandy to Matilda to solidify her position as his heir. William was supported by Matilda and her husband Geoffrey of Anjou [1113-1151].

England, delaying the burial for days. The length of time between death and burial led to some putrefaction of the corpse:

> Cuius corpus allatum est Rotomagum. Et ibi uiscera eius et cerebrum et oculi consepulta sunt. Reliquum autem corpus cultellis circumquaue dissecatum, et multo sale aspersum coriis taurinis reconditum est, causa fetoris euitandi, qui multus et infinitus iam circumstantes inficiebat. Vnde et ipse qui magno precio conductus securi caput eius diffiderat, ut fetidissimum cerebrum extraheret, quamuis lintheaminibus caput suum obuoluisset, mortuus tamen ea causa precio male gauisus est. (X.2.702-703)[151]

The fixation with Henry's remains indicates some dissatisfaction with the former king or at least some sense of the poisonous evil of this death, which might be Henry's reflection on the civil war that follows Henry I's death. The body exudes a deadly stench, like an aura of decay surrounding Henry and his kingdom. His brain is "stinking," and those who hope to be rewarded by working with this Norman only find death as their reward. It would seem that Henry sees the king's body as the first sign of the decay and corruption of the Normans and the first harbinger of their destruction. There is no evidence that Henry of Huntingdon personally disliked Henry I, but his rhetoric implies a judgement on the king and his people.

The present becomes the locus in which Henry distinguishes himself from other historians, as is evident in his treatment of the death of Henry I. While he continues to subscribe to his organizing principle of plagues and punishments, there are opportunities to abandon his carefully modeled structure: "Except for the interesting idea that the Normans, having served to punish the

---

[151] His body was brought to Rouen, and there his entrails, brain, and eyes were buried together. The remainder of the corpse was cut all over with knives, sprinkled with a great deal of salt, and wrapped in ox hides, to stop the strong, pervasive stench, which was already causing the deaths of those who watched over it. It even killed the man who had been hired for a great fee to cut off the head with an axe and extract the stinking brain, although he had wrapped himself in linen cloths around his head: so he was badly rewarded by his fee. (X.2.703)

English, must, in divine justice, turn on themselves, the contemporary history Henry records here breaks loose from the thematic grid against which the account of the past time is pinned" (Partner, *Serious* 24-25). Although Henry's moralizing of history does provide an organizational structure of this long, but neatly compact work, this thematic concern comprises only a small part of Henry's overall historical aim. When he reaches the present, Henry's ultimate motivations could not be to narrate the downfall of the Normans since he avoids projecting into the future. The religious pattern of stability, sin, and punishment cannot move beyond past events. Partner's final summation of Henry's thematic concern is intriguing but a little limiting in its scope: "[T]he history itself, in its didactic aspect, is not only a tale of human sin and divine punishment, but also an extended illustration of the treacherous volatility of pleasure and of the promises of fame" (*Serious* 33). Henry clearly represents the didactic aspect of his history throughout the countless retellings of past events. I agree with Partner's assertion that there is an element of *contemptus mundi* in Henry's musing of the present condition of Britain, especially when it comes to King Henry. In death the once brave, proud (and apparently deadly) king has been reduced to a pile of rotting flesh, so foul-smelling that not even head coverings can save the life of the man tasked with excising his brain. Henry wishes to show that no man can escape the final judgments of God, and the pursuit of earthly power and pleasure can be an ultimately fruitless endeavor. Yet, the *HA* has more to say about history than moral lessons and biblical allusions, as Partner claims; the amount of effort put into the work over countless years indicates a project dedicated to capturing more than the religious implications of the Norman invasion. What Henry has really captured in his work is an adapting portrait of the shifting cultural identity of England. His emphasis on the present condition, through countless revisions of historical

writings, and the ordering of the island under different cultural regimes indicates a fascination with the ever-changing idea of Englishness.

<u>Kingdoms of Order</u>

The greater goal of Henry's work concerns political order appropriated through the unity of kingship, which is quite heavily influenced by his clerical position, as seen above. But the theme of unity through religious conversion was already well-covered by his predecessor, Bede. So, Henry must distinguish his regnal ordering through his focus on cultural identity and religious morality. In her extensive work with Henry's *HA*, even Greenway cannot ignore that "Henry has a model in which disorder and war give way to rule by a king, and wars between petty kings end in rule by a stronger king over a larger kingdom. The *HA* is the story of the unification of the English monarchy" (lx). Greenway is right that kingship is integral to his system of order, but Henry's ordering relies on a judgment of the religious morality of the rulers as well. Each kingdom rises from the ashes of its predecessor, and the narrative is always the same: the disorder of the island is replaced by an ordered system of governance until that kingdom is overcome by an invading force, as orchestrated by God. Henry emphasizes the importance of unity under one king and one cultural/political identity. These ideas are particularly intriguing when considering the political context in which Henry was writing.

The period of history directly following the Norman Conquest is particularly tricky to examine in light of the shifting political and cultural allegiances. Britain was no longer Saxon or English (or even Briton), nor was it completely Norman (French). As previously stated, Henry ends his chapter on the kingdom of the Normans after the death of Henry I. From this point on, the text focuses on contemporary matters in "The Present Time." The shift is not only from the past to the present, but also from the Norman to the Anglo-Norman. Historians often label the

period as "Anglo-Norman," in the hopes of representing some blend of the two cultures. However, the term would seem rather anachronistic when placed within Henry's context. How did people like Henry identify themselves? Henry identifies both himself and Bishop Alexander as part of the same people despite having different cultural backgrounds. Could identity then be based upon their parentage if Henry included his own mixed ancestry with Alexander's decidedly Norman one under the banner of "our people"? Fitz Nigel's *Dialogus* suggests intermarriage between the English and Normans was fairly commonplace by the twelfth century, therefore Henry's vision of England includes an ethnically mixed idea of English people. Examining Henry's treatment of the Britons, Saxons, and the Normans provides a clearer portrait of the historian's work and his efforts to argue for the new English nationalism.

Saxons

Critical readings of Henry's work have long pointed to his partiality to the Saxons, suggesting that the historian's allegiance lies more with the English (his maternal family) than with the Normans. It is foremost the history of the English, *Anglorum*, with four out of the original seven books focused on English history. However, such emphasis on the English could have more do with his source material, the *ASC*, than any personal loyalties. Henry did make important contributions to the concepts of Anglo-Saxon history. R. W. Southern examined the role of twelfth-century historians, specifically focusing on the monastic historical writers and found that "[o]ut of their local knowledge and their local materials they created the image of a phase of English history which would scarcely have existed without their efforts: substantially they were responsible for bringing Anglo-Saxon history into existence" (256). Indeed, it is Henry who first introduces the concept of the Heptarchy to Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, furthering his goal of ordering the past. In the first book, Henry writes:

Quando autem Saxones hanc terram sibi subiugauerunt, reges septem statuerunt,

regnisque nomina pro libitu inposuerunt. Primum regnum uocatum est Cent. Secundum

Sudseaxe, in quo sita est Ciceastre. Tercium Westseaxe, cuius caput erat Wiltonia, que

nunc data est sanctimonialibus. In quo sunt urbes Winceastria, Salesberia et plures alie.

Quartum regnum Eastseaxe, quod non diu durauit, sed ceteris regnis subiugatum est.

Quintum Eastangle in quo sunt prouincie que uocantur Nordfolc et Sudfolc. Sextum

Merce, in quo est Lincolia, Leiceastria, et alie complures. Septimum Nordhumbre, in quo

est Eboracum. (I.4.16)[152]

Although the Heptarchy became the standard organizing principle for thinking about Saxon

kingship, it is too problematic as a model and has been since disregarded by most historical

scholars. David Dumville notes that the model oversimplifies the reality of the tribal culture

through its strict organization of the different kingdoms (126). Nonetheless, Henry's insistence

on bringing order to the disorder of the past is especially evident with the Saxons. As James

Campbell indicates, "Its author is often anxious to sort out, reorder, clarify, to make sure that the

reader knows where he has got to and where he is going" (135). There is a sense that by bringing

order to the past, taking the chronological events endlessly listed in sources like the *ASC*, Henry

can make sense of the past and tailor it to fit a specific narrative of ethnic stability under the

differing cultural regimes. Much like his alterations and embellishments to the annals he uses to

construct the history, Henry tries to make sense of the past to explain the present condition, a

culturally blended landscape. The treatment of the Saxons in Henry's *HA* indicates his

---

[152] Now when the Saxons subjected the land to themselves, they established seven kings, and imposed names of their own choice on the kingdoms. The first kingdom was called Kent. The second Sussex, in which Chichester is situated. The third Wessex, of which the capital was Wilton, now given over to nuns. In this kingdom are the cities Winchester, Salisbury and several others. The fourth kingdom was Essex, which did not long survive, but was subjected to other kingdoms. The fifth was East Anglia, in which are the counties called Norfolk and Suffolk. The sixth was Mercia, in which are Lincoln, Leicester and some others. The seventh was Northumbria, in which is York. (I.4.17)

preoccupation with ordering and organizing is a way to make sense of the past and narrativize it; it does not necessarily indicate a nostalgia for the past or a partiality to the English.

Henry's use of the Heptarchy is not the only interesting aspect to his treatment of the Anglo-Saxon past. As indicated, Henry used the *ASC* as the primary source for his books "Kingdom of the English" and "The Danish Wars." In Book V, Henry produces his own Latin translation of the alliterative verse Old English poem *Brunanburh*. In recounting the battle of Brunanburh between King Æthelstan and Olaf the Viking, Henry introduces the poem of the same name: "De cuius prelii magnitudine Anglici scriptores quasi carminis modo proloquentes, et extraneis tam uerbis quam figuris usi translatione fida donandi sunt. Vt pene de uerbo in uerbum eorum intrepretantes eloquium ex grauitate uerborum grauitatem actuum et animorum getis illius condiscamus" (V.18.310).[153] Henry uses the "strange" words of the English to understand their culture, their thoughts, deeds, and values. In translating the work, he hopes to provide the reader with an understanding of this "ancient" culture and blend them into the current model of English identity. What follows is a selection from Henry's translation of the text, which he hopes to render "word for word." In the OE version, the entry for 937 contains the following opening to the poem:

> Her æþelstan cyning, eorla dryhten,
>
> beorna beahgifa, and his broþor eac,
>
> Eadmund æþeling, ealdorlangne tir
>
> geslogon æt sæcce sweorda ecgum

---

[153]The English writers describe the magnitude of this battle in a kind of song, using strange words and figures of speech, which must be given a faithful translation, rendering their eloquence almost word for word, so that from the solemnity of the words we may learn of the solemnity of the deeds and thoughts of that people. (V.18.311)

        ymbe Brunanburh.[154] (Irvine 53)

Henry's version is presented in prose fashion, but he attempts to capture some of the poetic

qualities of the *ASC*'s entry. He begins: "Rex Adelstan, decus ducum, nobilibus torquium dator,

et frater eius Edmundus, longa stirpis serie splendentes, precusserunt in bello acie gladii apud

Brunebirih" (V.19.310).[155] Æthelstan (or Adelstan in Greenway's Latin edition) is described in

glowing OE terms with a proud lineage. His OE "warriors" now become "nobles," a more

elevated position reflecting the twelfth-century court. Clearly, Henry tries to reproduce poetic

compounds common to OE poetry, such as labelling the king as *torquium dator*, and inverting

the natural word order to include the descriptor *decus ducum* before arriving at the verb

precusserunt to make his prose sound more like poetry. In another example, later on in the

account, Henry writes, "Gens uero Westsexe tota simul die, prius electi, post indefessi, inuise

gentis globos strauerunt, uiri elegantes hastas cedebant, uiri Mercenses acuta iacula mittebant

duro mansu ludo" (V.18.312).[156] Adjectives are placed beofore the nouns like *prius electi* to

describe the Wessex people. The historian's usual direct prose is slightly altered to contend with

the flowery descriptions of the poem.

    Frederick Tupper is particularly harsh on the historian's translation of the poem,

characterizing Henry's translation as awkward and inaccurate, dismissing the endeavor as failure

(93). I disagree with this assertion because, while Henry's efforts to both accurately and

stylistically re-create the OE poem are some what lacking, his translation does not wish to re-

create the poem in Latin but to embody the essence of Saxon culture. Modern criticism has been

---

[154] Here King Æthelstan, leader of warriors, / ring-giver of men, and also his brother, / the ætheling Edmund, struck life-long glory /in battle slew with sword's edge / in strife round Brunanburh...

[155] King Æthelstan, flower of commanders, ring-giver to nobles, and Edmund his brother, the splendid products of a long unbroken lineage, struck with the sword's edge in battle at Brunanburh. (V.18.311)

[156] But all that day, the people of Wessex, first chosen, then, unwearied, laid low the masses of the enemy race. Fine warriors destroyed the spears, Mercian warriors threw sharp darts in the harsh sport of warfare. (V.18.313)

a bit kinder to Henry, taking into consideration that Henry was writing and translating during a time of linguistic and cultural shift. A.C. Rigg's "Henry of Huntingdon's Metrical Experiments" notes that Henry, as the historian himself states, was attempting to recreate the work as best he could "within the limits of a close verbal rendering, to reproduce the spirit of the poem by means of imitation of native English verse" (66). Indeed, the opening lines display Henry's attempt to re-create the language with its poetic compounds like *torquium dator* to describe the generosity and good qualities of King Æthelstan. Kenneth Tiller makes this same point when he expands upon Rigg's defense of Henry by fully examining the cultural climate in which the translation is produced:

> The difficulties Henry encountered in translating *Brunanburh*, therefore, might reflect the degree of change the language had undergone between the tenth and the twelfth centuries, change perhaps exacerbated by nearly sixty years of Norman dominance. Nonetheless, Henry employs identifiable Old English poetic tropes in his attempt at literal translation, with the occasional and expected inaccuracy. ("Anglo-Norman" 175)

Tiller's reading is much more in tune with the aims of the historian in using this OE poem. A literal translation of poetry can create some awkwardness in the language and make the attempt seem an unfaithful reproduction.

In addition to this defense of the "occasional and expected inaccuracy" of the translation, Tiller delves deeper into Henry's motivations for including a full translation of the Old English poem at all in his larger historical work, something unusual for an Anglo-Norman historian. In carefully examining Henry's translation, Tiller believes the poem exists as a form of "defensive nostalgia" for the Saxons and a desire to revive the traditions of Old English poetry: "his inclusion of a *verbatim* translation of *Brunanburh*...allows him to foreground his English

heritage and his knowledge of the language: the heroism of English leaders and what Henry perceives as the dignity of the poet and his language" (190). The Saxons are inscribed into the contemporary Anglo-Norman landscape with this inclusion of Saxon culture, in the form of poetry, into the *HA*. Tiller is right that there is something innovative about Henry's approach to Anglo-Saxon history, and the use of his word-for-word translation indicates an effort to salvage the remains of an important poetic tradition. It allows the Saxon culture an equal place in the cultural history of England despite their defeat at the hands of the Normans. His use of the poem provides a way to blend this part of the past into the cultural environment of the present.

Although his extensive use of Anglo-Saxon history and literature would suggest some affinity or privileging of the English over the Normans, Henry is still composing his history for a specific audience, his patron. Speaking specifically about Henry's *HA*, Campbell notes, "Henry could have been partly English (though there is no direct evidence for this) but the patron for whom he wrote was Alexander bishop of Lincoln, and among the emotions which affected the prelate's hard head and not always soft heart, it is unlikely that nostalgia for the Anglo-Saxons worked strongly" (133). Campbell provides a helpful reminder that despite Henry's cultural inclinations, he was writing for a specific patron. Henry's position and wealth perhaps excluded him from some of the constraints of other secular clergymen writing for a patron, but he would still be bound to please Alexander with his work. That would mean making the Normans just as significant a contributor to the cultural landscape as the Saxons. Henry's motivations as a secular clergyman would not have been different from other Anglo-Norman historians, appealing to a specific patron while distinguishing his own historical voice as Geoffrey does.

Henry may not have been exclusively championing the case for Anglo-Saxon supremacy with his overt focus on this section of history, but that does not mean he was not influenced by

the shifting political and cultural structure to say something about the cyclical nature of new regimes. Southern discusses post-Conquest monastic historians' preoccupation with the Norman invasion and their retellings of British and Saxon past events and finds the increased interest in historical writing "drew its inspiration and gained its momentum from the necessities of corporate survival...the survival of an ancient monastic culture, a religious and intellectual tradition, and a position in the world" (249). The aim of these historians was to resist the destruction of their values and cultural institutions through their historical narratives. History writing became a means of defense against a system of governance that threatened to change the monastic way of life. Campbell, building on Southern's claims, writes, "For monastic historians the threats they had to meet came not only from Norman intruders, but also, and perhaps to a greater extent, from bishops and their agents, from canons, secular clergy, and new orders" (133). Henry himself may not be part of the monastic tradition as a secular canon, but, like many Anglo-Norman historians, he contended with a changing landscape by preserving the ancient and recent past, as a means of preserving clerical traditions.

Normans

Henry's work cannot be said to have been written in defense of or even nostalgically about the Saxons, and he does at times criticize their regime. He is, however, also critical of the Normans; however, these criticisms are directed at specific Normans and not the *gens Normannorum*. I would argue that he meant to create a commentary of the ruling class and their weakness for corruption. In moralizing history, Henry initially points to the possible demise of the Normans in the future (at God's hands), but that is not the only apocalyptic piece of writing about the Normans. As discussed in earlier chapters, King Stephen's tumultuous reign created a lot of social and political anxiety for the recently established Norman monarchy. Avoiding

choosing a side when the civil war was still unresolved, Henry keeps himself from coming out

on the wrong side of history, but he does color his version of the events in a negative manner,

highlighting the treachery of Stephen and his followers as shown below. He never explicitly

shows his support for Matilda, but he definitely rejects Stephen as a ruler because of his actions

against clerical institutions and figures like his own patron Alexander. His authorial voice does

more than just narrate the events of this civil dispute. He tends to call the actions of usurpers,

rebels, and traitors as working against the will of God.

The later versions of the *HA* begin the process of narrating this civil dispute between Matilda

and Stephen. Henry first added Book X in 1138, extending the history from its previous stopping

point of 1129 in version 2. The conflict between Stephen and Matilda was well under way when

Henry narrates the problems of succession: "Venit enim sine mora Stephanus, Tedbaldi

Blesensis consulis frater iunior eo, uir magne strenuitatis et audacie, et quamuis iurasset

sacramentum fidelitas Anglici regni filie regis Henrici, fretus tamen uigore et impudentia, regni

diadema Deum temptans inuasit" (X.1.700).[157] Stephen is described as courageous and bold, but

Henry clearly indicates that he is forswearing himself and going against God's wishes by

usurping Matilda. Henry is clearly questioning Stephen's legitimacy, but he couches it in

religious terms, ascribing the act as a challenge to God's authority. More so, he points an

accusatory finger at those who switched their allegiance and pledged themselves to Stephen:

William, the archbishop of Canterbury, and Roger, the bishop of Salisbury. These are powerful

clerical figures, and Henry's criticism of their actions could have endangered his position as

archdeacon of Huntingdon. These two specific men suffer God's punishment according to

---

[157] For without delay came Stephen, the younger brother of Count Theobald of Blois, a man of great valour and boldness, and trusting to his vigour and effrontery, although he had sworn the English realm's oath of fealty to the daughter of King Henry, he challenged God by seizing the crown of the kingdom. (X.1.701)

Henry, with Roger later being tormented and punished by the very man he supported, King

Stephen. Henry goes on to claim, "Omnes qui sacramentum iuraruerant, tam presules, quam

consules et principes, assensum Stephano prebuerunt et hominium fecerunt. Hoc uero signum

malum fuit quod tam repente omnis Anglia, sine mora, sine labore, quasi 'in ictu oculi', ei

subiecta est" (X.1.700-702).[158] Henry's criticism of these powerful figures may be couched in

terms of divine judgment, but he is clearly disapproving of their actions. Thus, Henry avoids

directly declaring Matilda's legitimacy.

Henry's treatment of the Normans, especially following the death of Henry I, has been

interpreted as a means of symbolic resistance to the ruling elite. Even though Henry of

Huntingdon was not a member of the lower classes, he did experience personal losses at the

expense of the corruption of the king and his followers, as will be explored below. Both the

Conquest and the civil war indicate how fragile the relationship between the people and their

rulers was. A mostly Saxon culture was subjugated by the Normans, ruled by an invading force.

Then the relative stability of this new culturally blended society is disrupted yet again by another

issue of succession that further divides the people. Historians like Henry used their writing to not

only narrate these disruptions but also resist the loss of their customs and traditions by shifting

political allegiances. Gillingham describes a generation of Anglo-Norman historians using their

writings as way of coping with the Norman Conquest: "The devastating experience of 1066 had

meant that the correspondence between a kingdom and a people, a community of tradition,

custom, law and descent...no longer applied in England. During the composition of the first two

versions of his *History* (both finished soon after October 1131), Henry clearly felt that this

---

[158] In short all those who had sworn the oath—whether prelates, earls, or magnates——gave their approval to Stephen and paid homage to him. It was a bad sign that all England was subjected to him so speedily, without hindrance or difficulty, as 'in the twinkling of an eye.' (X.1.701-703)

disjunction was still a fact of life" ("Henry" 128). This "disjunction" was the division between English subjects and Norman rulers and, of course, the problem of the rightful heir to Henry I. Earlier versions of the *HA* more prominently indicate the problematic divide between the people, the cultural customs, and the customs of the new kingdom, and the later revisions show this same anxiety during the civil war.

   Some of the apprehension about Stephen's faithfulness to his word and to the traditions of succession are narrated from the start of Book X, but Henry especially highlights Stephen's dishonesty with members of the clergy. Right after the death and burial of Henry I, he writes that Stephen visits Oxford to confirm three covenants with the people and the Holy Church made on his coronation day, 22 December 1135, which included removing himself from the governance of the churches and renouncing ownership of clerical or layman woodlands.[159] Once Henry has listed these three covenants, he remarks simply: "Hec principaliter Deo uouit, et alia, sed nichil horum tenuit" (X.3.704).[160] Clearly, Henry cannot trust this ruler to uphold his vows to God, so he cannot trust his vows to the people either. Henry is highly concerned with the theme of treachery in the Norman kingdom following King Stephen's usurpation of the crown: "Iam ergo cepit rabies predicta Normannorum periuiro et prodicione pullulare" (X.4.706).[161] His discussion of Norman sovereignty is much harsher and more critical during Stephen's reign, which indicates more of a displeasure with this ruler than with all Norman rulers. Henry may have had a privileged position in Norman society, but that would not quell the anxieties associated with such political and cultural upheaval taking place seventy years after the Conquest, especially within the church.

---

[159] Henry's is the only historical source for this visit and these "confirmed" coronation promises.
[160] These were his chief vows to God, and there were others, but he did not keep any of them. (X.3.705)
[161]So already the madness of the Normans, referred to above, was beginning to spread, in faithlessness and treachery. (X.4.707)

Although Henry expresses negative sentiments about the Norman kingdom, his

recriminations indicate that he directs his animosity toward specific Normans instead of the

entire ethnic group. Gillingham notes that Henry's theme of Norman perjury was directed mostly

at Waleran [1104-1166], count of Meulan, and Stephen for very specific contextual reasons

("Henry" 130). Henry bore witness to the dangers of the new Norman king and his allies when

his own patron was arrested for treason. In 1139, Waleran alleged that three bishops—Roger of

Salisbury; Alexander of Lincoln, Henry's patron; and Nigel of Ely [c.1100-1169]— "were

contemplating treason, and urged [Stephen] to take steps to curb them before it was too late"

(Appleby 65). Bishop Roger did have enough fortune and power to build castles and fortify

cities like Salisbury, Malmesbury, and Sherborne during the civil war. His immense wealth,

lands, and influence made Stephen wary that the bishop felt himself somehow equal to the king.

Alexander also "on a scale hardly less magnificent, had built castles at Sleaford and Newark"

apparently for the protection of the diocese (Appleby 65). Already highly wary of possible

traitors or secret supporters of Matilda during this tense time of political turmoil, Stephen

eventually arrested all three bishops in June of 1139. The event is recounted in the *HA* after

Stephen leaves his siege of Ludlow for Oxford in 1138: "Vbi res infamia notabilis et ab omni

consuetudine remota comparuit. Rex namque Rogerum episcopum Salesbiriensem et

Alexandrum Lincoliensem ipsius nepotem cum pacifice suscepisset, uiolenter in curia sua cepit,

nichil iusticie recusantes et iudicii equitatem deuotissime poscentes" (X.10.718-720).[162]

Unfortunately, despite their request for fair treatment, Alexander is imprisoned and Roger is

tortured: "Angarians eum igitur ieiunii tormento et filii eius, qui cancellarius fuerat regius,

---

[162] There an extraordinarily scandalous and quite unprecedented affair took place. For when the king had peacefully received Roger, bishop of Salisbury, and Alexander of Lincoln, [Roger's] nephew, he violently arrested them in his court, though they—far from refusing to stand trial—earnestly begged a fair hearing. (X.10.719-721)

laqueo collum circumnectens, ut suspenderetur, tali modo castellum sibi extorsit, male recordans bonorum que in introitu regni sui, pre omnibus aliis, ei congesserat" (X.10.720).[163] As his patron and close associate Alexander was among those tortured, Henry would have made more personally invested in the arrest and treatment of these individuals, as well as making him a possible target for King Stephen or Waleran. Henry displays his disdain for the treatment of both bishops through the narration of their oppression through torture; he specifically mentions Stephen's assault against the Church and its officials despite their "good service" to the King and the country. Henry had already mentioned Stephen's broken vows to remain more or less removed from Church governance, and this instance shows how boldly Stephen disregards the authority of the Church and God.

The imprisonment of Alexander and the torture of Roger indicate that Henry's hostility towards the Normans is a reflection of his contempt for Waleran and Stephen specifically. The treatment of the bishops "caused a tremendous uproar amongst the clergy" because he "had indeed laid his violent hands on the Lord's anointed" (Appleby 68). Stephen had his own issues with the clergy in the latter part of his reign when he confronted a growing reform movement that wished to separate the church's power from royal influence. The rising Cistercian order, led by Bernard of Clairvaux [1090-1153], advocated for a more autonomous ecumenical system, which led to a dispute when Stephen attempted to replace the deceased Archbishop Thurstan of York [c.1070-1140] with one of his own relatives (Davis 99-100). Both Waleran and Stephen began to represent repressive forces that sought to put personal agendas over the traditions of the Church.

---

[163] Oppressing him by torturing him with starvation and putting a rope around the neck of his son, who had been the royal chancellor, as if to hang him, he wrested the castle away from him in this way, unmindful of the good service which he, before all others, had rendered him on his entry into his kingdom. (X.10.721)

Since the historical writers of the period were both secular and monastic clerics, they could respond more vocally with negativity towards Stephen's actions. Their leaders were ecclesiastical figures who, supposedly, were separate from the authority of rulers like Stephen. Although Henry is clearly critical of King Stephen, other writers like Henry in this period placed most of the blame for Stephen's behavior towards the Episcopal leaders on Waleran:

> The author of the *Gesta Stephani* says the brawl was started by the king's knights, 'at the instigation of the crafty count of Meulan and some others.' Orderic Vitalis, in support of this, says that the brothers Waleran and Robert and Alan of Brittany formed a plot against the bishops' men and the king's knights attacked the bishops' men, killed some, captured others, put the rest to flight, and then returned to the king, who, it is implied, had sent them on their mission in the first place. (Appleby 66)

The suspicious cast on Waleran highlights the real conflict at play: a battle between ecumenical and secular power. Waleran's attempt to wrest control away from powerful clergy like Roger and Alexander indicates he wanted to assert the aristocracy's control over the Church. As Crouch remarks, by the 1120s the Norman nobility was mostly led by Waleran, and his family, the Beaumonts, who began acquiring a lot of influence during King Stephen's reign (14). In 1139, Philip de Harcourt [d.1142], a strong supporter of Waleran, replaced Roger of Salisbury's son as chancellor of Lincoln, a clear indication of shifting court factions (Gillingham, "Henry" 132). Philip was later unsuccessfully nominated to replace Roger as Bishop of Salisbury in 1141, following Roger's imprisonment and torture. Henry witnessed the preferential treatment of the Beaumont family and their partisans, and its negative impact on his own patron. In addition, the Beaumonts exercised a new political program that gave control over shires to earls instead of sheriffs (Davis 30-31). Nobility was no being promoted and valued over the former system that

placed bureaucrats and public servants in control. As Gillingham points out, Waleran's actions

led to a very specific conception of the Norman elite: "Perhaps then Waleran and his friends…as

they pushed through their programme of putting English local government into the hands of

aristocrats rather than 'bureaucrats', came to be seen—and not only by Henry of Huntingdon—as

the Norman faction, an arrogant and snobbish group, conscious of their Frenchness and of their

noble chivalry" ("Henry" 133). These, according to Henry, are the "bad" Normans, and their

conscious nobility and Frenchness, the certainty of their significance, are unattractive traits to the

clergy because these Normans wish to subordinate them.

The anxieties of this political context no doubt drove Henry to respond to the shifting

allegiances and political anarchy through the revisions of his *HA*. His revisions involved more

than merely updating the work, and some versions indicate alterations to his interpretation of the

history of England in what he chooses to highlight and what he omits. For example, in the final

version, what Greenway labels version 6 from ca.1154, Henry makes a clear alteration to the

characterization of a political figure. At the start of Book X, Greenway's edition of the *HA*

provides side-by-side comparisons of different versions of the opening to Henry's "The Present

Time." Both texts begin with Henry's claim: "Defuncto igitur Henrico rege magno, libera ut in

mortuo solent iuidicia populi depromenbatur" (X.1.698).[164] The first narration of those "frank

opinions" found in versions 3, 4, and 5 (1138, 1146, and 1149, respectively) recounts them as

such: "Alli autem diuerso studio tribus illum uiciss inficiebant. Cupiditate nimia, qua—ut omnes

parentes sui—pauperes opulentus tributis et exactionibus inhians, delatoriis hamis intercipiebat.

Crudelitate etiam, qua consulem de Moretoil cognatum suum in captione positum

exoculauit...Luxuria quoque, quia mulierum dicioni regis more Salomonis continue subiacebat"

---

[164] As usually happens when a man dies, the frank opinions of the people came out after the death of Henry, the great King. (X.1.699)

(X.I.698-700).[165] In comparison, the sixth version of these events, written around 1154, appears

to have softened towards Henry I quite a bit: "Alli autem diuerso studio, quibus erat mens humili

lesisse ueneno, summa nimia cupiditate repletum asserebant, qua populum tributis et

exactionibus inhians, delatoriis hamis intercipiebat...Sic diuersi diuersa sentiebant" (X.1.698-

700).[166] Any mention of Henry's supposed cruelty and lechery are completely removed from this

version. In addition, Henry softens the allegation of "excessive greed" by attributing it to

"others...of another school of thought." Greenway has one explanation for this alteration: "The

last chapters of the history…are so concerned with the succession to the kingdom of England,

seeing Henry of Anjou as the true heir, that it seems likely that they were written after the treaty

of Westminster in December 1153, perhaps even after Henry II's accession a year later" (lxxvi –

lxxvii). I agree with Greenway that the signing of the treaty of Westminster[167] must have caused

the historian to revise his portrait of the new heir's grandfather. This event gave some hope that

the mistakes of Stephen's kingship could be overcome. Had the line of succession moved away

from Henry I, Henry might have left in his scathing eulogy for the deceased king. As explored

above, Henry's writing displays an animosity toward the issues of succession that started with

Henry's death, and he definitely displays his disgust with Stephen's and Waleran's deceitfulness.

However, with this signal of the end of Stephen's reign and Waleran's influence,[168] Henry made

---

[165] Others, however, of another school of thought, blackened him for three vices. Excessive greed, in that, like all his kin, although rich, he yearned for tribute and taxes and trapped the poor with snares laid by informers. Then cruelty, in that he put out the eyes of his kinsman, the count of Mortain, while he was his captive...And debauchery, since he was at all times subject to the power of women, after the manner of King Solomon. (X.I.699-701)

[166] Others, however, of another school of thought, whose intention was to injure him with base venom, maintained that he was filled with enormously excessive greed, in that he yearned for tribute and taxes and trapped the people with snares laid by informers...Thus different people expressed different views. (X.I.699-701)

[167] Treaty of Westminster (or Winchester) occurred when Henry II [1133-1189], Matilda's son, met with King Stephen on November 6, 1153. Stephen and Henry made a verbal agreement about Henry's succession to the throne, which was followed by a written document, shared at Christmas.

[168] In 1153, Waleran's nephew Robert de Montfort [c.1098-1170] held his uncle captive while the newly appointed heir, Duke Henry, seized his lands and castles.

the politic decision to excise some of the less flattering comments on Henry I. In this way, present events altered the way Henry chose to remember the past and ultimately how the future will unfold, effectively changing his earlier assertion that the past dictates the future. The revision effectively absolves Henry of any slanderous comments against the future king's grandfather. However, the earlier versions show some of Henry's dissatisfaction with Henry I, and his later comments on King Stephen indicate an apprehensiveness toward contemporary Norman rulers.

Clearly, Henry still sees problems with the Norman aristocracy and with the kingdom of the Normans, as evidenced by his treatment of the death of Henry I and King Stephen's reign. In the earlier versions of the *HA*, Henry displays his disdain for Norman rulers like Henry I and King Stephen, calling for God's punishment for their wickedness. The events of the period indicate that he was not pleased with the behavior of some Norman aristocrats and the treacherous actions of Waleran. However, in the later versions of the *HA*, Henry's perceptions of the Normans have slightly altered and no longer require the kind of editorial treatment found before 1150, specifically in the passage concerning the death of Henry I. What has changed for Henry? When first composing this history around 1123, Henry lived in a much different political and cultural climate than in 1154, when the final version was written. As Gillingham earlier showed, historians in the early part of the twelfth century were still recovering from the changes to customs and traditions following the Norman Conquest and used history writing to overcome the tensions of such disruptions. But thirty years later, Henry saw the disjunction between the English and the Norman slowly dissolve. Despite approaching this history as a means of compiling, ordering, and moralizing the past, Henry's ultimate goal appears to be mediating the conflict between the past, where the Normans are invaders and the present when they are

assimilated into the culture, which ultimately created a more ethnically blended vision of England's identity.

Conclusion – Nationalism

Henry's extensive history may not have started out as a narrative of nationalism, but the continual process of revision over thirty years recast the work as a post-colonial vision of England's national identity. The passages related specifically to King Henry's death are important to reading the text in this light, but so too is a seemingly innocuous reference to the people of England during the Battle of Standard on 22 August 1138.[169] Henry writes about the people standing their ground against the Scots, using the phrase "gens Normannorum et Anglorum" (X.8.716). The importance of this reference indicates a shift between the English and the Normans into a more Anglo-Norman people. Gillingham argues, "[I]n the continuation and revision of the *History* (Greenway's third version) which Henry wrote in the early 1140s there is no longer any sign of the distinction between Norman rulers and English subjects. Indeed, it was at this stage of his writing and in his account of the victory of the northern barons over the Scots at the Battle of the Standard that Henry refers to the *gens Normannorum et Anglorum in una cie*" ("Henry" 129). In this moment, both the English and the Normans are joined "in a single *gens*" (Gillingham, "Henry" 129). In his *Gerald of Wales*, Robert Barlett claims, "[N]ationality is not matter of objective classification at all. It is a matter of identification...a social process" (10). It becomes essential to examine how Henry identifies the people. This is the first and only use of the phrase *gens Normannnorum et Anglorum* in Henry's or any other twelfth-century historian's work. The moment is significant as an indication of the shift away from the "trauma" of the

---

[169] The Battle of Standard took place in Cowton Moor in Yorkshire, where English forces repelled a Scottish army led by David I of Scotland [c.1083-1153]. David I, brother-in-law of Henry I of England, began a campaign invading and raiding parts of England starting in 1138. His defeat in this battle led to the end of his campaign against England.

Conquest and toward a civilized and unified Anglo-Norman England. Henry's history, spanning

over a much longer period of history than Geoffrey's or Gaimar's, begins to narrate the moment

when the post-Conquest turmoil starts to dissipate.

In fact, R.H.C. Davies has gone so far as to question the idea of the Normans' existence as a

distinct racial group in his book *The Normans and their Myth*. According the Davies, the

Normans "were the first Scandinavian Northmen and then transformed themselves by a

'statesmanlike policy' first into Norman-French and subsequently into Anglo-Norman, Sicilian-

Norman and the rest" (14). He contends that they are not a racially distinct group, but they did

regard themselves as a cultural entity. Davies minimizes the importance of language and culture

to the Norman identity though these factors, as I see it, are more important to the formation of

both ethnic and racial identity. In fact, Davies reduces the entirety of Norman identity to

location: "The history of the Normans was shown to be deeply rooted in the soil of

Normandy...the one thing which made man Norman was his attachment to Normandy" (57).

Davies contention would then suggest that Norman culture would no longer exist as a distinct

entity once the population moved to England. The Normans definitely put their mark on the

English landscape through architecture, language, and cultural customs, and they changed the

political and social landscape through the transfer of lands and properties from Anglo-Saxon

noblemen to the Norman elite. And yet, even this process served to extinguish the real

differences between the Normans and the Saxons, as they mostly ended up being subsumed by

English traditions. Davies contends:

> The Normans had projected themselves into the past and identified themselves with the
>
> pre-Norman history of England. Both imaginatively and materially that history was very
>
> much richer than the pre-Norman history of Normandy and it already had a copious

literature. The Normans adopted it as the history of the land, and made the land their own

by covering it with their places and castles, their cathedrals and abbeys.... They belonged

to England as much as England belonged to them. (131)

In their efforts to claim England as Norman, the Normans were claimed as English. However, I

would not argue as Davies does that the Normans did not retain a distinct cultural and racial

identity from the English before and after the Conquest. Over time, the process of history writing

merely mediated the transformation between the Saxon England to Anglo-Norman England to

just plain England. The language and customs of the Normans remain a part of the new England

though no longer as distinct from the Saxon ones. Writers like Henry of Huntingdon narrated the

slow process of merging the Normans into the cultural representation of English history and

nationalism.

The blending of the cultures of Norman and English leads Henry's history to an optimistic

conclusion. When Henry II takes the throne, the historian celebrates with lines in hexameter:

Hec Henrice creas miracula, primus in orbe.

Rex nondum, presens nondum, tamen efficis illud.

Quod rex non potuit presens, dignissime sceptris.

Quam bene sceptra gerens, dum trans maris alta moraris,

Per te, sed sine te, fruitur tamen Anglia pace. (X.40.776)[170]

The tone of his final words is hopeful, indicating a return to peace that could not be achieved

under the previous king's rule. Despite being delayed by the high seas, Henry II achieves peace

in England while not even present. Henry even mentions that a new book must be written,

---

[170] You, Henry, foremost on earth, work this miracle. Not yet king, not yet present, you achieve what the king could not when he was present, you who are most worthy to wield the scepter. How well will you bear the scepter, who already hold the reins of the kingdom! Not yet do you bear the scepter, delayed beyond the high seas, but through you, though still without you, England enjoys peace. (X.40.777)

devoted to the new king, though he does not live to complete that addition. He ends by rejoicing in the new king, seeing a better future for a country no longer divided into English and Normans, but blended together to form a new British identity—Anglo-Norman.

Henry sees history as a barometer of rationality and wisdom. As indicated above, Henry regards the knowledge of the past as the distinguishing factor between brutes and wise men. An awareness of the past, origins, events, and progression of a people (their moral, social, and political evolution), distinguishes the kingdom of the Normans from the savagery of their ancestry. It is this concept of history that influences his crafting of the narrative of Anglo-Norman England. On top of his efforts to inform his audience and keep them from falling into the trap of brutishness, Henry clearly wants to entertain his audience with his rhetorical skills as a writer. Yet, as Campbell writes, "These historians did not, however, seek principally to entertain. They sought to inform, and not least by clarity in exposition. The creation of an ordered framework is of the essence of their work and among the weightiest of their contributions." (Campbell 134). Twelfth-century historians were particularly concerned with relating the past to the present generation for didactic reasons. Histories like Henry of Huntingdon's narrative of the formation of England's national identity—a process which was unfolding before his eyes—was crucial to the future establishments of a unified kingdom blessed by a Christian God. Henry's earlier attempts to moralize history and organize the past into ordered units of time ultimately led him to find unity in the post-Conquest chaos. Even following the tumultuous reign of King Stephen and the civil war with Matilda, Henry could find hope for the hybrid culture of Anglo-Normans under their new king, Henry II.

Chapter 4 – Geffrei Gaimar's Blending of History, Romance, and Cultural Identity

In the closing of his *Estoire des Engleis* (*Estoire*) Geffrei Gaimar claims, "N'est pas [cist livre] fable ne sunge, / ainz est de veire estoire estrait / des ancïens reis e d'els fait / qui guvernöent Engleterre, / alcuns em pes, alcuns en guere. / Issi cuvint: ne pot el estre" (Appendix 16-21).[171] However, close examination of this historical work reveals Gaimar's creative expansions of the chronologies of the Anglo-Saxon period. In exploring the repetitive pattern of conquest and colonization that occupies the historiographic tradition of Anglo-Norman England, Gaimar composes a history that explores the events of the past through a romantic[172] lens. As such, accuracy in representation is not always particularly important to Gaimar. His narrative of English history may be more similar to Geoffrey of Monmouth's than Henry of Huntingdon's, as Gaimar places the concerns and entertainment of his patrons over the precision of historical fact. As Ian Short notes, "Accuracy and reliability in that sense were not Gaimar's aims, and such statements tell us more about modern critical expectations than about medieval intentionality" (xiv). Gaimar was writing for a very specific medieval audience, as discussed below, and their expectations helped craft his history of the blending of the Norman and English cultures.

As "the oldest surviving work of historiography in the French vernacular," the *Estoire* provides an invaluable perspective on the Norman fascination with English history, and the inclination to inscribe the history of the Normans into the larger historical narrative of England (Short ix). Unfortunately, the first part of the *Estoire* has been lost, but judging from clues provided at the opening of the first extant section, Gaimar began his history with an exploration of the Trojan roots of the Britons, similar to the story given by Geoffrey of Monmouth. The rest

---

[171]This book is not fiction or fantasy, but is taken from an authentic historical source concerning the kings of the past, and tells of those who ruled over England, some peacefully, others by waging war. This is how it has to be: it cannot possibly be otherwise.

[172] See the introduction for a definiton of the romance or the romantic tradition.

of the work, which is extant, starting with the story of Havelok the Dane, is a verse translation

and interpretation of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC*). As with the other historical texts in this

dissertation, I claim that Gaimar's *Estoire* offers a post-colonial perspective on the Norman

Conquest, which blends together Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon historiographic traditions. It

draws on not only the earlier tradition of the *ASC* but also the post-Norman romantic tradition of

Geoffrey's *HRB*. The Normans had begun to romanticize Geoffrey's vision of British history,

and Gaimar takes that vision one step closer to the high romance traditions of the thirteenth

century. According to Antonia Gransden, "It presents Anglo-Saxon history seen through the eyes

of romance" (210). The romance genre's focus on the deeds of specific chivalric/heroic figures

and adventure is reflected in Gaimar's construction of a narrative history from the chronological

events of the *ASC*.

Gaimar's history distinguishes itself from the other historical works of the period by re-

imagining the Anglo-Saxon history of England in the language and literary tradition of the

Normans.His use of the French vernacular provides an opportunity to analyze the author's

linguistic context, surrounded by Norman-speaking laity, Latin texts, and Old English histories.

In this chapter, I examine the contemporary historical events that influenced the thematic

elements of Gaimar's history and his composition, as well as how the post-colonial condition of

Anglo-Norman England may have been part of the exigence for his romantic history. Gaimar is

as interested in Anglo-Saxon history as Henry of Huntingdon was, but he also takes pains to

elevate the somewhat "barbaric" figures of the past to the level of romantic heroes. Yet unlike

Henry, Gaimar avoids ecclesiastical matters wherever possible. Like Laȝamon, Gaimar's secular

concerns and use of the vernacular produce a historical text that is accessible to a wider audience

and also highlights the significance of all the cultural backgrounds of England, privileging none but romanticizing all for the edification and entertainment of his intended audience.

Geffrei Gaimar

A majority of the critical attention garnered by Gaimar's historical text focuses on the romantic elements, historical context, and linguistic issues presented by the work, with very little attention paid to the author's biographical information. Authorial information can illuminate possible motivations for thematic elements in a work, so it is necessary to examine what scant information exists on Gaimar's background. Perhaps in the completed version of the work, a prologue of sorts might have existed that contained the kind of proper introduction of the work found in Geoffrey's *HRB*, Henry's *HA*, or Laȝamon's *Brut*. As the beginning portion of the *Estoire* has been lost, however, there is no way to know for certain if the author was merely reticent to reveal himself or if his motives, occupation, and origins are articulated as a means of introduction for the piece.

As it stands, based upon the scant surviving documents from the period and the information contained with the epilogue of the *Estoire*, anything claimed about Gaimar's identity is mostly conjecture. Before Short's more contemporary text, Alexander Bell produced the most comprehensive edition of the *Estoire* in 1960 for the Anglo-Norman Text Society. Bell avoids making any definitive claims about Gaimar: "Though the author's name appears to be of Continental Germanic origin and is either a later adoption into French or a borrowing from Provençal, this does not permit any conclusions about the author himself" (Bell, *L'Estoire* ix). The author refers to himself numerous times throughout the course of the work as Gaimar, with one unusual spelling,[173] but he provides no other relevant information about himself. The name

---

[173] Gaimar mentions himself five times in the text, but on a sixth occasion in line 2923 he calls himself Gillemar. The misspelling is confined to one manuscript, MS R, London British Royal 13.A.xxi.

"Gaimar" offers little illumination on the author's identity. The most recent edition by Short

finds a similar dead end when examining the author's name:

> The forename Geoffrey is too common among Anglo-Normans to be in any way
>
> informative, while investigating possible etymologies of his second name is inconclusive:
>
> Widemar, Waidmar/Gaidmar, Winimar are Germanic names...Wimar, and Wymarc are
>
> Breton. It is no doubt coincidence that Wimar/Guimar was steward to earl Alan I of
>
> Richmond, and that a certain Geoffrey, recorded between 1100 and 1115, was probably
>
> his kinsman and local steward in Lincolnshire. (*Estoire* xii)

The many possible spellings of Gaimar have numerous connections to possible Germanic

origins, as well as Breton-speaking regions. If the author had identified himself as Geffrei of

Gaimar (as Geoffrey of Monmouth did in the *HRB*), there might be some avenue for determining

his origins. However, as Short indicates, "As the name is not toponymic, any link with

Gaimara,[174] a locality in Caen, seems unlikely" (*Estoire* xii). Though some toponymic names do

become personal names that does not seem to be the case with Gaimar.

Gaimar offers almost no personal information in his *Estoire*, but based on the work itself, a

few assumptions can be asserted about the author. For one, the *Estoire* is written in Norman

French, indicating that it must have been his primary language. This evidence seems to suggest

that Gaimar was not born in England; however, his ability to use Old English texts as sources[175]

means that he had knowledge of the language necessary for translation: "It is a legitimate

conclusion from the fact that he had a command of English sufficient to enable him to set about

translating a version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that he was not a recent immigrant, but had

---

[174] Gaimara, currently known as Gémare, is a suburb of Caen located in Brittany in northwestern France. Caen is the burial place of William the Conqueror.
[175] See section on Sources on page 202

been resident for some time in England, even if he was not actually born there" (Bell, *L'Estoire* x). Short "would expect him to have been born in England" based upon his familiarity with the area and language, but he could have immigrated and learned the language as well (xiii). Gransden speculates more on his occupation as that relates to his origins, suggesting "he was probably a secular clerk of Norman extraction" (*Estoire* 209). His position as a secular clerk would allow for movement across the Channel and settlement in Lincolnshire in an Augustinian house. The Augustinian canons were represented in the north east and very early on used the vernacular in their writings, making it likely that Gaimar was a member of this order.

Gaimar's duties as a clerk matter more to critics mostly because his occupation is one of the few aspects of his life that can be properly asserted. Although clearly affiliated with some religious institution in Lincolnshire, Gaimar avoids foregrounding ecclesiastical matters: "...indeed, the religious life, whether regular or secular, has little part in his *Estoire*, though it is noticeable that the saints on whom he dwells to any extent are mostly of Anglo-Saxon origin" (Bell, *L'Estoire* x-xi). Due to the lack of religious matters and history in the *Estoire*, it can be assumed that Gaimar's education might have focused on more secular matters in addition to religious matters.

Because of the lack of information about Gaimar, from his birth or cultural background, it is impossible to know where his earliest education took place. But his position in secular clergy suggests his education was much like Henry of Huntingdon's, focused on grammar, writing, and song. His history of England, however, was motivated not by some of the ecclesiastical concerns of his contemporary, Henry of Huntingdon, but by a more unique blending of the Norman romantic literary tradition and the annalistic medieval historiographic tradition represented by the *ASC*. With so little to assert about Gaimar the historian, it becomes necessary to explore other

motivations for this distinct historical representaitons. Part of what influenced Henry's *HA* was the request of his patron, Alexander; as such, Gaimar's patrons should also be considered an important part of his mottivations.

<u>Gaimar's Patrons and Supporters</u>

While the surviving portions of Gaimar's history assert very little about the author directly, the epilogue to the *Estoire* provides a great deal of contextual information about the author's patrons and regional influences. As with any author in this period, these factors probably had the greatest impact on his composition process. These patrons from a specific regional context would have certain expectations that Gaimar would need to meet with his *Estoire*. In addition to the linguistic and educational skills required to compose the *Estoire*, the information contained within the epilogue provides an abundance of contextual information relating to Gaimar's patrons. There are two existing epilogues to the *Estoire*; one is much lengthier with more detail in MS R, London British Library Royal 13.A.xxi.[176] There is some debate as to which epilogue more accurately reflects the original produced by Gaimar. I agree with Short's assertion that R, "with its plethora of contemporary references and patronage information, must clearly in some way reflect the original edition of the *Estoire*, but it is not impossible that it incorporates, in the form of which we now know it from MS R, revisions made when Gaimar issued his putative second edition" (*Estoire* xxx). The epilogue may have been revised at some point to respond to the contemporary social and political situation following the civil war between King Stephen and Empress Matilda [1135-1154], but such a revision would have been composed by Gaimar and not by a scribe.

---

[176] See "The Text" section below.

His epilogue, as provided in Short's edition, is important because it provides relevant

information about not only Gaimar's patrons but also the contextual situation in which he

composed the *Estoire*:

> Ici voil [jo] del rei finer.
> Ceste estorie fist translater
> Dame Custance la gentil.
> Gaimar i mist marz e avril
> e [aprés] tuz les dusze mais
> ainz k'il oust translaté des reis.
> Il purchaça maint esamplaire,
> livres engleis e par gramaire
> e en romanz e en latin,
> ainz k'en p[e]üst traire a la fin.
> Si sa dame ne li aidast,
> ja a nul jor ne l'achevast.
> Ele enveiad a Helmeslac
> pur le livre Walter Espac.
> Robert li quens de Gloücestre
> fist translater icele geste
> solum les livres as Waleis
> k'il aveient des bretons reis.
> Walter Espec la demandat,
> li quens Robert li enveiat,
> puis la prestat Walter Espec
> a Raul le fiz Gilebert.
> Dame Custance l'enpruntat
> de son seignur k'el mult amat. (6435-6458)[177]

Within this portion of the epilogue, Gaimar clearly identifies a number of individuals directly

involved in the successful completion of the *Estoire*: Constance [unknown] and her husband

Ralph Fitz Gilbert [d.1172], minor members of the Clare family;[178] Walter Espec [d. 1153]; and

---

[177] The noble lady Constance had this history adapted into French. Gaimar took March and April and a whole twelve months before finishing this adaptation of [the history of] the kings [of Britain]. He obtained a large number of copies of books—English books, by dint of learned reading, and books both in the French vernacular and in Latin— before finally managing to bring his work to a conclusion. If his lady had not helped him, he would never have completed it. She sent to Helmsley for Walter Espec's book. Robert earl of Gloucester had had this historical narrative translated in accordance with the books belonging to the Welsh that they had in their possession on the subject of the kings of Britain. Walter Espec requested this historical narrative, earl Robert sent it to him, and then Walter Espec lent it to Ralf Fitz Gilbert; lady Constance borrowed it from her husband, whom she loved dearly.
[178] The Clares were a highly influential Anglo-Norman family descended from Richard Fitz Gilbert [1035-1090], who accompanied William the Conqueror to England during the Norman Conquest.

Robert of Gloucester [c.1100-1147]. It is these individuals that make up Gaimar's intended

audience, especially Lady Constance Fitz Gilbert. Understanding more about these individuals

unlocks details about the author's motivations and objectives for his *Estoire*.

As they were each significant enough to be mentioned by name in Gaimar's history, all of

these prominent figures would have had some influence over the author. These few names also

represent most of what can be definitively asserted about Gaimar:

> All we know of his position in society is the information derived from his own chronicle
>
> that he was attached to the household of Constance, the wife of Ralph fitz Gilbert, a
>
> powerful baron of the north in the time of King Stephen. He lived at a time when the
>
> recent publication of Geoffrey of Monmouth's romance of the British History had created
>
> a great interest on such subjects; and at the request of his patroness he undertook to
>
> translate that work into the Anglo-Norman verse, and continue it through the Anglo-
>
> Saxon and into the Anglo-Norman period. (Wright, Thomas 9-10)

This may seem like insufficient evidence to analyze Gaimar's personal motivations for

composing and compiling his history according to his own historiographic concerns; yet, it

provides valuable contextual information about the patrons he wished to gratify and the cultural

and literary milieu in which he worked.

Gaimar identifies the Lady Constance, the first to be mentioned in the epilogue, as the patron

who requested this vernacular British history. Bell's edition notes Constance's significance to the

text in relation to her husband "Ralf Fitz Gilbert, who held lands in that county, founded Markby

Priory, and was a benefactor of Kirkstead Abbey and of Stixwould Priory; he also held lands in

Hampshire, where he was a benefactor of Southwick Priory" (*L'Estoire* ix). All of these

ecclesiastical houses were located in Lincolnshire. Kirkstead Abbey, a Cistercian monastery, was

founded in 1139 by Hugh, son of Edo, and Stixwould Priory was a Cistercian nunnery established by Lucy, countess of Chester, in 1135. Southwick and Markby were both priories of Augustinian canons, with Southwick first being founded by Henry I in 1133 in the church of St. Mary, Portchester, before being moved to Southwick c.1145. Markby Priory was established during the reign of Henry II, although there are no official mentions of it until 1204 after Ralph's death. While this list of properties and connections suggests Ralph was a prominent figure in Lincolnshire, this patron was probably a lesser nobleman who had the good fortune to marry well. Jane Zatta points out that the rather common practice of marrying up in Norman society definitely helped Ralph gain some monetary advantages:

> Although not one of the great land-owners himself, Ralf FitzGilbert [*sic*] seems to have been well connected and rather typical of the men raised to prominence through an advantageous marriage. He was undertenant of the Archbishop of York and held land of various magnates in Lincolnshire, one of whom was Gilbert of Gaunt…. He also had estates in Hampshire, which seem to have come to him by virtue of his marriage to Constance, since they are not recorded in Domesday. (27)

As patrons, the Fitz Gilberts represented a newer class of Norman aristocracy, with land and money from marriage and other social connections. Therefore, Gaimar's history encapsulates some of the audience expectations and desires of this new social class in England.

Regardless of Ralph Fitz Gilbert's connections and political station, the epilogue clearly identifies his wife Constance as the one who arranged for and commissioned this history. Constance's apparently loving marriage to Ralph Fitz Gilbert would have made her one of the wealthy Norman landowners in Lincolnshire, increasing her husband's status through their union. Constance, "a Hampshire heiress… had probably been at the court of Adeliza of Louvain"

(Legge 3). Constance herself has access to a text written in the vernacular; Gaimar specifically

mentions her copy of David's (an unknown[179] contemporary of Gaimar) work: "Bien dit Davit e

bien trovat / e la chançon bien asemblat. / Dame Custance en ad l'escrit, / en sa chambre sovent

le lit; / e ad pur l'escrire doné / un marc d'argent ars e pesé" (6495-6498).[180] This description

indicates much about her motivations for wanting a vernacular history: "The book is thus for

private reading by an obviously very literate woman, though not instructed in Latin, and the price

she paid for it makes private reading a pleasure of great cost" (Zatta 27-28). Gaimar also

mentions that Queen Adeliza of Louvain [1103-1151], the second wife of Henry I, also had the

same copy of David's book. This suggests that Constance "may have wanted to emulate

Adelaide and that she saw sponsoring a work of history as a validation of her social status and

indeed an affirmation of the role of her social class in the destiny of the English nation" (Zatta

28). The ruling Norman elite, as represented by Queen Adeliza, seems to have a predilection for

romances, or at least the wives of the Norman aristocrats did. And as part of an ethnic group and

social class seen as the "invading force" in England during the Norman Conquest, Constance

may have sought historical validation for her position in life in combining her love of romances

with history.

Also mentioned in this epilogue is Walter Espec, the helpful figure who procured an

important source for Gaimar. Walter, a "baron and justice, succeeded to the Bedfordshire estates

held in 1086 by William Speche, possibly his father or maternal uncle, and by *c*.1122 had

---

[179] Short's "Gaimar's Epilogue" discusses the identity of David and his choice of language for his poetry in fns. 6 and 7. He rejects Bell's assertion that David wrote in Latin simply because Gaimar's patroness, Lady Constance, wanted a vernacular history that she could read. Since she owns a copy of David's writing on Henry I, it must have been in a language accessible to her. However, nothing can be definitively asserted about David's identity or place in court (if any).

[180] David is a good narrative poet, and he composed good verse and constructed his song well. Lady Constance owns a written copy of it, which she often reads in her chamber; and for the copying of it she paid a mark of silver, duly assayed and weighed.

acquired (probably from the crown) additional lands centred on Wark, Northumberland, and

Helmsley, Yorkshire" (Dalton, "Espec"). Walter's occupation involved him in various aspects of

political and royal life. It also afforded him the benefits of royal patronage. Paul Dalton's brief

entry on Walter Espec in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* addresses some of his

most important judicial contributions: "Between *c*.1119 and 1135 Walter Espec witnessed or was

addressed in many royal charters, sometimes with Eustace Fitz John, and in 1121 he attended an

assembly of northern magnates at Durham. By 1130 Espec and Eustace had heard pleas as royal

justices in several northern counties, and Espec had also recently been restocking royal manors

in Yorkshire and estates in the vacant bishopric of Durham" ("Espec"). Indeed, Walter appears to

be a well-respected justice, as well as a prominent landowner in Yorkshire. In addition to acting

in a judicial capacity for the county and as a witness to royal charters, Walter contributed to the

establishment of several religious houses in Yorkshire and surrounding areas: "Walter, who died

in 1153, was the founder of the Cistercian abbey of Rievaulx and the Augustinian priory of

Kirkham, both in Yorkshire, and of the Cistercian abbey of Wardon in Bedfordshire, thus having

contacts with both north and south England" (Gransden 209). Through Walter's influence and

relationship with his patron, Gaimar was able to reach far outside his own social sphere as a

secular clerk and access vital sources for his history. In particular, Walter was instrumental in

obtaining a crucial source for the *Estoire* from Robert of Gloucester that was eventually passed

on to Gaimar's patron, Ralph Fitz Gilbert, and made its way to the author. It is unlikely the

author knew Walter personally, as he received the text through his patron and not directly from

Walter, but he received necessary assistance for his history, and thus, includes a note of his

gratitude to Walter for his intercession.

The connections between Robert of Gloucester and Gaimar may have been somewhat

tenuous, as there is only an indirect connection between them, but the fact that Robert provided

Walter and Ralph with a source for this history creates quite an interesting contextual issue for

the *Estoire*. Robert, the 1st earl of Gloucester, was the illegitimate son of Henry I: "Henry I... was

also survived by a long line of bastards, the senior and probably the eldest of whom was Robert,

earl of Gloucester" (King, *The Anarchy* 6). As mentioned in previous chapters, Matilda, Robert's

half-sister, was the acknowledged heir to her father's throne after the death of her brother

William, but Stephen, cousin to Matilda and nephew to Henry I, usurped Matilda's position,

leading to the nineteen-year civil war in England known as "The Anarchy." Robert's illegitimacy

effectively ruined any consideration of his accession, though he was a closer blood relative to

Henry than was Stephen. Initially supportive of Stephen's claim to the throne, tensions between

Robert and Stephen led the earl to consider switching his allegiance, a decision he did not take

lightly:

> A great struggle and deep doubt lay behind the earl's defiance of Stephen in late May
>
> 1138....We see this in the evidence that Earl Robert took so long to decide to embrace the
>
> empress's cause; that he took great care in constructing a religious and moral brief to
>
> defend his change of side; and that he cultivated in William of Malmesbury and his circle
>
> an almost paranoid obsession with Stephen's capacity for treachery. (Crouch 77)

Robert did switch his allegiance to Matilda, but unfortunately, he ultimately cost her the crown.

Matilda captured King Stephen after his defeat at the Battle of Lincoln on February 2, 1141,

providing the empress with a clear upper-hand in the conflict. However, Robert was later

captured near Stockbridge in September of 1141 after Matilda's forces were defeated at the Rout

of Winchester. Matilda exchanged Stephen for Robert, effectively losing her best chance at

winning the crown. Robert's involvement in the civil war made him an interesting historical figure for writers like Gaimar and Geoffrey of Monmouth. One version of Geoffrey's *HRB* dedicates the work to Robert of Gloucester; however, another version contains a similar dedication to King Stephen, so Geoffrey's position on the civil war is rather tenuous and opportunistic.[181] Gaimar provides no mention of King Stephen in his epilogue, but that does not imply that he was on Matilda and Robert's side in the conflict. While Gaimar does focus on the follies of civil fighting in his history (see below), his historical aim does not involve legitimizing the claims to the crown in this dispute. He mostly wishes to entertain his patrons, leaving out such serious matters. However, as will be explored later, Gaimar narrates moments of usurpation and rebellion in history with a romantic bent to mediate the conflict in an idealized way.

Gaimar's epilogue also briefly mentions another important person for the purposes of authenticating Gaimar's sources, Nicolas de Trailly. In referencing the Washingborough book,[182] Gaimar claims: "De tut le plus pout ci trover / ki en cest libre volt esgarder; / e ki ne creit ço ke jo di, / deman Nicole de Trailli!" (6479-6482).[183] Nicholas de Trailly [d.1180], a canon of York Minster and Walter Espec's nephew, was important to confirming the validity of the Washingborough source (Short, *Estoire* xii). He is also another figure in the complex web of well-known individuals of the period who figure into Gaimar's composition of the *Estoire*, mostly through his familial connection with Walter. Gaimar invites his contemporaries to check his sources, or at the very least, to ask Walter's nephew about the text that was given to him. All these references to these individuals work to provide Gaimar with authorial credibility.

---

[181] See Chapter 1 on Geoffrey of Monmouth.

[182] This is how Gaimar refers to the *ASC*. For a more detailed discussion of this source, see the section below on Sources.

[183] Anyone willing to look into this [Washingborough] book will be able to find there all this and more, and let anyone who does not believe what I say ask Nicholas de Trailly!

Gaimar's mention of the Fitz Gilberts, Walter Espec, and Robert of Gloucester should illuminate some aspect of the author's life and relationship to them. Unfortunately, in searching through documents associated with the Fitz Gilberts, critics have found no clear record of a professional or personal relationship with Geffrei Gaimar: "Though numbers of charters of these FitzGilberts [*sic*] have survived, so far no name identifiable as our author appears to have been found; the Galfridus capellanus, who signs as witness to a number of them, is but a doubtful candidate, for though the name is a very common one, it is apparently not the one preferred by Gaimar himself" (Bell, *L'Estoire* ix). Again, the prevalence of the name Geoffrey indicates that the Galfridus of these charters need not be the same Geffrei Gaimar who wrote the *Estoire*. It may be difficult to assert much about Gaimar the individual, but there is much to be learned from the Fitz Gilberts and the county of Lincoln. Indeed, the people mentioned directly in this epilogue represent the audience for Gaimar's *Estoire*: "His patrons were well-connected members of the minor aristocracy of Lincolnshire, and the provincial Anglo-Norman baronage must, at least in the first instance, have been his intended audience" (Short, *Estoire* ix). Gaimar writing began with a very narrow audience, a single patron and those who helped him complete his writing; however, his history would be a more accessible, vernacular text that would influence a much broader audience. Examining his audience in context of their regional surroundings will help illuminate more about their expectations and the cultural factors that influenced Gaimar's composition of the *Estoire*.

Regional Context of Lincolnshire

Like many of the historians in the period, Gaimar's vision of British history is influenced by his regional context. Bell's assertions regarding the Fitz Gilberts provide a regional context for Gaimar, suggesting he lived and worked in Lincolnshire. Of the priories and abbeys mentioned,

it is possible to make some assumptions about the author. As mentioned earlier, Bell lists

Markby, an 11th century Augustinian priory; Kirkstead Abbey, an 11th century Cistercian

monastery; and Stixwould, a Cistercian nunnery, as having some connection to the Fitz Gilberts.

Since Gaimar is a secular clerk, it is most likely that he composed his writings at Markby. What

is definitely clear from the text is Gaimar's interest and fascination with the area and its history:

"The close acquaintance with Lincolnshire topography shown on many occasions in the 'Estoire'

and the interest displayed in East Anglia traditions—Haveloc, St. Edmund, Hereward, &c.—

have led to the general assumption that the author had lived in that part of the country..." (Bell,

"Gaimar's Patron" 104). Gransden also points out that much of Gaimar's focus and knowledge

of the east had to be based upon not only his patrons' land-holdings in the area but also the fact

that Gaimar lived, worked, and researched in this area (209). Gaimar's vision of English history

focuses on figures not normally emphasized in the histories of writers like Geoffrey, Henry, or

Laȝamon, and he explores these definitively Anglo-Saxon traditions and historical figures in the

French language, thus making the local history accessible to his Norman patrons. It is the

influence of this area that most likely accounts for these authorial choices. If Lincolnshire so

greatly influenced the author's historical vision, it is important to examine the area and its

cultural significance for my thesis regarding his blending of Anglo-Saxon history and Norman

culture.

The county of Lincolnshire has many connections to Anglo-Saxon history and culture, which

makes it a particularly fitting location for writing a history of the English. In fact, the county "lay

within the Danelaw, in the part dominated by the five Boroughs of Lincoln, Stamford,

Nottingham, Derby and Leicester" (Platts 1). Lincolnshire accounted for only five of the fifteen

shires and boroughs comprising Danelaw, which included Yorkshire, Essex, Cambridgeshire,

Suffolk, Norfolk, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, and Buckinghamshire. Graham Platts argues that the arrival of the Normans rid the area of Danish invaders and ushered in a more stable and peaceful period. This "period of peace enabled men to turn their attention to the Church, with the result that it became a powerful part of the seigneurial class by the end of the twelfth century" (Platts 17). The greater attention devoted to ecclesiastical matters is evidenced by the existence of over fifty religious houses of various orders in and around the county.

The connection to a regimented system of Scandinavian governance continued to influence the area even in the century after the Norman Conquest. Platts' *Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire* notes the continuance of certain Scandinavian practices in Lincolnshire: "From the time of Cnut until at least the reign of Henry I the existence and practice of characteristic legal customs there was officially tolerated. Danish names as well as legal and administrative institutions survived because the local population from the tenth century onwards desired this; one supposes they also sought to preserve...their Danish cultural heritage" (283). Despite the rapid development of religious institutions and the growing control of Norman baronages in Lincolnshire, cultural and legal aspects of the earlier Scandinavian people remained a large part of everyday life. Indeed, Short comments on the multicultural atmosphere of the area as well: "The persistence of a Scandinavian cultural substratum in the area, even into the 1130s, can be assumed with a high degree of plausibility. This regional culture had been facilitated by the mutual intelligibility between the Norse and English languages that had long since been a feature of the area's multiculturalism" (Short, *Estoire* ix). I would argue that the region would have provided the perfect environment for the composition of the *Estoire*, especially as the author seems mostly concerned with highlighting this sense of multiculturalism in his work.

In addition, the heavily Scandinavian folk tradition also influenced Gaimar's decision to highlight and amplify the stories of popular Danish and Anglo-Saxon heroes: "A central place within the folk tradition of men and women in Lincolnshire was held by certain heroes of the past with local connections whose exploits were later written down" (Platts 274). Gaimar's use of Havelok the Dane and Hereward the Wake, the last East Anglian chieftain to hold out against William the Conqueror, may seem like unusual choices for this Norman audience, but he was obviously motivated by the proliferation of these local legends in Lincolnshire. Indeed, the inclusion of some of these stories (at such extensive lengths) in the *Estoire* tells quite a lot about Gaimar's interest in the area and indicates how much they still influence the local populace. The inclusion of the stories of Havelok and Buern Bucecarle gives his work even more literary and historical value since his *Estoire* contains the most extensive and sometimes only references to these local figures.

In addition to the multicultural, multilingual influences of the Lincolnshire area, Gaimar clearly could not have avoided knowing and being inspired by the work of a fellow historian working in the same area. Henry of Huntingdon was initially a canon of the diocese of Lincoln, eventually becoming archdeacon of Huntingdon. He lived in Lincolnshire and composed his *HA* while in the area. Short remarks on the close ties between the two historians:

> It is difficult to imagine that Gaimar's choice of title for his ambitious historiographic enterprise was not influenced by that of his Lincoln neighbour Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*. Henry completed the first two versions of his history in 1133, and four more versions followed between 1140 and 1155. Gaimar's *Estoire* can give the occasional impression of being in some way in dialogue with Henry's version of history, but apart from the fact that they used similar, but certainly not identical, versions of the

> *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, there are few points of relevant contact between them. (Short
>
> *Estoire* xxxi-xxxii)

Indeed, both historians appear to have been writing around the same time in the same area,

working from similar sources. Both Henry and Gaimar used the *ASC* as an integral source for

Anglo-Saxon periods of their histories. While both historians were preoccupied with Anglo-

Saxon history, they approached the subject in very different ways. Henry's focus on divine

intervention throughout English history casts his work as more concerned with God's plan for

the great nation. As explored below, Gaimar, however, spends more time creating a romantic

vision of the Anglo-Saxons, treating their culture with equal attention and elevation as the

Normans who comprised his intended audience. Naturally, Gaimar's relationships to his patrons,

his regional context, and his contemporaries have a great deal of influence over debates

regarding the text itself, as well as the date of composition for the *Estoire*, itself a crucial

component in his vision of a culturally-blended England.

<u>The Text</u>

The first official edition of Gaimar's text was that in The Rolls Series edition of 1888-89. It

was the only available version of the *Estoire* until Bell's Anglo-Norman Text Society edition in

1960. Short's edition, published in 2009, represents the most recent scholarship and translation

of the text. The *Estoire* exists in four manuscripts: MS D, Durham Cathedral Library C.IV.27;[184]

MS L, Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library 104 (A.4.12);[185] MS H, London College of Arms

Arundel XIV (150);[186] and MS R, London British Library Royal 13.A xxi (*olim* 1146).[187] Short

---

[184] MS D is the oldest extant MS, dated sometime between the end of the twelfth to the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is comprised of 167 folios and written in four hands.

[185] MS L dates to the end of the thirteenth century and consists of 189 folios written by a single scribe.

[186] MS H can be dated to the early fourteenth century and is comprised of a three part volume of 238 folios in at least four different hands.

[187] MS R was probably copied in the early part of the fourteenth century and consists of 194 folios written in a single hand.

uses the MS R as the primary source for his edition and translation. He claims: "That R is, textually speaking, the most complete and by far the best of these manuscripts has long been recognized" (*Estoire* xxii). Bell edited from MS D, a decision which has been criticized by a number of scholars including Short and M. Dominica Legge. Legge, in her book *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background*, contends that R "contains material omitted from D which the editor considers authentically Gaimar's" (29). Especially important to Short is the longer epilogue found in MS R: "R's preservation of the longer epilogue (6435-532), so obviously authentic, and the appearance in the other MSS of a much shorter passage appropriate to a different redaction of the *Estoire*, is further proof, if such be needed, of its textual value" (*Estoire* xxiii). However, Short does acknowledge a few faults with the R scribe's text, specifically errors of naming both people and places.[188]

<u>Sources</u>

From the excerpt provided above, the epilogue continues and addresses possible sources for the *Estoire* while also suggesting other important contextual information. These sources indicate what literary and cultural traditions Gaimar uses and blends together to create his Anglo-Norman vision of history. Coupled with the earlier portion of the epilogue, the completed conclusion to the *Estoire* provides critics with a way of analyzing both the composition dates of the text and the sources utilized by Gaimar. He writes:

> Geffrai Gaimar cel livre escri[s]t
> [e] les transsa[n]dances i mist
> ke li Waleis ourent leissé,
> k[ë] il aveit ainz purchacé—
> u fust a dreit u fust a tort—
> le bon livre dë Oxeford
> ki fust Walter l'arcedaien,
> sin amendat son livre bien;
> e de l'estorie de Wincestre

---

[188] For a detailed list of these errors, see Short's edition of the *Estoire*, xxiii-xxiv.

> fust amende[e] ceste geste,
> de Wassingburc un livre engleis
> u il trovad escrit des reis
> e de tuz les emper[e]ürs
> ki de Rome furent seignurs
> e de Engleterre ourent treü,
> des reis ki d'els ourent tenu,
> de lur vies e de lur plaiz,
> des aventures e des faiz,
> coment chescons maintint la terre,
> quel amat pes e liquel guere. (6459-6478)[189]

That the author takes such time to not only list the sources used for his own history but also the way in which these sources helped him make "considerable improvements" to his own text indicates that Gaimar was a skilled historian, authenticating his history against the earlier historiographic traditions and those of his contemporaries. Gaimar uses this epilogue almost "self-consciously," as Short puts it (323), because when writing to a specific Norman patron who wishes to take part in this decidedly English history, he needs an overt signal of his expertise and authority as a historian. In including the Norman romantic tradition in the Anglo-Saxon history, Gaimar must show his awareness of the historiographic tradition which precedes him and build off of it.

Aside from what can be learned about the author's credibility, the epilogue provides useful information about the historical models that influenced the *Estoire*. In reading through this epilogue, Bell assumes that Gaimar is claiming four sources: "He proceeds to mention four books in particular which he had used in his work: (i) *le livere Walter Espac* (l.6442); (ii) *le bon*

---

[189] Geoffrey Gaimar made a written copy of this book and added to it the supplementary material that the Welsh had omitted, for he had previously obtained, be it rightfully or wrongfully, the good book of Oxford that belonged to archdeacon Walter, and with this he made considerable improvements to his own book. And this historical narrative was improved also by reference to the Winchester History, [that is,] a certain English book at Washingborough, in which he found a written account of the kings [of Britain] and of all the emperors who had dominion over Rome and tribute from England, and of the kings who had held lands of these emperors, of their lives and their affairs, what happened to them and what deeds they performed, how each one governed the land, which ones loved peace and which ones war.

livere de Oxeford (l.6458); (iii) *l'estoire de Wincestre* (l.6464); (iv) *de Wassingburc un livere*

engleis (l.6463)" (*L'Estoire* liii[190]). Bell goes on to surmise that (i) was a copy of Geoffrey of

Monmouth's *HRB* because it was received from Robert of Gloucester, but claims that (ii) is a

little more complicated: "it is associated with Walter the Archdeacon, from whom Geoffrey

claimed to have received his 'British book,' and has sometimes been identified with that book,

but that is unlikely, because Gaimar nowhere says that the Oxford book was in Welsh, nor is

there any evidence available that he was conversant with that language" (*L'Estoire* lii). It seems

likely to Bell that this source was another Latin text, not a Welsh one. With the third source, Bell

contends that Gaimar's use of the term "*croniches*" with the Winchester source clearly make it

copy of the *ASC* found at Winchester. And the fourth book remains rather shrouded in mystery

"as it does not appear to be mentioned by any other writer" (Bell, *L'Estoire* lv). However, Bell

follows the same critical analysis given by C.T. Martin in the Rolls Series edition: "There was

close connexions between Washingborough and Peterborough and also between that place and

Kirkstead Abbey, of which the FitzGilberts were benefactors" (*L'Estoire* lv). Following this line

of reasoning, Bell considers the Washingborough book as variant *ASC* text, used to authenticate

and improve Gaimar's *Estoire*.

For his part, Short argues that Gaimar is referencing three sources for his *Estoire*, two Latin

texts and one English. His reading of the epilogue initially seems to follow Bell's arguments

about the books mentioned; however, upon closer examination, Short finds some problems with

Bell's reading:

> Gaimar, however, is clearly at pains to distinguish the Robert of Gloucester/Walter Espec
>
> book (6442-44) from Archdeacon Walter's (6458-59), and it must be admitted that at first

---

[190] Please note that Bell's translation of these sources differs slightly in spelling from Short's.

sight the source books that he enumerates do indeed look suspiciously like two different versions or copies of the *Historia regum Britanniae* and two different versions or copies of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (the Winchester history and the Washingborough book: 6461, 6463). Yet *a priori* this sort of duplication of sources would surely be unexpected and call for some special explanation of why Gaimar should deliberately have chosen to complicate his task as a translator in this way. (Short, "Gaimar's Epilogue" 327-328)

Short's reading suggests that having two extra copies of the English and Latin sources would complicate the job of translating, researching, and compiling the information of four different sources, two versions each of the *ASC* and the *HRB*. This leads Short to compellingly conclude Gaimar used three sources, not four: "That the Washingborough book is to be seen not as a separate fourth source, nor as a duplicate version of the Winchester history, but simply as a copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* defined in terms of its location seems to me clear enough from the epilogue as it survives. Gaimar's original syntax and meaning can, I think, be reestablished merely by repunctuating Bell's edited text" (Short, "Gaimar's Epilogue" 329). Short's contention is quite convincing to me, as there is not enough evidence to show that the Washingborough book is anything other than a copy of the *ASC*. Plus, the composition process, as discussed below, was fairly short according to Gaimar, just fourteen months. Having additional Latin and English sources would lengthen that process. The epilogue would indicate that Gaimar used Walter Espec/Robert of Gloucester's *HRB* for his history and revised his text with information provided in another *HRB* manuscript, Archdeacon Walter's version. From there, Gaimar "proceeds to incorporate the Winchester history, that is, more specifically, a book from Washingborough" (Short, "Gaimar's Epilogue" 329). In this reading, the Winchester history would be located in Washingborough and not in Winchester, as Bell had previously assumed.

These sources, as discussed by both Short and Bell, indicate Gaimar's propensity to use materials from differing cultural backgrounds, which is necessary to his goal of creating a multicultural history of England.

The Date of Composition and Historical Context

On top of the already complex critical discussion regarding Gaimar's text, contention exists about the date at which Gaimar composed his history. Gaimar's history represents a blending of the Norman, Saxon, and Welsh cultures; therefore, the date of composition signifies when this transition occurred, at least according to Gaimar. Gaimar was probably writing at the same time as both Geoffrey of Monmouth and Henry of Huntingdon. As a twelfth-century historian, Gaimar was affected by the same political conditions that color the writing of Geoffrey and Henry, but his writing is so free of direct references to the political climate, stopping after the reign of Henry I and avoiding the civil war, that his history more resembles Laȝamon's post-Conquest vision of England. As indicated by the epilogue, "Gaimar i mist marz e avril / e [aprés] tuz les dusze mais / aniz k'il oust translaté des resis" (6438-6440).[191] All the author provides for his timeline of composition is the length of time for completion of his *Estoire*, fourteen months. This is such a narrow window of time that ascribing a specific year-long period has become the focus of scholarly work by Bell, Short, and Dalton. In fact, these three arguments involve quibbling over a difference of one to two years, or as many as twenty. However, due to the complex political relationships between the persons mentioned in the epilogue, especially Robert of Gloucester, pinpointing the specific details of Gaimar's historical context while composing the *Estoire* is necessary. When exactly did Gaimar make a more multicultural vision of English history and why?

---

[191]Gaimar took March and April and a whole twelve months before finishing this adaptation of [the history of] the kings [of Britain].

Bell makes the first case for a composition date of somewhere in the five-year period of 1135-1140. He picks up on some minor points like a reference to peace on line 6521 (6527 in Short), which suggests to Bell that this was during the quiet part of Stephen's reign, the first three years. However, these dates would have been at the start of The Anarchy. Gaimar writes: "Ore avom pes e menum joie,"[192] suggesting to Bell a time of *pes* and *joie* for the people and not the disruption of the advent of the civil war. His edition of the *Estoire* also points to some specific personal issues that would have affected Walter Espec and Robert of Gloucester: "[Gaimar] obtained a copy of the *Historia* through the good offices of…Walter Espec, from Robert of Gloucester himself; in the dynastic struggle which broke out in 1138 Robert and Walter took opposite sides...the borrowing more likely [took] place before than after that break in relations" (Bell, *L'Estoire* li-lii). In addition, Bell looks at Gaimar's reference to Ælfthryth's death at Wherwell Priory, suggesting to the scholar that the abbey must have been still standing when Gaimar composed the history. Since Wherwell was burned down by King Stephen's troops in 1141, the composition dates would have to be before that time. These textual references, combined with Bell's assumption about the date for the borrowing of the text from Robert of Gloucester, and the earlier statements about the apparent peace of the time period convinces Bell that the *Estoire* was composed sometime between 1135-40 (lii). An important point for both Bell and Short is the animosity between Walter and Robert after the Battle of the Standard on August 22, 1138. So, what was the big disagreement between Walter Espec and Robert of Gloucester?

A major turning point in the relationship between Robert and Walter may have occurred in 1138. The Scots made many incursions in Northern England: "The castles of Wark and Norham...had been among the castles captured by David after the death of Henry I and then

---

[192] We are now reconciled and can rejoice.

restored to Stephen by the Treaty of Durham early in 1136. They came under renewed pressure

in 1138. The garrison at Wark had attacked the supply train of the Scottish army as it travelled

south, gaining valuable supplies, and it was able to withstand the first retaliatory attack" (King,

King Stephen 91). The actions of the Scots ultimately led to the Battle of Standard on August 22,

1138, a definitive victory for the English, but it also seems to have strained the relationship

between Walter and Robert. Walter continued his support of King Stephen in the Battle of

Standard, while Robert switched his loyalty to Matilda. In fact, Walter apparently gave a speech

to the Anglo-Norman army as recounted by Ælred of Rievaulx[193] as a means of proclaiming his

allegiance to Stephen. The reason for his support of Stephen over Matilda may have been more

personally than politically motivated. Dalton points out that the Scots' "forces had besieged

[Walter's] fortress of Wark and were notorious for devastating England, and Walter's castle of

Helmsley and abbey of Rievaulx were close to their invasion route in summer of 1138" ("The

Date" 28). Walter stood to lose valuable property with the invasion of the Scots, and his

alignment with Stephen was the best way to avoid the devastation of his land. Short also points

out that Robert's change in fealty led to a brief stay in Normandy: "It is known that Robert of

Gloucester had left England for Normandy in March 1137 and that he did not return until the end

of September 1139. Unless...Walter Espec actually sent to Normandy to borrow Robert's book

(and that Robert had taken it with him to France), it looks very much as if the transaction must

have taken place before March 1137" ("Gaimar's Epilogue" 337). All of this historical

---

[193] The speech has been attributed to Walter Espec by Ælred in his historical writings and to Radulf Novell Bishop of Orkney by Henry of Huntingdon. In it, Walter encourages loyalty to King Stephen: "Think of your absent king, how great will be your glory when you report the triumph of a king without the king's presence. Yours will be the court, yours the kingdom: everything will be done by your counsel through whom today a kingdom is sought for the king, peace for the kingdom, and glory for the peace. The king will say that he has been crowned again today by your hands" (Freeland 256).

information seems to suggest that Gaimar's source was received sometime before the spring of 1137.

Short slightly alters the date provided by Bell and builds upon his predecessor's arguments, especially those regarding the tenuous relationship between Walter and Robert. He argues, "The various components of this epilogue permit us in addition to propose a somewhat narrower date for the composition of the *Estoire des Engleis* than has hitherto been thought justified, namely, the fourteen-month period between March 1136 and April 1137" (Short, "Gaimar's Epilogue" 340). Using lines from the epilogue of the *Estoire* to claim that Gaimar is writing after the death of Henry I in 1135, Short effectively reduces the five-year period proposed by Bell into a more exact time frame. Gaimar writes, "Mes dé festes ke tint li reis, / del boschaier ne del gabeis, / del dounaier e de l'amur / ke demenat li reis meillur / ki unkes fust ne jamés seit, / e crestïen fust ben[ë]eit..." (6502-6506).[194] Because Gaimar refers to the "blessed memory" of Henry I, Short assumes this means the king has died. Based on these lines, he is able to further postulate:

> That Gaimar was writing after the death of Henry I, that is, after 1 December 1135, can
> be deduced.... A *terminus ante quem* of 1139 may be suggested by line 6483, since by
> September of that year Henry's widow Adeliza, whom Gaimar refers to as "la raine de
> Luvain," had already remarried William d'Aubigny and had presumably ceased to use the
> royal title by which Gaimar addresses her. A firmer terminus, however, is provided by
> Gaimar's reference (4084) to services in memory of Queen Ælfthryth still being held at
> Wherwell, since this must clearly predate the priory's destruction in September 1141.
> (Short, "Gaimar's Epilogue" 337)

---

[194] But as for the festivities that the king held—and still today [Henry,] that [true] Christian of blessed memory, ranks as the best king that ever was—as for the drinking and boasting bouts, the courting and the love affairs over which he presided...

Short uses historical information to decipher the references in Gamair's epilogue. Using the reference to Queen Ælfthryth as well the contextual information provided by Gaimar about Adeliza's remarriage and subsequent loss of title, Short makes a convincing case for his timeline of March 1137-April 1138.

The book exchanged between Robert and Walter, and ultimately given to Gaimar, offers another salient piece of evidence in Short's argument. The text is assumed to be Geoffrey's *HRB*; according to Short, "This book must have been Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, the earliest surviving version of which in fact contains a dedication to Robert, earl of Gloucester. Gaimar's use of Geoffrey's *Historia* would, of course, have been largely confined to that part of his narrative that is now lost, but sufficient traces of it do survive in the *Estoire de Engleis…*" ("Gaimar's Epilogue" 338). Although most of the material that would have relied on Geoffrey's *HRB* (especially the Trojan origins of the Britons) has been lost, Short still sees enough of the text's influence on the *Estoire* to acknowledge it as a source. Therefore, discerning the time period in which the *HRB* would have been available to Robert is essential to the discussion of the date of composition. Geoffrey was composing his *HRB* between 1123 and 1138, and this timeline must match up to the references in Gaimar's *Estoire* about both Henry's death and the services held for Queen Ælfthryth. In addition, Robert of Gloucester must have had a copy that he was still willing to lend to Walter Espec. If Robert of Gloucester's book was the *HRB*, then it must have been circulating from 1134 to 1135, before the animosity between Robert and Walter. Neil Wright's edition of the *HRB* has already shown that Geoffrey must have completed the work sometime before January of 1139, as Henry of Huntingdon saw a copy of it at that time. But how likely is it that Gaimar received a copy by 1135? As Dalton argues below, there are many problems with the dates offered by both Bell and Short.

Dalton suggests some problems with the dates given by Bell and Short, arguing for a much wider period of composition. First, he takes on Bell's assumption that the first years of Stephen's reign were peaceful: "They witnessed a series of Welsh risings, three major Scottish invasions, numerous rebellions in England and Normandy" (Dalton, "The Date" 29). Short's edition of the *Estoire* also claims that the county of Lincolnshire specifically dealt with its own tumultuous events: "[T]welfth-century Lincolnshire...could lay claim to a particularly rich and diverse cultural heritage; it was also to be the theatre of a series of political and territorial clashes between the English, the Normans, and the Bretons, and the Flemings during one of England's rare periods of civil war from 1139 until 1147" (Short ix). Naturally, having citizens from disparate cultural backgrounds occupying the same space can lead to some civil disruption. Coupled with the problems of King Stephen's ascension, Dalton's disagreement with Bell on this major point makes sense. The early part of Stephen's reign could not be considered peaceful, but any time after Henry II ascension to the throne in 1154 could arguably fit this description.

Dalton also has problems with Short's suggestion that the *HRB* would have been available in a completed form by 1137. Unlike Short and Bell, he claims, "[T]here is no direct evidence that Gaimar actually possessed the *HRB*, in whatever form, by the time Robert of Gloucester renounced his homage to King Stephen in 1138 or by the time Walter Espec fought at the battle of the Standard that year" (Dalton, "The Date" 29). With such spotty information about the actual completion date of the *HRB*, Dalton is right to question the probability of the text being available for Gaimar to borrow. Surely, he would have been aware of Geoffrey's work on the subject, as the *Prophetiae Merlini* (*PM*) had been completed and circulating by 1135 at the latest. But the larger work might have still might not have reached Robert of Gloucester by 1138.

Despite Dalton's reasonable assertions about the problems in Short's and Bell's claims, his argument is less convincing when it comes to the bad relations between Walter and Robert. Essentially, he claims that despite the fact that Walter fought against the Scots (and Robert) at the Battle of Standard, the friendship between Robert and Walter may not have been affected. Dalton argues, "It is not certain, however, that Walter Espec's role at the battle of the Standard is indicative of his allegiance to King Stephen. And even if Walter was loyal to Stephen at this point, the strength, exclusivity, and durability of his loyalty is open to question; as is the idea that such loyalty would have made book-exchange between Walter and Robert of Gloucester less likely after than before 1138" (Dalton, "The Date" 27). In assessing Walter's career during Stephen's reign, he also mentions the speech Walter gave just before the Battle of Standard in support of Stephen.[195] While the speech is attributed to more than one individual fighting that day, Dalton seems to accept Walter as the speaker, but still argues: "Although it may be, therefore, that Walter's role in the battle reflects his continued loyalty to King Stephen, that is uncertain. He had other reasons to fight the scots" ("The Date" 28). Indeed, Walter worked to preserve his lands, but it makes sense that he would align himself with the only political figure who could assure the safety of his property, King Stephen. Dalton provides an interesting reading of Walter's speech, but he does not offer any concrete evidence to show that Walter's allegiances were anything other than what he claimed. Even if he were not completely supportive of Stephen's position, his actions against Matilda's military ally, King David, would have affected his personal relations with Matilda's half-brother, Robert.

---

[195] Full speech offered in fn 193

Ultimately, Dalton takes the much narrower timeline proposed by Short and expands it over decades. He compiles the death dates of the individuals mentioned in the epilogue to propose that the *Estoire* could have been written sometime between 1141 and 1150:

> [W]hen information within this epilogue is used in conjunction with evidence that establishes the dates by which Walter Espec and Nicholas de Trailli were dead, a reasonable case can be made that Gaimar finished his work no later than April 1159 or, at the very latest, no later than an April around 1180. Within these dating limits of March 1135 – April 1159/ca. 1180, it is possible to suggest that Gaimar is most likely to have written the *Estoire*, or a revised version of it, at some point during the period ca. 1141-1150. (Dalton, "The Date" 38).

Elongating the period of composition reflects the approach Dalton takes to all of the material presented in Gaimar's epilogue and in other historical texts of the period. He takes none of the claims made by the author as a certainty and questions the assuredness of Bell's and Short's readings of the complex relationship between Walter and Stephen as it relates to the friendship of Walter and Robert. Such cautious scholarship is especially necessary when dealing with an author of which very little can be asserted. While Short does utilize the available information provided by Gaimar's epilogue and the historical context to offer a reasonable window of time for the composition of the *Estoire*, I echo Dalton's misgiving about the availability of the *HRB* as a source for Gaimar. Short's timeline of March 1137 to April 1138 seems too early for Robert of Gloucester to have the text, then lend it to Walter Espec, who then provides it to Gaimar, given that the *HRB* was completed sometime between 1136 and 1139.[196] Therefore, I will use Dalton's

---

[196] See Chapter 1 on Geoffrey's *HRB*.

window of composition of 1141-1150 for the *Estoire* to provide a clearer contextual window of the climate in which this history was composed.

A Vernacular History

With the established timeline of ca.1141-1150, Gaimar's use of Old French to compose his history becomes even more interesting because he is composing his history more than forty years earlier than another vernacular historian, Laȝamon. Eschewing the historiographic tradition of using Latin, Gaimar composes his history in his native Old French at the request of his patroness, Constance Fitz Gilbert. Unlike Laȝamon s *Brut*, which also utilizes the vernacular, Gaimar's history stands out as the first verse history written for a secular audience: "Gaimar's *Estoire* is the first known romance history in vernacular verse (it is in octosyllabic rhymed couplets) written in England. It was probably primarily intended to be read aloud" (Gransden 209). The use of both the octosyllabic rhyming verse, a favored metrical foot at the time, and the French vernacular allows Gransden to consider this a work meant for sharing orally with a group. Indeed, the epilogue already indicates that there is a rather small intended audience for this work, which might account for the fact that there are so few surviving copies. Its popularity may have been muted by its lack of availability outside the Fitz Gilbert's close and extended family, but the ability to share it orally could have increased its influence.

Gaimar's use of both Latin and English sources for a vernacular history indicates that the author had a working knowledge of these languages, enough to translate and transform the texts into a verse history. In addition to his knowledge of three languages, Gaimar was able to incorporate the more ancient literary traditions of Scandinavian cultures in the area. For Short, this makes Gaimar a skilled historian, despite the author's propensity toward exaggerating and romanticizing the chronological events in the *ASC*: "Gaimar would have an honourable place in

the history of English literature if only because he must be the earliest known translator of English into French. His claim, however, transcends the purely linguistic, and his contribution to Anglo-Norman literature, as much an integral part of the Continental culture whose language it uses as it is of Insular culture, is highly significant" (*Estoire* xiii). Gaimar's work of translating his Anglo-Saxon sources into French becomes similar to the transformative work of Laȝamon, only earlier in England's history. His work translates not only the language but also the cultural traditions of the Saxons, making them accessible to his audience and blending them into the contemporary culture of the Anglo-Normans.

Gaimar's work has also been compared to Laȝamon's historical predecessor, Wace. The fact that both Gaimar and Wace wrote in the vernacular, with Wace writing around 1150 and finishing his *Roman de Brut* in 1155, causes some critics to draw comparisons between the two. In fact, Bell does an examination of the military vocabulary used between each in reference to the many battles that take place over the long history of England. He claims:

> Though the greater richness of Wace's vocabulary is undoubted, it is probably that had
> more of Gaimar's work survived, the disparity would be less marked; it is likely that with
> his *Estoire des Troiens* and his *Estoire des Brutuns*, both lost, in addition to the extant
> *Estoire des Engleis* his literary production would approximate to that of the later poet.…it
> must be borne in mind in comparing the vocabularies of the two authors that Wace is
> writing for an audience acquainted with the niceties of rhetoric and critical of literary
> style, whereas Gaimar is primarily concerned to supply his private patron with
> information in an agreeable form. (Bell, "Notes" 102-103).

Bell does notice less variety in Gaimar's use of terms like *navie* or *baruns* or *vassals*, but he believes that even though Gaimar's work came before Wace's verse history, there is no reason to

accuse the author of having less literary technique and style. The missing sections of Gaimar's history could reveal a diverse and expressive vocabulary not found in the *Estoire des Engleis*. Plus, there is the difference in the intended audiences for these texts. Gaimar's was a much narrower group, and, as such, he wrote in a language designed to please to them.

The issue of audience plays a huge part in examining the language of the *Estoire*. Clearly, Constance was a literary-minded individual but could not read Latin. Additionally, Constance seems more enamored with the romantic writings of Gaimar's contemporary David, whose works were owned by Queen Adeliza of Louvain, than by the ecclesiastical writings of Henry of Huntingdon or William of Malmesbury. Therefore, Gaimar had to create a vernacular history that would appeal to her interests and, in the process, composed a unique representation of history for the laity: "He accommodates this unpromising material to the requirements of a verse chronicle destined for a predominantly secular audience firstly by consistently suppressing all but a few references to ecclesiastical history, and secondly by introducing a number of narrative interludes from more popular sources" (Short ix). The text marks Gaimar as a historical writer for the laity unlike Henry or Geoffrey. The first step in transforming his history from the more ecclesiastically inclined versions was to give voice to more secular and romantic concerns. Like all of the historians mentioned above, Gaimar does take liberties with the chronologies of his sources, elaborating some and erroneously listing dates, but his voice is unique amongst the other chroniclers and historians of the twelfth century.

Indeed, combining Old English and Anglo-Norman histories into a vernacular text is a difficult process, as both cultures represent differing historiographic visions. Elizabeth Freeman notes, "His writing demonstrates the self-conscious strategies and processes by which a variety of hitherto disparate historiographical traditions were in fact *made* compatible" (189). It might

seem a difficult task, but Freeman contends that Gaimar's vernacular history accomplishes its

goal of combining these different cultural modes of historiography in three ways: "the adoption

of a recognized exemplar (the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*); the presentation of early English history

in terms of contemporary twelfth-century preoccupations with land tenure; and the

characterization of English protagonists as heroic Anglo-Normans" (189). The *ASC* becomes the

authority, the framework, for the larger historical narrative of England. And the means of making

English history more agreeable to the Norman audience involves giving them something they

can relate to by romanticizing the Old English histories and historical figures.

Anglo-Saxon History as Romance

    The secular focus of Gaimar's history can be most easily identified through the recasting of

Anglo-Saxon history into a more romantic tradition by using both the vernacular and the

thematic tropes of romance. This is where the blending of both the historical and romantic

traditions as well as the Norman and Saxon cultures occurs. As indicated in his epilogue, Gaimar

is fully aware of the popularity of courtly romance during Henry I's reign. He shows an

awareness that even David has failed to write about in the "courting and the love affairs over

which [Henry] presided," before declaring:

> Ore dit Gaimar k'il tressailli,
> mes s'il uncore s'en volt pener,
> des plus bels faiz pot vers trover:
> ço est d'amur e dosnaier,
> del gaber e de boascheier
> e dé festes e des noblesces,
> des largetez e des richesces
> e del barnage k'il mena,
> des larges dons k[ë] il dona:
> d'iço devreit hom bien chanter,
> nïent leissi[e]r ne trespasser. (6508-6518)[197]

---

[197] Gaimar now declares that he is not after all going to go into any of this here, though if he were willing to work hard at it, he could compose a verse account of the finest exploits [of Henry's court], namely the love affairs and the

No doubt Gaimar is commenting on the reputation of Henry I's court at a time before the popularization of courtly romance in the reign of Henry II. Indeed, Gaimar's description works as a precursor to romanticized notions of court life and courtly love: "We have in Gaimar's epilogue an idealized picture of court life, a realization of the ideal courtly life such as had been allusively evoked in our early troubadour's lyrics, and such will serve to characterize the typical courtly romance of the later twelfth century" (Press 269). Later romantic traditions will follow the same model of idealized court life, and it seems that Gaimar is suggesting that he himself will not attempt to re-create the romantic picture of Henry I's Norman court.

Yet, there are episodes in his history, dealing with both the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans, that present a rather romantic vision of the past. Again and again, the chronologic events presented in the *ASC* are expanded and recast as courtly romances. They display the same emphasis on heroic figures, beautiful high-born maidens, and treacherous villains. Freeman points out, "The *Estoire*'s emphasis on personality and rightfulness seems to have been a means of obviating the otherwise problematic fact that many of the historical exemplars to whom Gaimar appealed were in fact heroes of the Old English past" (200). The narrative spends more time espousing the qualities and personalities of the historical figures in the *ASC* to create romanticized characters from the reality of history. In this way, Anglo-Saxon warriors, kings, and queens can seem more appealing to the Norman audience. Gaimar offers detailed examinations of the loving relationships between these men (like Edgar and Buern Bucecarle) to entertain his intended audience while offering some education on Anglo-Saxon history. As

---

courting, the drinking and the hunting, the festivities and the pomp and ceremony, the acts of generosity and the displays of wealth, the entourage of noble and valiant knights that the king maintained, and the generous presents that he distributed. This is indeed the sort of material that should be celebrated in poetry, with nothing omitted and nothing passed over.

Freeman notes, "The courtly preoccupation with relationships meets the concern with action to produce an episode of particular relevance to a twelfth-century audience" (199).

For example, the story of Edgar and Ælfthryth, probably more inspired by William of Malmesbury's depiction than the *ASC*'s short remark of Edgar's marriage in 965, displays the author's propensity for narratives on the forbidden quality of courtly love. The story of Edgar and Ælfthryth is recounted in a fairly similar fashion in both texts. In Gaimar's and William's version, King Edgar hears of Ælfthryth's beauty and status and declares his intention to take her as his second wife. He sends his ealdorman Æthewald to negotiate his marriage Ælfthryth. Unfortunately, Æthewald becomes enamored with her when he arrives to woo her in the king's name:

> od lui juout Elstruet la bele,
> suz ciel n'out onc tel damesele.
> E Edelwolt mult l'esgardat:
> trestut un jor i demorat,
> tant l'esguarda, vis e colur
> e cors e mains, la bele flur,
> k'il quidat bien ke ço fust fee,
> k'ele ne fust de femme nee.
> E quant la vit de tel bealté,
> tant par en fu enluminé
> k'il purpensat en son corage,
> u turt a pru u a damage,
> ne dirrat mie a son seignur
> la verité, cel traïtur,
> ainz dirrat k'ele n'est pas si bele. (3655-3669)[198]

The scene here is reminiscent of Uther Pendragon's fascination with Igerna in Geoffrey's *HRB*.

---

[198] The beautiful Ælfthryth – there was no young woman to equal her in the whole world – was playing with him, and Æthewald spent a great deal of time looking at her – in fact the whole of one day. He stared at her for so long – her face and her complexion, her body and her hands – in the full bloom of beauty that he convinced himself that she must have been a fairy and not someone born of woman. Beholding such beauty so inflamed his passion that, traitor that he was, he made up his mind that, whatever the outcome, good or bad, he would not tell his lord the truth, but would say that she was not as beautiful [as people said].

Both women are so beautiful that they seem to use some kind of sexual magic to enchant their would-be suitors. Also key to both scenes is the element of betrayal. Gaimar and William identify Æthewald as a traitor as soon as he decides to lie to Edgar about the lady's appearance and suitability for his king. Similarly, Uther schemes through magical means to sleep with Igerna despite the fact that she is married to one of his strongest supporters in Cornwall, Gorlois. Here Æthewald has a plain portrait of the lady made and falsely reports that she is actually rather unattractive, but that the king should marry to one of his men to avoid offending her father. Edgar, trusting in his ealdorman, believes this story and grants Æthewald the right to marry her and "safeguard her honor."

Gaimar's expansion of the scant details presented in the *ASC* allows for a comparison between the two scenes, exposing the similarity in the depictions of the male obsession with beautiful females as part of the early romantic tradition. King Edgar grows suspicious when he hears many of his knights praising her beauty, intelligence, and grace. Once Edgar sees Ælfthryth and realizes that he has been tricked by Æthewald, he finds himself unable to stay away from her despite the barriers to their love:

> Tel dame ne vist unkes mes,
> en son quer pensa s'il ne l'ad,
> donc murrat il, ja ne guarrat.
> Ore quert engin e mal penser
> ke sovent puise od lui parler.
> [De s'amur est mult ententis;
> or quert engin ço m'est avis].
> En la contré el bois chasçat,
> des cerfs ke prist li enveiat.
> Altres presenz li fist asez,
> par treis faez est a li alez. (3820-3830)[199]

---

[199] He had never before seen a woman like her, and in his heart of hearts he thought that if he does not have her, he will never get over it and will die. Now he searches for a stratagem and thinks up some devious means of being able to speak with her frequently. His heart now set on his love, and I guess he will be looking to make some shrewd

Despite the fact that Edgar is just as obsessed with Ælfthryth as Æthewald, Gaimar is much more sympathetic to the king's desire because Ælfthryth returns Edgar's affections, a key difference between Edgar and Æthewald. And, as a king and the victim of Æthewald's deception, Edgar seems worthier of the beautiful bride. However, Gaimar's moral voice comes through when he warns, "Ultredevise cil purprent / ki tolt sa femme a son parent (3817-3818).[200] Unlike William, Gaimar makes his King Edgar a much nobler romantic hero, which is evident in how Edgar and Ælfthryth eventually marry.

While the story of the two lovers is similarly presented in both William's *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*GRA*) and Gaimar's *Estoire*, it is the resolution of the conflict between Edgar and Æthewald that distinguishes Gaimar from William. Indeed, Gaimar also displays an inclination to include his own judgments about the behavior of his historical figures, treating them like characters in a romance. It is his voice as the author that clearly displays who the villains and heroes are. In continuing with the Edgar and Ælfthryth story, Gaimar indicates his sympathy for the couple torn apart by circumstances, specifically Æthewald's treacherous marriage to Ælfthryth. Edgar waits until Æthewald's death to marry Ælfthryth. It is this death of Ælfthryth's husband that marks a clear distinction in the storytelling. In Gaimar's *Estoire*, the couple do not marry until Æthewald is quite rightly dispatched due to his sinful character:

> Les brefts resçut tesl cum il volt.
> Ore s'en vait danz Edelwold.
> En cel aler ke la alout
> ne sai quel genz i econtrout:
> Uthlages sunt e enemis,
> donc fu iloc cel fel oscis.
> Asquanz distrent ke cel convei
> li enveat Edgar le rei,
> meis nul ne sout ki l'osast dire

---

move or other. He went out hunting in the woods in the region, and sent her some of the stags which he caught there. He made numerous other gifts also, and called to visit her on three separate occasions.

[200] An outrageous act is committed by someone who makes off with the wife of a person to whom he is related.

> ki cil furent kil vont oscire. (3849-3858)[201]

There is a suggestion that Edgar might be responsible for Ælthewald's death, but there is no direct evidence. Gaimar clearly states, however, that Æthewald is killed due to defects in his character; he is a common criminal and receives the fate of a common criminal. In William's version, Edgar kills his rival during a hunt so he may marry Ælfthryth.[202] Gaimar's version of the events between Edgar and his second wife show "Gaimar reshaping the events, the figures, and the chronological sequence of this story.…while in William of Malmesbury all characters are morally grey, Gaimar's version directs all our sympathies and admiration towards the lovers while, to the same effect, Edewold's character is blackened beyond redemption" (Press 272). What A.R. Press points out is the manner in which Gaimar takes a historical event and reconstructs the narrative to fit the romantic tradition. In this way, all the standard features of the romance—nobility of the personages, obstacles to the love (unattainability), and mutual attraction—are introduced to the story of Edgar and Ælfthryth. Press notes, "The high-born hero and heroine, endowed with all the requisite noble qualities, overcome the machinations of the treacherous *losengeier*, are mutually attracted, love each other loyally and exclusively, and openly fulfill that love in an honourable marriage which both contributes to and is accompanied by the joy, as by the material splendor, of the court" (273). The events of the Anglo-Saxon past are recast as a romantic story for Gaimar's Anglo-Norman patroness to make the past of the region more palatable and accessible.

---

[201] Our lord Æthewald, having obtained such writs as he required, now sets off. Going where he did, he came into contact with all sorts of people—outlaws and individuals hostile to him. What happened next was that he was killed—killed like the common criminal he was. Some people say that it was king Edgar who had sent him people like this for company, but none knew anyone who have dared maintain that these were the same people as those who were to put him to death.

[202] See the *GRA*, II.157

The same is true in the story of Buern Bucecarle, although the tale is about vengeance instead of courtly romance. This narrative is thought to originate mostly with Gaimar, although it may have been taken from an oral story. In this story, "Gaimar deviates significantly from his source information in order to concentrate exclusively on King Osbirht's moral failings" (Freeman 199). The *ASC*'s entry on Osberht [d.867] only discusses how he is overthrown in 867: "Her for se here of Eastenglum ofer Humbre muðan to Eoferwicceastre on Norðanhymbre. Þær wæs mycel unðwærnesse ðere þeode betwux heom sylfum. Hi hæfdon heora cining aworpene Osbriht ungecynde cining underfengon Ællan."[203] From this entry, Gaimar expands to explain the real moral failings of Osberht and explain his replacement with another "unnatural" king. Buern Bucecarle is introduced as the man who brought the Danes to England in his thirst for revenge after his wife is raped by Osberht, king of Northumbria:

> La dame mult s'en adulat
> de la honte ke feit li ad;
> tut en devint descoluree
> de la dolur k'en ad mene[e].
> Atant es vus Buern sis marriz,
> ki mult ert nobles e gentilz;
> parmi tut ço ke mer hantout,
> mieldre vassal en terre n'out,
> në el renge dont il ert né
> n'ert nus home mielz enparenté. (2635-2644)[204]

In the passages concerning Buern Bucecarle, Gaimar is clearly setting up an opposition between the personalities of the two historical figures. Osberht's actions are disgusting and shameful and the audience must reject him in order to cheer for the noble and generous (and high-born) Buern.

---

[203] Here the raiding-army went from East Anglia over the mouth of the Humber to York city in Northumbria; and there was great discord of the nation among themselves, and they had thrown down their king Osberht and accepted Ælla, an unnatural king.

[204] The lady [meanwhile] was extremely distressed, and had turned quite pale with the shame of what the king had done and because the pain that this caused her. Lo and behold, back home comes Buern her husband, so generous hearted and of such nobility! Even though he customarily spent so much time at sea, there was no better or braver a person in either the country or the kingdom where he was born, nor was there anyone who came of a better family than his.

When his wife confesses to what occurred, Buern is provided another opportunity to indicate his generosity of spirit: "'Ja ad li reis od mei geü, / par force fist sa felunie. / Ore est dreiz ke perde la vie...'" (2656-2658).[205] Buern refuses the offer to kill his wife for this shame, and Gaimar clearly focuses the audience's anger towards Osberht and his corruption. Even though Buern achieves his vengeance by killing Osberht and many others with his Danish forces, Gaimar positions his personal strengths and the relationship between Buern and his wife above the moral issues of the cost of vengeance.

The romantic elements added to the chronological events of the *ASC* mark Gaimar's *Estoire* as a text that explores a new genre of history, what Rosalind Field calls "romance as history, history as romance." Histories like Gaimar's present a problem for the modern reader as they cross the lines between romance and history, frustrating the boundaries between each. Field argues, "Their evident factual inaccuracies irritate the historically minded reader, while their deviation from the norms of the genre disappoint the reader whose expectations are set by the courtly romances of France" (163). As they belong in many ways to both genres, the inaccuracies allow historians like Gaimar to project their own goals onto the work. For Gaimar, the romanticized imaginings of Anglo-Saxon history may not fit neatly into the courtly romance tradition, but they provide enough elements of the genre to keep the audience pleased. In essence, the romantic history or historical romance genre worked "to encourage assimilation rather than resistance or resentment, acceptance rather than rebellion, and from the Anglo-Norman side an exploitation of the Anglo-Saxon past" (Field 164). Gaimar's romantic *Estoire* negotiated a kind of peace between two different cultures and allowed the Normans to be more accepting of the neighbors who were once their enemies.

---

[205] "The King has just slept with me. He did it by force, just like the common criminal he is. It is only right now that I should lose my life..."

<u>Culturally Blended History</u>

For all the romantic elements of the *Estoire*, it must still relate the history of the island's numerous cultural epochs for the Norman audience. Elevating figures like Edgar and Buern to the status of romantic heroes makes them entertaining subjects in a text that would be somewhat removed from the expectations and values of twelfth-century Anglo-Normans. Yet, Gaimar must also educate the Normans on their place in the larger historiographic narrative of England. They, too, have taken part in the conquest and colonization of the isle, so they must also be inscribed into English, or in this case Saxon, history. Interestingly, part of Gaimar's historical project is not only to highlight the important cultural and historical influence of the Normans in the *Estoire* but also to make English history part of Norman history. In this way, he may blend both cultures into the historical landscape of England. Short contends, "By the end of Gaimar's chronicle, the Norman aristocracy is not only fully integrated into Insular history, but occupies the most prominent cultural position with it. The history of the English is now a legitimate part of the Norman heritage" (Short xlviii). By situating the Normans at the top of the historical ladder, having conquered the conquerors, Gaimar may ease the cultural hybridization of Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Saxon history.

Gaimar opens his history by discussing the repeated pattern of the conquest and domination for the disparate cultures of early English history. Of the Britons, he remarks on the possible conditions that led to their downfall:

> Este vus ci [un'] acheson
> dunt en travail entrent Breton,
> si funt Escoz e les Pictais,
> li Gawaleis e li Combreis:
> tel guere funt la gent estraigne
> en grant dolur entra Bretaigne.
> Li Angleis tuzjurs acreisseient
> car de ultremer sovent venaient:

cil de Seissoigne e de Alemaigne
s'ajust[ei]ent a lur compaigne; (17-26)[206]

The ethnic distinctions the author makes—Scots, Picts, Galwegians, and Cumbrians—are interesting choices. While Scots and Picts seem like different ethnic tribes of the Anglo-Saxon period, Galwegians and Cumbrians seem more like geographical descriptors. Gaimar might be referring to the Irish with Galwegians and Celtic Britons (Welsh) with Cumbrians. It is a mixture of seemingly Celtic ethnicities of the north and east; it is possible the author is referencing Celtic cultures he would have been most familiar with from his time in Lincolnshire. But Gaimar is drawing particular attention to the disruption on the island before the arrival of Normans, thus his various warring tribes are all of the Anglo-Saxon period. Gaimar also comments on how these changing ethnic and political conditions affect the social landscape of England: "tuzjurs sicom il conquera[i]ent, / des Engleis la reconuissaient: / la terre k'il vont conquerant / si l'apel[ei]ent Engeland. / Este vus ci un'acheson / parquei Bretaigne perdi son nun" (29-32).[207] Acccording to Gaimar, Britain, of the Britons, became England for the Anglo-Saxon conquerors.

Interestingly, Gaimar avoids the trap of displaying the Anglo-Saxons as a culture begging to be conquered. He does not, as Henry does in his *HA* or Geoffrey with the Britons in the *HRB*, claim that their demise was merely God's punishment for their wickedness. Instead he sets up a much smoother transition from English to Norman. But first, he actually makes the Scandinavian cultures occupying England admirable characters. As Short points out, "One of the more unexpected aspects of Gaimar's attitude to English history is his treatment of the Danes. Though

---

[206] One explanation for the increasing difficulties encountered by the Britons—and by the same token, the Scots, the Picts, the Galwegians, and the Cumbrians—is that Britain entered a period of hardship as a result of ever greater incursions by foreign armies. The numbers of English kept on increasing as, time and time again, they arrived from overseas, and their ranks were swelled by invaders from Saxony and Germany.

[207] As the conquests increased, they more and more acknowledged the land under conquest as being that of the English, and therefore called it England. This is one explanation of why Britain lost its name.

they can, at times, as perennial raiders and plunderers of England's shores, fulfill the role of traditional villains...they can also appear in a significantly more positive light" (Short xliii). One prime example of Gaimar's habit of emphasizing the nobility and heroism of the Danes is found in his retelling of the legend of Havelok the Dane. In doing so, he adds to the nobility of the island's history and to the Normans, who were able to conquer such great warriors.

Gaimar's *Estoire* opens with the rulers who succeed King Arthur, and while Arthur is not present in this history, the effects of his kingship are felt by the Danes. The history of the Britons may be missing, but the story of Havelok becomes a connection between these two cultures. The legend itself is quite romantic in its scope and, in fact, spawned a Middle English Lay, *Havelok*, or the *Lay of Havelok the Dane*. Havelok's story occupies a significant portion of the *Estoire*. The interlude deals with issues of succession, as Havelok is the rightful heir to the throne, but he is blocked from his position by a treacherous villain. The Danes, as Gaimar recounts, blame Arthur for the loss of their kingdoms: "Meis li Daneis mult les häeinet / pur lur parenz ki morz estaient / es batailles kë Artur fist / contre Modret k'il puis oscist" (37-40).[208] The kingdom is separately ruled by two kings, Adelbriht, a Dane, and Edelsi, a Briton; the two even join families as Edelsi has his sister marry Adelbriht. However, upon Adelbriht's death, the treacherous Edelsi schemes to take the inherited crown from Adelbriht's rightful heirs: "Oiez ke fit cel felons reis: / pur l'erité k'il coveitat / sa nece [donc] mesmarïat; / il la donat a un garçon / ki Cuheran aveit a nun; / pur ço k'abeisser la voleit / se purpensa k'il li durreit" (98-104).[209] Edelsi seemingly cheats his niece, Argentille, out of her inheritance, but a series of prophetic dreams reveal to the

---

[208] The Danes, however, felt great hatred for them because their relatives had died in the battles that Arthur had waged against Mordred, whom he subsequently killed.

[209] Just hear what this criminal king [Edelsi] did! To keep for himself the inheritance which he coveted, he proceeded to marry his niece to someone of inferior rank: he gave her to a serving lad who was called Cuaran. His desire to degrade her explains his decision to give her to him.

debased princess the true nature of her lowly husband. Cuaran is actually Havelok, the son of

Gunter, a legitimate king of Denmark whose kingdom was conquered by King Arthur. Gunter

died in battle with Arthur, making Havelok his rightful heir. Havelok returns to Denmark to

reclaim his throne, successfully battling the evil King Edulf, and once Edelsi dies, both he and

Argentille rule Denmark and England.

Ultimately, Havelok's historical representation is honorable, brave, and admirable. Before

Gaimar reveals that Cuaran is Havelok, he describes the Dane in glowing terms despite his

menial work and low-born status:

> Cil Cuheran estait quistrun,
> mes mult par ert bel valetun:
> bel vis aveit e bele[s] mains,
> cors eschevi, süef e plains, —
> li sons semblanz ert tut tens lez —
> beles jambes out e bels piez.
> Mes pur ço quë hardi estait
> e volunters se combateit,
> n'aveit valet en la meison,
> si lui feseit ahataison
> e sur lui començast mellees,
> k'il nel rüeit jambes levees. (105-116).[210]

He has both fine physical features, a good temperament, and a reputation as a fearless fighter.

Gaimar describes his nobility of character as both a means of hinting to his origins and providing

a competing hero to Geoffrey's King Arthur. Overall, "The story also depicts a wrongful king

being counseled by his men to do right and make peace rather than fight, and it shows secular

aristocrats being faithful to good lords, defying bad ones, advising kings in the ways of peace,

and coordinating the succession of kingdoms dutifully" (Dalton, "Geffrei" 434). In this way,

---

[210] This Cuaran did menial work in the sculleries, but was an extremely handsome young man: he had a beautiful face and fine hands, a slim body with soft and smooth skin, shapely legs, and delicate feet. He was always of a cheerful disposition. But because he was fearless and enjoyed fighting, anyone in the household who dared challenge him or get into a scrap with him ended up on the ground with his legs in the air.

Havelok story's favors peace over war, which makes the character even more commendable and reflects well on his cultural background. Unlike the treachery and uncertainty of the war between Matilda and Stephen, Havelok's story represents a clear right side and wrong side to the civil dispute, making this a blending of the romance of Havelok with a political message about the right way to handle disputes over succession. Havelok is the rightful ruler and takes his kingdom back with the aid of his loyal lords and counselors. Such loyalty could not be seen in the apparent betrayal of Matilda when the lords and other members of the aristocracy supported her cousin Stephen. However, it is much easier within this narrative space to ascribe labels like right and wrong, legitimate and illegitimate. There are evil kings and good kings in this romantic narrative, labels which were not as easily placed in Gaimar's contextual period, or at least not done so lightly. Gaimar cannot directly choose a side in the conflict between Matilda and Stephen, so he avoids mentioning this portion of history. However, historical episodes like Havelok's indicate where his authorial sympathies lie, if only in his narrative of English history.

Just as compelling as Gaimar's use of Havelok is the inclusion of Hereward the Wake [c.1035-c.1072],[211] a historical figure who actively fought against the Normans. After the Norman Conquest, Hereward leads a group of English outlaws who rebel against the king. Their deeds are infamous as they move from town to town, plundering and destroying:

> Une cité unt asaille:
> Burg asaillirent cil forsait,
> bientost en fu li mur tut frait;
> entrent dedenz, assez unt pris
> or e argnet e veir e gris;
> altre herneis i out assez,

---

[211] Gaimar may be drawing from several sources for this tale. Hereward is mentioned in the *Domesday Book*, the Peterborough Chronicle (*ASC*), and the *Gesta Herewardi*, a Latin text ca. 1109-31. Gaimar's version includes episodes unique to his *Estoire*.

        la chose as moignes unt tensez. (5556-62)[212]

Clearly, they are very successful outlaws, and their actions negatively impact the new political

regime in England. Gaimar seems almost indifferent to the criminal activities of Hereward:

"K'en diraie? Par plusurs anz / tint Hereard contre Normans.../ En plusurs lius issi avint /

k'encontre seit tresbien se tint; / de seit homes aveit vertu, / unc plus hardi ne fu veü" (5571-

90).[213] Gaimar does not pass any moral judgments on Hereward's actions; in fact, he does not

even set up a clear opposition between Normans and English. Instead, he comments on the

absolute strength and resilience of this outlaw hero.

        Eventually, however, Hereward cannot occupy the same space as law-abiding citizens.

His exile and eventual death at the hands of Norman knights rights the social order. After

securing a truce with William, Hereward visits Ælfthryth upon her request, but while dining, he

is attacked by Normans who break the truce. Although he fights admirably, Hereward is

ultimately defeated:

Meis quatre en vindrent a son dos
ki l'ont feru parmi le cors:
od quatre lances l'ont feru,
…………………………….
Mais Halselin [le] paroscist,
cist Hereward, le chef en prist,
si jura Deu e sa vertu,
e li alter ki l'unt veü
par mainte faiz l'ont for juré
ke unc si hardi ne fu trové,
e s'il oust od lui tells trais,
mar i entrassent les Franceis,
e s'il ne fust oscis,

---

[212] One fortified town in particular they attacked—for their sins—[and this was Peterborough.] The wall was breached in less than no time, and once inside they seized a vast amount of gold, silver, and miniver-lined cloaks. There was a great deal of other booty too, though they did place the property of the monks under special protection.

[213] What more should I say? For several years, Hereward held out against the Normans....The same thing happened in several different places: [Hereward], having the strength of seven men, would easily stand his ground against seven assailants. A braver fighter than he was never seen.

tuz le chasçat fors del pais. (5677-5700)[214]

Although Hereward is defeated, the Norman knights proclaim his bravery and skill as a fighter. Gaimar's final words on Hereward, although complimentary, indicate what danger the rebel was to the Norman elite. If he was not killed, he might have prevented the Normans from conquering the island. Ultimately, it is his lawlessness that dooms him. Zatta claims, "The stories of Gaimar's outlaw heroes reflect a political vision that is consistent with the values and aspirations of the class to which his patrons belonged...far from underlining the value of legality or exalting rebellion, Gaimar's chronicle affirms the value of the law over force at every turn" (28). Lawfulness trumps heroism in these situations, so even a brave character like Hereward cannot be saved in the historical narrative.

Clearly, Gaimar creates rather positive portrayals of Anglo-Saxon characters, but that fact does not lead him to paint them as the unfortunate victims of the cruel Normans. In fact, "The Danish bias gives way to a pro-English stance in Gaimar's post-Conquest sections" (Short xliv). The definitive change between Saxon and Norman, the Conquest of 1066, places the Normans in control but also begins to de-emphasize the importance of ethnicity and political allegiances. Gaimar marks a smooth transition from Saxon to Norman by focusing on personalities not ethnicities: "For Gaimar, this date [1066] formed an orderly transference of dominion, made more natural by the correspondence of English and Norman personalities. Having achieved transition, Gaimar defined Norman men and women by their actions, and not by their ethnic or geographic origins" (Freeman 202). Hereward's heroic characteristics cause him trouble as he

---

[214] But four others came up from behind him and thrust four spears right into his body…It was, however, Halsalin who administered the final blow by decapitating Hereward. He swore by God and all his saints, as did the others who had seen Hereward and likewise often repeated the same solemn oath, that a braver man than he was never to be found. Even if he had had three companions with him, the French would have been ill-advised to go in after him, and if he had not been killed in the way he was, Hereward would have succeeded in expelling them all from the country.

continues to advocate and fight for a specific cultural identity, the Saxons. Once the shift from Saxon to Norman dominion has occurred, the Normans of Gaimar's history focus less on their ethnicity and more on their heroic acts. The Norman "characters" of history are not treated with any more animosity than the Saxon ones.

For Gaimar, it really is the character of a historical figure that matters far above his ethnic background. This can be clearly seen in his depiction of William II. From the start, Gaimar is complimentary: "Celui refu mult alosé, / Engleis, Normanz l'ont coruné / tant [com] li ducs alat conquere, / sin firent reis en Engletere, / e il la tint e bel regnat, / Normanz, Engleis fort justisat / Tote la tere mist en pes" (5777-5783).[215] His reign appears to be a peaceful one due to his ability to effectively rule over the Normans and English with a strong will. His personal retinue of kings and mercenaries is also described in a positive light: "Il out de prive[e] meisn[e], / mil e seit cenz cele faiee. / Tuz erent riches chevalers; / sachez li reis les aveit chers. / Les chevalers k'il [re]teneit / en poi de tens bien lur feseit: / riches erent, bien aturnez, / entr'els n'aveit pas povertez, / mes richement veniet li reis / come prodome e [com] curtais" (5841-5850).[216] In Gaimar's *Estoire*, the king and his knights represent the standard for courtly monarchs. His personality and court are described in such a way that they elevate him to the status of one of the greatest kings of British and English history (no matter whose side he promotes), Arthur: "The description of Rufus's court seems to imply a comparison with King Arthur's" (Gransden 211).

---

[215] A man of high renown, likewise, he was crowned by the English and the Normans while duke Robert was away fighting, and he was made king in England [in 1087]. He ruled the kingdom well and fittingly during his reign. He exercised strong government over the Normans and the English and established peace throughout the whole land.
[216] The king's domestic household, which numbered seventeen hundred on this occasion, consisted exclusively of powerfully armed knights, and you can be sure that the king held them in special affection. He lost no time in recompensing those knights whom he retained in his service; they were well paid and highly equipped, and poverty was unknown within their ranks. The king's arrival was a truly splendid affair, as befitted a worthy and courtly monarch.

The comparison is a flattering one and gives some indication of Gaimar's opinion of the Normans, especially those with admirable personalities.

Conclusion – Multicultural History

History writing in Anglo-Norman England often involved a lot of cultural appropriation, especially on the part of the Normans. As mentioned in the chapter on Henry, Davies' *The Normans and their Myth* indicates how the Normans "project" themselves into the early history of England as means of appropriating the English culture as part of their own. He claims that the ethnicity of the Normans is mostly tied to their place of origin as their culture moves and adopts the cultural features of its new home. Indeed, "The listeners to Gaimar's narrative were responding to their cultural displacement by putting down new roots for themselves in the past of their adoptive homeland. Claiming the cults of the Anglo-Saxon saints as their own was merely an extension of the same process" (Short, *Estoire* xlix). This process can be seen in the composition of Gaimar's *Estoire*. Through their patronage of poets and clerics like Gaimar, twelfth-century Anglo-Normans, like Constance Fitz Gilbert, were trying to inscribe their own identity in the literary landscape of English history.

Gaimar's history moves beyond merely adding to the complexity of Norman identity and history and actually creates a multicultural history that successfully hybridizes the English and Norman cultures. Short points out, "Historiography was, in this respect, a tool for a continual process of rearticulating and redefining a wide range of cultural allegiances across several centuries" (xlix). History writing becomes the right space in which to define and articulate the real identity (culturally, politically, and socially) of twelfth-century England. At this time, there would have been threads of Anglo-Saxon, Danish, Welsh, and Norman cultural elements throughout England. A conquest like the one in 1066 does not wipe all the customs, languages,

and histories of these disparate ethnicities from the land. What remains must be reconciled with the new order, and Gaimar uses his *Estoire* to do just this. In utilizing both Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman sources, Gaimar found a literary common ground, as Short calls it (xlix). Peaceful resolutions abound in the *Estoire* despite the disparate cultures that fought against one another.

In addition, Gaimar's use of the romantic conventions of the period allowed him to explore history in a way that made it both pleasing and educational for his Norman audience. In his article on the Gaimar's *Estoire*, Dalton claims, "Infused with chivalric and literary conventions and concepts, it was a history designed not only to appeal to the interests and concerns of contemporary aristocrats but also to show them some of the methods, virtues, and benefits of peacemaking and some of the disastrous consequences of conflict" (Dalton, "Geffrei" 431). The entertaining parts of Geffrei's romantic vision of Anglo-Saxon history may have made it easier for the audience to accept the deeper underlying message: conflict, whether it be over issues of ethnicity or succession, leads to grave and unhappy endings.

Conclusion: History, Memory, and the Crafting of Identity

Kazuo Ishigiro's recent novel *The Buried Giant* crafts a fictional portrait of England after the Saxon conquest of the Britons. The protagonists, Axl and Beatrice, wander their medieval village in a fog of forgetfulness, living in seeming peace with the Saxon invaders despite the recent bloody conflict. The forgetfulness or "oblivion" of the novel is revealed to be caused by a magical fog exhaled by the dragon Querig so the Saxons and Britons could move forward past their differences. The "buried giant" of the title is their resentment, hostility, and desire for vengeance. This novel's mist of historical amnesia becomes an allegory for the real historical confrontation between the conquered and the conquerors, which Axl, Beatrice, and their Saxon companion Wistan must confront when Querig is finally slain. Writers like Geoffrey, Laʒamon, Henry, and Geffrei may be writing in the context of a different conquest, but they contend with the same cultural anxiety that exists for these earlier British and English people. They may not always confront the true memories of the past, but they provide another means of mediating the cultural conflict of conquest—history.

History writing in the medieval period may have differed from our contemporary period, as today's readers demand more authenticity, accuracy, and authority in the texts, but in many ways, the process still exists as a means of smoothing out the rough edges of the past and all its conflicts. Recently, history textbooks in Texas caused controversy by re-casting the role of slavery in American history. The glossing over of the serious crimes committed against a race of people indicates that modern historians are not immune to the same rhetorical techniques used by medieval writers. All of the writers in this dissertation have a purpose for composing their histories and revise the chronology of the past into a clear narrative that fits their goals.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB* provides a glorified history of the Britons/Welsh that at times seems to elevate their status and perhaps suggest a future uprising for the native inhabitants of

the island. But this representation is for narrative purposes only, adding to the history and cultural value of England. The story of the Britons and King Arthur provides a valuable cultural commodity for the Normans to appropriate as they conquer the island. It also serves as a reminder to avoid the civil disputes that ruined the Welsh. Geoffrey's most pressing concern as a historian is carving out a space for himself in the historiographic landscape. He refers directly to his rivals as a means of establishing his historical space. In this way, he wishes to gain the favor of Norman patron with this appealing mythological history of the Britons. His *HRB* paves the way for future historians to use the Arthurian story as part of the English narrative and also begins the shift from history to romance in medieval literature.

La3amon and Geffrei Gaimar pick up on Geoffrey's shift to the romantic tradition; they use the history of England as means to highlight the individual instead of the collective. While La3amon's *Brut* carries on Geoffrey's Arthurian history more directly, Gaimar likely also used the *HRB*'s mythological origins of the Britons to start his mostly English *Estoire*. Each of these authors use the vernacular (Middle English for La3amon and Old French for Gaimar) to translate and transform the narrative of English history into the Anglo-Norman tradition. In pulling from Welsh, Saxon, and Norman influences, these authors create a culturally hybridizes vision of Anglo-Norman identity through their romantic histories.

Of all the historians, Henry of Huntingdon seems the most concerned with providing an accurate accounting of the history of England, using accepted and respected sources and his own lived experience of history to continuously revise his history. His *HA* also emphasizes religious morality more so than his contemporaries; it becomes a means of organizing his history into various plagues and punishments from God that shift the political and cultural landscape from one ethnic group to another. The *HA* covers so much of the ancient and contemporary history of

England that Henry is actually able to narrate the moment when post-Conquest anxieties began to dissolve. When he refers to the *gens Normannorum et Anglorum*, the distinctions which divided Saxons and Normans seem to be resolved in a nationalistic narrative of English history. He is crafting the history of shared collective identity, through his reference to Bishop Alexander of the history of *nostre* people and not those of disparate tribes.

History has no agenda, and it is the process of narrating the events of the past that is so fascinating in twelfth-century England. The creative process of narrating history allows each author to craft the story of England from Anglo-Saxon to Anglo-Norman. To understand what motivated their decisions to use some sources and not others, to highlight some events while obscuring others, and to dedicate their works to prominent Anglo-Norman figures is a key component to this dissertation's analysis of the rhetorical goals of each historian. For the historians in this dissertation, the goals differed in many ways: Geoffrey wanted to establish his historical voice while crafting a history that amplified the ethnic distinctions between the Saxons and the Britons to mediate the transition to Norman rule, providing him the opportunity to curry favor with prominent Anglo-Norman patrons. Laȝamon and Gaimar crafted a culturally blended romantic vision of England, making the Normans a part of Anglo-Saxon history through the use of the Norman themes and literary techniques. Henry brought order to the disparate cultures under his organizing principles. And yet, all four succeeded in crafting a unique perspective on the past that narrated the transformation of England from British to Anglo-Saxon to Anglo-Norman, and, eventually to English. In performing these close readings and contextual analyses of each history, I was able to pinpoint "the moment of transition," as Otter calls it, and the formation of English identity, as well as the movement from history writing into romantic writing.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Bede. *Historiæ ecclesiasticæ gentis anglorum*, 1723. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*,

    find.galegroup.com.proxy.lib.utk.edu:90/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&docLevel=FASCI

    MILE&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=knox61277&tabID=T001&docId=CW331898919

    2&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0. Accessed 13 Dec. 2010.

Cartularium monasterii de Rameseia. Vol 3. Edited by W.H. Hart and P.A. Lyons. Cambridge

    University Press, 2012. 3 vols.

Fitz Nigel, Richard. *Dialogus de Scaccario*. Ed. and Trans. Emilie Amt. Clarendon Press, 2007.

Freeland, Jane Patricia, trans. Ed. Marsha L. Dutton. *Ælred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works*.

    Cistercian Publications, 2005.

Geoffrey of Monmouth. *De gestis Britonum* [*Historia Regum Britanniae*]. Ed. Michael Reeve.

    Trans. Neil Wright. The Boydell Press, 2007.

---. *The Prophetiæ Merlini of Geoffrey of Monmouth: A Fifteenth Century English Commentary*.

    Ed. Caroline D. Eckhardt. Medieval Academy of America, 1982.

---. *Vita Merlini*. Ed. Basil Fulford Lowther Clarke. University of Wales Press, 1973. Print.

Geffrei Gaimar. *Estoire des Engleis*. Ed. and Trans. Ian Short. Oxford University Press, 2009.

Gildas. *De excidio Britanniæ*. Llanerch Press, 2006.

Henry of Huntingdon. *Historia Anglorum*. Ed. and Trans. Diana Greenway. Clarendon Press,

    1996.

Irvine, Susan, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*. Vol 7. D.S. Brewer,

    2004. 17 vols.

John of Salisbury. *The Letters of John of Salisbury*. Vol 1. Eds. W.J. Millor, H.E. Butler, and

    C.N.L. Oxford Medieval Texts, 1979. 2 vols.

Laȝamon. *Brut (British Museum Ms. Cotton Caligula A.IX). Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. University of Michigan, 1993. http://name.umdl.umich.edu/LayCal. Accessed 12 Dec. 2012.

Laȝamon. *Brut (British Museum Ms. Cotton Otho C.XIII). Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*. University of Michigan, 1993. http://name.umdl.umich.edu/LayOtho. Accessed. 12 Dec. 2012.

Orderic Vitalis. *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*. Ed. Marjorie Chibnall. Oxford Medieval Texts, 1969-1980. 6 Vols.

Wace. *Roman de Brut: A History of the British*. Ed. and Trans. Judith Weiss. University of Exeter Press, 1999.

---. *The History of the Norman People: Wace's Roman de Rou*. Eds. Glyn S. Burgess and Elizabeth M.C. Van Houts. Boydell Press, 2004.

William of Malmesbury. *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*. Vol 1. Eds. R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom. Clarendon Press, 1999. 2 vols.

William of Newburgh. *Historia Regum Anglicarum*. 1856. Vol 1. Ed. Hans Claude Hamilton. Kraus Reprint Ltd., 1964. 2 vols.

Wright, Neil, ed. *The Historia regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth*. D.S Brewer, 1984.

Wright, Thomas, ed. *The Anglo-Norman Metrical Chronicle of Geoffrey Gaimar*. 1850 Burt Franklin, 1967.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Rosamund. *Lawman: Brut.* Dent, 1992.

Allen, Rosamund, Jane Roberts, and Carole Weinberg. *Reading Laȝamon's Brut*. Rodopi, 2013.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of*

Nationalism. Verso, 1991.

Appleby, John T. *The Troubled Reign of King Stephen*. Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1970.

Ashe, Geoffrey. "The Origins of the Arthurian Legend." *Arthuriana*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1995, pp. 1–
24. www.jstor.org/stable/27869122. Accessed 13 September 2010.

Bainton, Henry. "Translating the 'English' Past: Cultural Identity in the *Estoire des Engleis*."
Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England c. 1100-c.1500. Ed.
Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, et al. York Medieval Press, 2009, pp. 179-187.

Barron, W.R.J. *English Medieval Romance*. Longman Publishing Group, 1987.

---. "Arthurian Romance Traces of an English Tradition." *English Studies*, vol. 61, no. 1, 1980, p.
2. *Academic Search Complete,* an: 7895975. Accessed 10 Jan. 2012.

---. "The Idiom and the Audience of Laȝamon's *Brut*." *Laȝamon: Contexts, Language, and
Interpretation*. Ed. Rosamund Allen, Lucy Perry, and Jane Roberts. King's College London
Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2002.

Barron, W.R.J and S.C. Weinberg, eds. *Laȝamon Brut or Hystoria Brutonum.* Longman Group
Limited, 1995.

Bartlett, R.J. *History and Historians: Selected Papers of R.W. Southern*. Blackwell, 2004.

---. "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity." *Journal of
Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2001, pp. 39-56. *Academic Search
Complete,* an: 4813358. Accessed 20 Oct. 2010.

Bartlett, Robert. *Gerald of Wales, 1146-1223*. Clarendon Press, 1982.

Bell, Alexander, ed. *Geffrei Gaimar's L'estoire des Engles*. Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1960.

---. "Gaimar's Patron: 'Raul Le Fiz Gilbert.'" *Notes and Queries*, vol. 12, no. 8, 1921, pp. 104-
105.

---. "Notes on Gaimar's Military Vocabulary," *Medium Ævum*, vol. 40, no. 2, 1971, pp. 93-103.

Bell, Kimberly. "Merlin as Historian in 'Historia Regum Britanniae,'" *Arthuriana,* vol. 10, no. 1, 2000, pp. 14–26. *JSTOR,* www.jstor.org/stable/27869518. Accessed 3 March 2013.

Bhabha, Homi. K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.

Brennan, John, P. "Rebirth of a Nation? Historical Mythmaking in Laȝamon's Brut." *Essays in Medieval Studies*, vol. 17, 2001, pp. 19-33.

Brook, G.L. and R.F. Leslie, eds. *Laȝamon*'s *Brut*. Early English Text Society and Oxford University Press, 1963-1978. 2 vols.

Brown, Arthur C. L. "Welsh Traditions in Laȝamon's *Brut*." *Modern Philology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1903, pp. 95–103. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/432426. Accessed 15 Oct. 2010.

Bzdyl, Donald G, ed. and trans. *Layamon's Brut: A History of the Britons*. Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1989.

Campbell, James. "Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past." *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland*, vol. 3, 1984, pp. 131-150.

Chibnall, Marjorie. *The Debate on the Norman Conquest*. Manchester University Press, 1999.

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, ed. *Cultural Diversity in the British Middle Ages: Archipelago, Island, England*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Crouch, David. *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*. Longman, 2000.

Curley, Michael. *Geoffrey of Monmouth*. Twayne Publishers, 1994.

Dalton, Paul. "The Date of Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, the Connections of his Patrons, and the Politics of Stephen's Reign." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 42 no. 1, 2007, pp. 23-47. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/cr.2007.0020. Accessed 4 November 2010.

---. "Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, Peacemaking, and the 'Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation.'" *Studies in Philology*, vol. 104 no. 4, 2007, pp. 427-454. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/sip.2007.0015. Accessed 4 November 2010.

---. "The Topical Concerns of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*: History, Prophecy, Peacemaking, and English Identity in the Twelfth Century." *Journal of British Studies*, vol 44, no. 4, 2005, pp. 688-712. *JSTOR*, doi:10.1086/431937. Accessed. 25 October 2010.

---. "Espec, Walter." *Oxford Dictionary of National Bibliography*. Oxford University Press. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8885?docPos=1. Accessed 10 Sept. 2013.

Davies, R.R. *Domination and Conquest: The Experience of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, 1100-1300*. Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Davis, R.H.C. *The Normans and their Myth*. Thames and Hudson, 1976.

Donoghue, Daniel. "Laʒamon's Ambivalence." *Speculum*, vol 95, no. 3, 1990, pp. 537-563. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/2864034. Accessed 15 Oct. 2010.

Dumville, David. "Essex, Middle Anglia and the Expansion of Mercia in the South-East Midlands." *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*. Ed. Steven Bassett. Leicester University Press, 1989. pp. 123-40.

Echard, Siân. "'For Mortals are Moved by these Conditions': Fate, Fortune and Providence in Geoffrey of Monmouth." *Arthurian Studies LXIV: The Fortunes of King Arthur*. Ed. Norris J. Lacy. D.S. Brewer, 2005. pp. 13-28.

Edwards, Kathleen. *The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages*. Manchester University Press and Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1967.

Faletra, Michael. "Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the

Norman Colonization of Wales." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2000, pp. 60-85.

JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/25096117. Accessed 25 Oct. 2010.

---. "Once and Future Britons: The Welsh in Lawman's Brut." *Medievalia et*

Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture, vol. 28, 2002, pp. 1-23.

Field, Rosalind. "Romance as history, history as romance." *Romance in Medieval England*. Eds.

Maldwyn Mills, Jennifer Fellows, and Carol M. Meale. D.S. Brewer, 1991. pp. 163-173.

Finlayson, John. "Definitions of Middle English Romance." *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 15, no. 1,

1980, pp. 44-62. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25093749. Accessed 13 June 2015.

Frankis, John. "Laȝamon Or the Lawman? A Question of Names, a Poet and an

Unacknowledged Legislator." *Leeds Studies in English*, vol. 34, 2003, pp. 109-32.

---. "Towards a Regional Context for Lawman's *Brut*: literary activity in the dioceses

of Worcester and Hereford in the twelfth century." *Laȝamon: Contexts, Languages, and*

Intepretation. Eds. Rosamund Allen, Lucy Perry, and Jane Roberts. King's College London

Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 2002. pp. 53-77.

Freeman, Elizabeth. "Geffrei Gaimar, Vernacular Historiography, and the Assertion of

Authority." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 93, no. 2, 1996, pp. 188-206. *JSTOR*,

www.jstor.org/stable/4174545. Accessed 15 Oct 2010.

Galbraith, V.H. "Nationality and Language in Medieval England." *Transactions of the Royal*

Historical Society, 4th Series, vol. 23, 1941, pp. 113-128. *JSTOR,* doi:10.2307/3678656.

Accessed 1 Nov. 2010.

Geary, Patrick. "Ethnic Identity as a Situational Construct in the Early Middle Ages." *Medieval*

Perspectives, vol. 3, no. 2, 1988, pp. 1-17.

Georgianna, Linda. "Periodization and Politics: The Case of the Missing Twelfth Century

in English Literary History." *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 64, no. 2, 2003, pp. 153-68. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/42782. Accessed 25 Oct. 2010.

---. "Coming to Terms with the Norman Conquest: Nationalism and English Literary History*." Literature and the Nation*. Ed. Brook Thomas. Narr, 1998. pp. 33–53.

Gibbs, A.C. *The Literary Relationships of Laʒamon's Brut*. University of Cambridge, 1963.

Gillingham, John. "Contexts and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain." *Anglo-Norman Studies: Proceedings of the Battle Conference*. Ed. Marjorie Chibnall. The Boydell Press, 1991, pp. 99-118.

---. "Gaimar, the Prose Brut and the Making of English History." *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values*. The Boydell Press, 2000, pp. 113-122.

---. "Henry of Huntingdon and the Twelfth-Century Revival of the English Nation." *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values*. The Boydell Press, 2000, pp. 123-144.

---. *Richard the Lionheart*. Times Books, 1978.

Golding, Brian. *Conquest and Colonisation: The Normans in Britain, 1066-1100*. Palgrave McMillan, 2001.

Gransden, Antonia. *Historical Writing in England: c.500 to c. 1307*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.

Greenway, D. E. "Henry of Huntingdon (*c*.1088–*c*.1157)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press. http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12970. Accessed. 11 June 2012.

Greenway, Diana E. "Henry of Huntingdon and the Manuscripts of his *Historia Anglorum*."

Anglo-Norman Studies IX: Proceedings of the Battle Conference. Ed. R. Allen Brown. The

Boydell Press, 1986, pp. 103-26.

---. "Authority, Convention, and Observation in Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*."

Anglo-Norman Studies XVIII: Proceedings of the Battle Conference, 1995. The Boydell

Press, 1996, pp. 105-21.

Hahn, Thomas. "The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the

Modern World." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2001, pp. 1-

37. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/16479. Accessed 1 Sept. 2010.

Hanning, Robert W. *The Vision of History in Early Britain: from Gildas to Geoffrey*. Columbia

University Press, 1966.

Hinckely, H.B. "The Date of Laʒamon's *Brut*." *Anglia: Journal of English Philology*, vol. 56,

1932, pp. 43-57. *Reference Global Journals,* doi:10.1515/angl.1932.1932.56.43 Accessed 7

May 2015.

Holt, J.C. "1153: The Treaty of Winchester." *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*. Ed.

Edmund King. Clarendon Press, 1994. pp. 291-316.

Howlett, D.R. "The Literary Context of Geoffrey of Monmouth: An Essay on the

Fabrication of Sources." *Arthuriana*, vol.5, no. 3, 1995, pp. 25-69. *JSTOR,*

www.jstor.org/stable/27869123. Accessed 25 Oct. 2010.

Ingledew, Francis. "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The

Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*.'" *Speculum*, vol. 69, no. 3,

1994, pp. 665-704. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/3040847. Accessed 25 Oct. 2010.

Ker, N.R, ed. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. EETS. Oxford University Press, 1963.

King, Edmund, ed. *The Anarchy of King Stephen's Reign*. Clarendon Press, 1994.

---. *King Stephen*. Yale University Press, 2010.

Kleinman, Scott. "The Legend of Havelok the Dane and the Historiography of East Anglia."
Studies in Philology, vol. 100, no. 3, 2003, pp. 245-277. *Project Muse*,
doi:10.1353/sip.2003.0012. Accessed 6 Feb. 2013.

Lavezzo, Kathy. *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Le Saux, Françoise. *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and Its Sources.* D.S. Brewer, 1989.

---. *A Companion to Wace*. D.S. Brewer, 2005.

Leckie Jr., R. William. *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the
Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century*. University of Toronto Press, 1981.

Legge, M. Dominica. "Clerc Lisant." *Modern Language Review* 47.4 (1952): 554-556. Print.

---. "The Rise and Fall of Anglo-Norman Literature," *Mosaic*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1975, pp. 1-6.

Liebermann, F. "Heinrich von Huntingdon." *Forschungen zur Deutsehen Geschichte*, vol. 17,
1878, pp. 265-95.

Lloyd, John Edward. "Geoffrey of Monmouth." *The English Historical Review*, vol. 57, no. 228,
1942, pp. 460-468. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/554371. Accessed 13 Aug. 2011.

Lloyd, Lewis C. *Origins of Some Anglo-Norman Families*. Eds. Charles Travis Clay and David
C. Douglas. Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1975.

Loomis, Roger S. "Laȝamon's *Brut.*" *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages.* Ed. Roger S.
Loomis. Clarendon Press, 1959.

Madden, Sir Frederic, ed. *Laȝamon's Brut, or Chronicle of Britain; A Poetical Semi-Saxon
Paraphrase of The Brut of Wace*. Volume 1. The Society of Antiquaries of London, 1847. 2
vols.

Martin, C.T. and T.D. Hardy, eds. and trans. *L'Estoire des Engleis*. Rolls Series, 91. 1888-9.

Marvin, Julia. "Havelok in the Prose *Brut* Tradition." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 102, no. 3, 2005, pp. 280-306. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4174822. Accessed 25 Oct. 2010.

Morris, Rosemary. *The Character of King Arthur in Medieval Literature*. The Boydell Press, 1982.

Morse, Ruth. *Truth and Convention in the Middle Ages: Rhetoric, Representation, and Reality*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Otter, Monika. "1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest." *Speculum*, vol 74, no. 3, 1999, pp. 565-586. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/2886761. Accessed 25 Oct 2010.

---. "Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing*." Writing Medieval History: Theory and Practice for the Post-Traditional Middle Ages*. Ed. Nancy Parker. Hodder and Arnold, 2005, pp. 109-30.

---. *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing*. North Carolina University Press, 1996.

---. "*Prolixitas Temporum*: Futurity in Medieval Historical Narratives." *Reading Medieval Culture: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Hanning*. Eds. Robert Stein and Sandra Prior. University of Notre Dame Press, 2005, pp. 45-67.

MacDougall, Hugh A. *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons*. Harvest House, 1982.

Oakden, J.P. *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English*. Archon Books, 1968. 2 vols.

Page, William. "Parishes: Little Stukeley." *A History of the County of Huntingdon: Volume 2. British History Online.* Victoria County History, 2015. http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/hunts/vol2/pp234-238. Accessed 10 Nov. 2012.

Partner, Nancy F. "Henry of Huntingdon: Clerical Celibacy and the Writing of History." *Church History*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1973, pp. 467-475. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3164967. Accessed 6 June 2015.

---. *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth Century England*. University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Perry, Lucy. "Origins and Originality: Reading Lawman's Brut and the Rejection of British Library MS Cotton Otho C. Xiii." *Arthuriana*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2000, pp. 66-90. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27869544. Accessed 15 Dec. 2011.

Pilch, Herbert. *Layamon's Brut*. *Eine literaische Studie*. Carl Winter, 1960.

Platts, Graham. *History of Lincolnshire IV: Land and People in Medieval Lincolnshire*. The History of Lincolnshire Committee, 1985.

Press, A.R. "The Precocious Courtesy of Geoffrey Gaimar." *Court and Poet: Selected Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society*. F. Cairns. 1981, pp. 270-3.

Rigg, A.C. "Henry of Huntingdon's Metrical Experiments." *Journal of Medieval Latin*, vol. 1, 1991, pp. 60-72. *BrePols Online*, doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1484/J.JML.2.303954. Accessed 17 Dec. 2015.

Salter, H.E. "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Oxford." *English Historical Review*, vol. 34, no. 135, 1919, pp. 382-385. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/551071. Accessed 13 Aug. 2011.

Sawyer, P.H. *From Roman Britain to Norman England*. Routledge, 1998.

Short, Ian. "Gaimar's Epilogue and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Liber vetustissimus*." *Speculum*, vol. 69, no. 2, 1994, pp. 323-343. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/2865085. Accessed 16 Oct. 2010.

Southern, R.W. "Presidential Address: Aspects of the European Tradition of Historical Writing:

4. The Sense of the Past." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 23, 1973, pp. 243–263. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/3678880. Accessed 7 Oct. 2012.

Stanley, E G. "The Date of Laȝamon's Brut." *Notes and Queries*, vol. 15, 1968, pp. 85-8.

---. "Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments." *Medium Ævum*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1969, pp. 23–37. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/43627501. Accessed. 3 Nov. 2011.

---, ed. *The Owl and the Nightingale*. Nelson's Medieval and Renaissance Library, 1960.

Stephen, Leslie, Sir, 1832-1904. *Dictionary of National Biography*. Smith, Elder, & co. *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, 18851901. Accessed 4 March 2010.

Tatlock, J.S.P. *The Legendary History of Britian*. University of California Press, 1950.

"The Norman and Angevin/Plantagenet Kings." *Panther File*. University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. http://hoocher.com/Henry_II_of_England/Norman_Plantagenet_Kings.gif. Accessed 19 Nov. 2015. Gif file.

Thomas, Hugh M. *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity, 1066c-1220*. University Press, 2003.

---. *The Norman Conquest: England after William the Conqueror*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008.

Thomson, R.M. *Catalogue of the Manuscripts of Lincoln Cathedral Chapter Library*. D.S. Brewer, 1989.

Tiller, Kenneth J. "Anglo-Norman Historiography and Henry of Huntingdon's Translation of *The Battle of Brunanburh*." *Studies in Philology*, vol. 109, no. 3, 2012, pp. 173-191. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41511144. Accessed 23 Aug. 2012.

---. *Laȝamon's Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History*. University of Wales Press, 2007.

---. "The Truth Bi Arðure Þan Kinge: Arthurs Role in Shaping Lawman's Vision of History."

Arthuriana, vol. 10, no. 2, 2000, pp. 27-49. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27869542.

Accessed 2 Feb. 2012.

Tupper, Frederick. "Notes on Old English Poems." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*,

vol. 11, no. 1, 1912, pp. 82-103. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27700143. Accessed 25 May

2016.

Turner, Ralph. *King John*. Longman, 1994.

Warren, Michelle R. *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300*.

University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Warren, W.L. *King John*. University of California Press, 1978. Print.

Webber, Nick. *The Evolution of Norman Identity: 911-1154*. The Boydell Press, 2005.

White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century England.*

The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Wogan-Browne, Jocelyn. *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England

c.1100-1500*. York Medieval, 2009.

Wickham-Crowley, Kelley. *Writing the Future: Laȝamon's Prophetic History*. University of

Wales Press, 2002.

Wyld, Henry Cecil. "Studies in the Diction of Layamon's Brut." *Language*, vol. 6, no.1, 1930,

pp. 1-24. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/409171. Accessed 13 June 2015.

Zatta, Jane. "Gaimar's Rebels: Outlaw Heroes and the Creation of Authority in Twelfth-Century

England," *Essays in Medieval Studies*, vol. 16, 1999, pp. 27-37.

Further Reading

Blacker, Jean and Glyn S. Burgess. *Wace: A Critical Bibliography*. Société Jersiaise, 2008.

Bratu, Cristian, "Translatio, autorité et affirmation de soi chez Gaimar, Wace et Benoît de Sainte-Maure." *The Medieval Chronicle*, vol 8, 2013, pp. 135-16

Everett, Dorothy. "Laȝamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Verse." *Essays on Middle English Literature*. Ed. Patricia Kean. Greenwood Press, 1978, pp. 23-45.

Harper-Bill, Christopher and Elisabeth Van Houts. *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*. Boydell & Brewer, Ltd, 2007.

Legge, M. Dominica. *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background*. Oxford University Press, 1963.

Short, Ian. "What was Gaimar's *Estoire des Bretuns*?" *Cultura Neolatina*, vol 71, 2001, pp. 143-45.

Solopova, Elizabeth, and Stuart D. Lee. *Key Concepts in Medieval Literature*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Urbanski, Charity. *Writing History for the King: Henry II and the Politics of Vernacular Historiography*. Cornell University Press, 2013.

Zatta, Jane. "Translating the 'Historia': The Ideological Transformation 'Historia Regum Britannie' in Twelfth-Century Vernacular Chronicles." *Arthuriana*, vol. 8, no. 4, 1998, pp. 148–161. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27869405. Accessed 12 Dec. 2016.

Vita

Teresa Marie Lopez was born in San Antonio, Texas, where she lived until enrolling at the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York, in 2000. After four years of study, which included a semester abroad in Bath, England, Teresa earned a Bachelor of Arts in English with Honors and Distinction, with Clusters in Psychology and General Science in May 2004. Following a year away from academia, Teresa accepted a graduate teaching assistantship at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in the English Department. She earned a Master's Degree in 2007 and her PhD in 2017. Teresa is a tenure-track Assistant Professor at Pellissippi State Community College, where she teaches English composition and literature courses. She lives in Knoxville with her husband, two dogs, and a baby on the way.