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LA3AMON'S *BRUT* AND THE RUNES OF HISTORY

by

THOMAS J. HARFORD

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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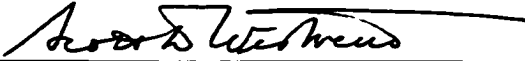
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Chair of Examining Committee

16 February 1999
Date


Executive Officer


Steven Kruger


Catherine McKenna

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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INTRODUCTION:

The Historical Project of *Lazamon's Brut*

*Lazamon's Brut*¹ is a far-reaching chronicle poem of 16,095 lines, describing the legendary history of Britain and its kings and people, from the time of its eponymous founder Brutus, great-grandson of Aeneas, to the exile and death of the last of the British rulers, Cadwalader, who is supplanted and defeated by the Angles. Scholars have long been attracted to the poem's narrative account--the first in English--of the rise, conquests, and eventual fall of King Arthur (although the Arthurian story makes up only around one-third of the poem's entire content). A freely adapted translation of Wace's *Roman de Brut* (c.1155)--itself an Anglo-Norman French verse translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin prose *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c.1135)--the *Brut* must have been composed, given its internal evidence, between 1189 and 1216.²

Brut survives in two manuscripts: British Library Cotton MS Caligula A.ix and Cotton MS Otho C.xiii. Of the two, Caligula is longer and stylistically more curious, given that its vocabulary and syntax appear intentionally archaic and reminiscent of Old English poetic forms. The Otho MS is some 3,000 lines shorter, apparently the result of deliberate scribal deletion; relatively brief gaps occur throughout the text except for a couple of lengthy lacunae.

It appears that the Otho scribe was working from an exemplar whose archaic style made it very close to Caligula (although it is clear that this exemplar was not the Caligula text), and that he subjected it to revision and modernization: the Otho text lacks many of Caligula's archaisms, and has a higher degree of French loan-words. The "modern" quality of the Otho text as compared to Caligula's perceived outdated style initially led scholars to assume at least fifty years' difference between the MSS. However, paleographical evidence proves the two to be more or less contemporaneous, thus suggesting that the peculiar style and diction found in Caligula is as conscious a choice to preserve an "old-style" language as Otho's is to render the poem more contemporary in its style.³ (I explore the issue of the *Brut*'s archaic English and its thematic implications in chapter one.)

One of the many unique--and much discussed--passages found in Lazamon's *Brut* is its prologue,⁴ where the reader is given a detailed account of the author's sources, methodology, and aims in writing the chronicle poem. Written in the third-person (unlike the rest of the narrative), one can speculate, as Rosamund Allen does (*Lawman: Brut*, 441), that Lazamon composed the prologue after he had completed the entire poem.⁵ Whether it was composed before or after, it is reasonable to assume that the prologue can be mined for the author's likely interpretative guides to the work as

a whole, along with assertions about the poem's overarching purpose and intent. As Leslie Johnson notes, the prologue is where "certain expectations are set up about the kind of historical narrative which is to follow and the stance from which it is to be told" ("Reading the Past," 148). She locates one such raised expectation by pinpointing a salient dimension of the *Brut's* treatment of the past:

One of the ways in which *Lazamon's* reworking of British history distinguishes itself from the narrative of *Wace...is in the emphatic textual orientation of the narrative. The narrator's references to written sources, written records, and the boc of the Brut which occur periodically through the narrative...remind his audience that this historical narrative is a product of, and is orientated within, an emphatically textual environment....This textual orientation...is...a feature which is most strongly stressed in the prologue to the text...* (147-48)

What is the nature of this "textual orientation," and how does it illuminate the narrative's larger historical themes, which have proved so perplexing to critics? An examination of *Lazamon's* prologue--where Johnson finds the narrative's textual orientation "most strongly stressed"--provides guideposts, or "expectations," for interpreting the work as a whole. The narrator, who identifies himself as a priest who reads "bock" (5) at a fair church in Areley (in the diocese of Worcester, not far from Wales), relates his desire to tell of the "Engle" (7)--who they were, and whence they came. This results in a physical journey throughout the "leode" (14), a term of ambiguous usage, meaning both

"people, or race" and "land, or nation." This journey, or quest, results in the narrator obtaining three "æðela boc" (15). The first is the English version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (a translation that dates from some 150 years after the author's death in 735). The second is more difficult to identify: *Lazamon* describes this source specifically as a Latin book by Saints Albin and Augustine (of Canterbury). Since Bede mentions Albin near the beginning of his Latin history, and since Book I covers Augustine extensively, this may simply be the (original) Latin version of Bede's book, but other possibilities have been raised. E. G. Stanley ("Antiquarian Sentiments") posits, for example, that *Lazamon* may have confused Albin with Alcuin, whose writings, combined with Augustine of Hippo's, he may have seen.⁶ The third and final book (one mentioned only in *Caligula*⁷) is Wace's *Roman de Brut*, which serves as *Lazamon*'s main textual source.

Of equal, if not greater, interest is what he does with these collected volumes, for he doesn't merely read them, he manipulates them for his own creation:

*Lazamon leide þeos boc. & þa leaf wende.
 he heom leofliche bi-heold. lipe him beo Drihten.
 Feþeren he nom mid fingren. & fiede on boc-felle.
 & þa soþere word. sette to-gadere.
 & þa þre boc. þrumde to are. (24-28)*

[*Lazamon* laid these books and turned the pages; he beheld them lovingly--God be gracious to him. He took

quill feathers in fingers and wrote on book-skin, and he set together the truer words, and he compressed the three books into one.]

The reader is given a general indication of the writer's compositional procedure: he "þrumde" the three texts into one, an act he accomplished by extracting and combining the "soþere word"--"the more truthful words" (*þrumde* is possibly from the OE verb *þringan*, "to press, squeeze"⁸). Having explicated his editorial principles, the narrator, in a personal appeal, then prescribes a procedure for reading and interpreting this text fashioned through selective compilation:

Nu biddi[ð] Laȝamon alcne æðele mon.
for þene almiten Godd.
þet þeos boc rede. & leornia þeos runan.
þat he þeos soðfeste word. segge to-sumne. (29-32)

[Now asks Laȝamon that, for the sake of Almighty God, each noble man who reads this book and learns these runes, that he say together these truth-fast words...]

Those who read this book, composed of truthful words, are to "leornia[n] þeos runan." But what, specifically, is meant by *runan*? In learning of *runan*, is one learning of the truthful words--the *soþere worde*--proclaimed in the prologue as the narrative's compiled essence? The two concepts appear linked, for Laȝamon explicitly tells us that he has extracted the truthful words from his textual sources, and that he has compressed them into one "boc," which he implores us to read, and, in reading, to

"leornia[n]...[its]...runan." But the word *run(e)* itself has no one definition in the poem. In her edition of the *Brut*, Rosamund Allen renders line 31b as: "learn its revelations" (2). This is but one possible meaning.⁹ According to Bosworth and Toller's Old English Dictionary, the Old English definitions of *run(e)* are, respectively, "a whisper," "speech not intended to be overheard," "council," "confidence," "consultation;" with *runstæf* meaning a runic character. The Old English verbal counterpart is *runian*: "to whisper, murmur, conspire." The Middle English Dictionary shows that the word's later definitions share the above Old English meanings, while demonstrating others as well. For example, "mystery," or "secret," can also specifically refer to a secret council of God; in addition, *run(e)* can signify a poem or text in and of itself, as in the case of the *Cursor Mundi* (c. 1300): "Ðe last resun of all þis ron" (219). Middle English also retains the definition of runic letters or characters in the word *runstæf*. Thus, we have a noun and its verb counterpart denoting secrecy and private consultation, performed and interpreted orally or in writing, sometimes involving a hidden conspiracy, other times the mystical council of God, and still other times signifying a text itself--especially, a poetic text.¹⁰

Given the variety of possibilities offered by these definitions, the reader hoping to take the prologue's

instructions to heart, and to learn the runes of the *Brut* so as to interpret the "truth" of its historical narrative, is given a variety of paths to follow, paths whose diversity is mirrored by the eclecticism of the poem's narrative *exempla*. In my attempt to read the runes of the *Brut* in this dissertation, I build upon previous critical insights into Lazamon's project, and I explore and articulate its various narrative representations as they regard the subject of history: its authority in the text, its relation to power (who gains it, who loses it, and why), and its treatment by Lazamon as both a way of interpreting events *and* a subject of interpretation. I argue that Lazamon's narrative representations and interpretations of history foreclose the possibility for a single and overarching historical truth to take hold in his *Brut*. This impossibility is represented in the poem's series of *exempla* that present for the audience a competing array of interpretative possibilities. As Johnson states, Lazamon views the past as an "untidy" affair (155), and thus his poem frustrates any reader's recourse to a single model of medieval historiography--typological or otherwise--as a means of explicating the *Brut*.

My examination of the *Brut*'s *exempla* shows that, while they evince the narrative process of "emplotment"--Hayden White's term for the manner in which one orders the raw data

of the world into a structured and coherent narrative history (44)--they also clearly reflect what Monika Otter refers to as the "very lively polyvocality of much medieval [historical] writing" (6).¹¹ *Lazamon* emplots, or orders, his narrative in a highly polyvocal manner. Yet at the same time, and in juxtaposition to this apparent diversity of voices, *Lazamon* strives to legitimize his poem by attesting to the authority of its historical truths (as, for example, he does in his prologue), and he often projects forcefully into the narrative his desire to have those unequivocal truths distinguished and known by his audience. I will demonstrate that this tension between narrative configuration and historical veracity reaches its apogee in the Arthurian section of the poem (roughly 8433-14297).

To understand this tension at its most acute points, I will explicate from the beginning of the poem the nature of *Lazamon's* historical proclamations, and what strategies he evolves to circumvent--and ultimately reconcile himself to--the narrative's polyvocality in his attempt to bestow authority on his entire project. Each chapter of my investigation (outlined below) highlights and examines one of the dominant and interrelated themes that exemplify the poem's imaginative--and vexed--engagement with history. History, in the *Brut*, is indeed a most difficult set of runes: for the characters in the poem, for *Lazamon* in his

attempt to write these "runes," and, as a result, for the readers of the poem.

Critical attempts to understand Laȝamon's historical orientation have been centered most often on the question of the poet's "Englishness." In chapter one, I clarify in two ways the critical issues that have emanated from this complex point. First, I assess the critical history of *Brut* scholarship as it pertains to the related issues of Laȝamon's Anglo-Saxon archaism and English racial and national identity; that is, I examine how various critics have, in general, tried to define Laȝamon's vision of the past and, in particular, have mined the poem's unique language to arrive at their respective definitions of his historical vision. A complete analysis of the stylistic and metrical studies of the *Brut* is outside the purview of my project. Instead, I am more concerned with extracting and analyzing the insights from the changing critical reception of Laȝamon via his perceived "ironic," or "ambivalent," historical status as a writer of English. Much of the critical discourse on the *Brut* has been spurred by what Daniel Donoghue identifies as "the apparent inconsistency between its verse style, in many ways reminiscent of classical Old English verse, and its content, much of which vilifies the first generations of Anglo-Saxon invaders in

Britain and praises their enemies the Britons" (537).¹² In my survey, I scrutinize the critical postulations on this "inconsistency" and how scholars have related it to, or have sought to sever it from, English identity.

This review of *Brut* scholarship as it pertains to the "English question" leads me to examine Laȝamon's overarching, thematic motivations for using an English poetic style that is archaic in appearance, a style that I see as consciously chosen by the poet in order to simulate an historical, diachronic truth that may be traced and interpreted. This is most explicitly evident in Laȝamon's proclivity for rehearsing and clarifying the etymologies of toponyms. I examine such episodes, where he most clearly demonstrates authoritative historical interpretation as a vertical ascent or descent on the diachronic ladder of time. Laȝamon equates accurate knowledge of the past with the recovery of true names, as if they were concrete entities grafted by history upon a fixed location in time, only to be transformed--indeed, sometimes severed--by that same history. But his etymological catalogues of toponyms are not mere name-lists. If, as Laȝamon claims in these examples, the old names are lost, they are apparently not lost to him, or to his "sources." Laȝamon's catalogues are a display of

his authority, and the authority of his historical representations.

If Laȝamon establishes himself as an authority on the accurate history of names, he implies the same for his language--a language that approximates the poem's place upon the diachronic ladder. It is necessarily "older" in appearance and style because the truth it is recouping and reflecting is in the past (as are his purported textual sources). Thus, Laȝamon's stylistic archaism reflects his quest for historical interpretation, as well as the authority of those interpretations; his antique style legitimizes the veracity of applying the lessons of the past to the present to which it too is necessarily linguistically connected, for diachrony is continuity. Ironically, though, diachrony is also change, and, while demonstrating continuity in history, it obviously reinforces the flux of time, thus creating the linguistic ambivalence. Put another way, Laȝamon's antiquated English diction mirrors his desire to establish an authentic representation of a stable past, and in mirroring it, reflects not only its ambivalence, but also, I will argue, the inherent difficulty it has in representing the past in the present. The *Brut's* unique linguistic medium, to the degree that one can pinpoint its place in language history, contains a stylistic and thematic tension that cannot be conclusively resolved.

In chapter two, I examine closely how the prevalent theme of *runen* and its multifarious uses stands as a metaphor to the chronicle's polyvocal interpretations of the subject of history. *Lazamon* repeatedly and provocatively uses the word *run(e)* in various forms and contexts, and these usages constitute a theme in the poem that 1) represents the successes and failures of interpretation pursued by the narrative's characters, and 2) addresses how the audience's interpretative task is to be imagined and pursued (again, with the entire narrative being pointedly signified in the *Caligula* prologue as *runan*). I focus on key episodes in which explicit political struggles abound with secret councils--both oral and written--in a variety of narrative contexts. But I give my most sustained reading of the *runen* theme to the *Vortigern* section of the poem (roughly 6474-8432), where it is most cogently represented. *Vortigern's* wily ability to manipulate the intimate spaces of runic council becomes, ironically, the very snare that precipitates his downfall.

I conclude that the *runen* theme allegorizes the difficulties of interpreting the past--for the reader, for the characters in the narrative, and for *Lazamon* and his project as a whole. Indeed, to "*leornia[n] þeos runan,*" one discovers, is to learn that history is a type of rune, a

narrative whose competing voices and hidden meanings vie for power.

In chapter three, I examine how representations of prophecy may be construed to communicate the possibility for an idealized--and perhaps stabilized--history. I explore how the author's very vocal assertions of the truth of prophecy manifest themselves most clearly in the characterization of Merlin and his pronouncements concerning Arthur. Indeed, many of *Lazamon's* original contributions to this lengthy section of the poem create a supernatural aura rich in Christian eucharistic symbolism and Celtic fairy lore.¹³ While the evidence for Welsh influence upon *Lazamon* regarding his depiction of Merlin and Arthur is tenuous, I will discuss scholarship concerning this matter, particularly Françoise Le Saux's work (*Lazamon's Brut*, 1989), which has been the most precise; I will examine her conclusions and will discuss Merlin's possible Welsh antecedents. While such proposed sources may be intriguing, however, my primary interest is in examining prophecy as a narrative device; particularly, I will explain how representations of prophecy set up models of interpretation that seem to foreground an idealized (often Christian) authority. I examine Merlin's prophetic statements concerning Arthur and, importantly, *Lazamon's* emphatic narrative interjections about their veracity. These

interjections set up an interesting paradigm between *Lazamon* and Merlin, for the former continuously authorizes the statements of the latter, thus 1) providing Merlin with the authority of the narrator's sanction, and, conversely, 2) making the narrative actions and statements by Merlin a barometer of sorts by which the narrator's veracity may be judged. After investigating narrative representations of prophecy, I conclude this chapter by demonstrating that, despite the authority that *Lazamon* bestows on prophetic utterances (particularly Merlin's), a close look at both human actions and mundane historical events in the *Brut* forecloses the possibility that prophecy can serve as an interpretative key to a transcendent Christian truth in the poem. I show that the character of Arthur himself embodies the bifurcation between the idealized history put forth by prophecy and the distinctly *unprovidential* events related in the narrative.

The *Brut* begins and ends with exile; in this narrative, however, exile presages return. From the first episodes of the exile of Brutus, to the final conquest of the Angles that results in the exile of Cadwalader, the narrative unfolds a set, repeated pattern of action in which land is taken from one defeated hand and placed into the conquering hand of another. In chapter four I extricate the thematic elements of this narrative formula of exile, dominion, and

return; I will pursue this issue in light of the previous chapters' discussions of historical narrative interpretation. If there is to be an "idea of history" found in the *Brut*, a lesson of truth to be extracted from the narrative, many critics seek it in the relevance and meaning of the chronicle's final example of the dominion-exile-return pattern: i.e., the conquest of the Angles over the Britons, leading to the "final" transference of power over the land now referred to as England.¹⁴ I will assess Laȝamon's additions to this last section of the *Brut*, particularly the hagiographical elements in his expanded treatment of the English saints, Augustine and Oswald. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that, on the one hand, Laȝamon's narrative expansions in this section reinforce the legitimacy of the English dominion over the land, while, on the other, British reclamation remains open as a distinct possibility.

I conclude that the *Brut* ends as a text fraught by the difficulties of interpreting historical events, though one clearly engaged in narrative attempts to extricate an authoritative and conclusive lesson from the *exempla* of history. I also revisit Daniel Donoghue's thesis--namely, that Laȝamon's *Brut* is an inherently ambivalent historical project. I contend that the notion of ambivalence is hardly an anachronistic imposition upon the poem. To underline my

point, I will turn to Otter as well as other scholars, such as Nancy Partner (1977), whose work on twelfth-century Anglo-Latin historiography vividly reveals the inadequacies of imposing homogeneous historical models upon a genre of writing that was clearly not monolithic in its understanding of how to interpret the past, nor in its awareness of the complexities of a venture that offered various models of which the historian could avail himself.

Insular Historiography and Its Antecedents

In the depth of its struggle to grapple with meaning in the past, in its idiosyncratic poetic form and ambitious narrative grasp, *Laȝamon's Brut* clearly proves to be one of the paramount vernacular exemplars of the eclectic--if also elusive--medieval practice of history writing. While I have so far placed singular emphasis on the poem--indeed, I will do so throughout my study--*Laȝamon* did not write in a vacuum; thus, some attention should be paid to the growth of historical writing in the twelfth century, so as to place the *Brut* within its general milieu. A source-study of the poem is not one of the aims of my project, nor do I intend to trace all of the possible influences upon the *Brut*; such a task has already been pursued with great success by Françoise Le Saux.¹⁵ Instead, I review some of the pertinent

historical texts (specifically, texts of Insular history) so as to: 1) give the reader a general outline of Insular historiography and a sense of its subject matter and early Christian antecedents, and 2) establish a context in which it can be made apparent that *Lazamon's* project shares with other historical texts a complex and sophisticated contention with historical issues, and does so in a fashion that reveals the high caliber of his imagination.

Robert Hanning (1966), in his study of "Fall of Britain" texts, speaks of the importance of comprehending historiography by recourse to "the historical imagination," a term he defines as

the faculty which perceives the reality of the past; the response, evoked by the record (accurate or inaccurate) of history, which identifies that record with the human condition, seen as a timeless and continuing phenomenon. The historical imagination minimizes the temporal distance between past and present, and emphasizes instead their proximity and continuity. (2-3)

At the risk of oversimplification, much of the historical discourse of western medieval Europe written after the fifth century is fed by the "historical imaginations" of such figures as Eusebius, Augustine, and Orosius, whose works of history emanated from the idea of Christianity as the fulfillment of the Hebraic notion of "history as a dynamic process established and controlled by God, and ratified in a series of covenants made between God

and man" (Hanning 6). A full account of the complexity of their works belies a short treatment; what concerns me is how each author, in overlapping but unique ways, evolved the universalizing tendencies evident in Christian providential history, an approach in which early Insular historiography was highly invested.

Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 263-340), a bishop whose name recalls his episcopal see in the capital of Palestine, authored the ten-volume *Ecclesiastical History*, which recounts the development of the Christian church from apostolic times to the year 324.¹⁶ His writings establish Rome in the divine plan of history by placing the imperial city in God's providential hand. This placement is carried out within the larger aims of Eusebius' project, which seeks to reveal through scriptural exegesis how human history is an ongoing battle between Christ and Satan and the historical manifestation of Christ's Church from the earliest patriarchs to imperial Rome. As Hanning notes, Eusebius' approach to Christian history entails typological readings of scripture that, for him, reinforce the notion of history as the continuous revelation of God in the world as manifest through Christ's *ecclesia*. Eusebius views the first patriarchs as not merely prefiguring the Church, but representing "its first concrete manifestation" (24):

The historical order, in other words, is always a sign of the eternal order established by God for the

universe and supervised by Christ. Such a...spatial view of the meaning of history is perhaps more easily universalized to include not only Israel but all nations in a providential relationship with God. (25-6)

And of "all nations," the role of contemporary Rome becomes centrally important. Under Eusebius' model of history, the establishment of the eternal city of Rome is the necessary foundation through which the Church is active in the world, as witnessed in the triumphant rule of Constantine.

Eusebius' universalizing tendencies embrace the entirety of Rome under God's providential plan. In *De civitate Dei*, however, Augustine of Hippo (354-430) relocates this universal struggle between Satan and Christ within the personal choice of the individual human being. In this work, Augustine responds to the respective notions of Rome as the great Eternal City undermined by Christianity, as non-Christians proclaimed, and as the current foundation upon which Christ's Church is established in the world, as Eusebius proclaimed:

Augustine answered...with a vision of two cities existing side by side, or rather intertwined in the world, from the days of Cain and Abel until the very end of time. One is the earthly city, inhabited by those...[dedicated to]...worldly goods, fame, and honor as ends in themselves...the *civitas terrena*....To the inhabitants of the other city, the *civitas Dei*, all worldly glory (and all worldly suffering) are, in contrast, the means to be used in gaining the supreme End, God. (Hanning 34)

These two cities, seeming as one, are in fact separated by the ends of their love: the worldly city (invested in secular history) has love of itself as its ultimate end; the city of God is but a means to the "supreme End" of union with God. At the final end of history, the two cities, seemingly coexisting in the world, will be eternally separated. For Augustine, the large pattern of God's work in history cannot be known by recourse to Eusebian notions of providence working "visibly in the world of Rome" (36), for only God has recourse to Ultimate Reality *sub specie aeternitatis*. Instead, the individual partakes of the universal truth of history by *imitatio Christi*, for only in such a pattern, revealed through God's Word, does ultimate universal truth reside, and in such emulation does one approximate life in the *civitas Dei*. Augustine may reflect the rather Eusebian tendency toward a universalizing application of salvation history, but his project ultimately seeks "[to liberate]...man from the tyranny of secular (or imperial) history" (35).

Interestingly, it is in the work of Augustine's disciple, Paulus Orosius, that Eusebian notions of Rome's centrality are reasserted. *Septem libri historiarum adversum paganos* (c.418)--"Seven Books of History Against the Pagans"--is a response to one of the issues that Augustine sought to counter in *De civitas Dei*; namely, the accusation

that Christianity was responsible for Rome's considerable calamities (most recently Alaric's catastrophic sack of the city in 410). Orosius responds that Roman misfortunes long preceded the advent of Christianity, and he catalogues such accounts to this effect that are found in the works of pagan authors. More important, though, is the role he imparts to Rome as the ultimate vehicle, chosen by God, for the spread of Christ's Church: "[T]he Pax Augusta...prepared the world for Christ....God had elected Rome, and despite her rebelliousness and preference for evil she moved through history toward Christ" (Hanning 40). By employing typological exegesis beyond Old and New Testament parallels, Orosius moved toward finding biblical signification within Roman history itself; thus does salvation history absorb pagan and imperial models.

In turning to early works of Insular history, one generally finds the above notions of providential history firmly ensconced, for such theological and providential modes "of history had become a multipurpose garment which Franks and Anglo-Saxons [and Britons], as new Israelites, could wear as easily as Romans" (Hanning 42). Gildas' *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* (c. mid-sixth-century), as N. J. Highman notes (7), is very much a continuation of the historical

tradition of late Classical, Christian history which begins in many respects with Eusebius...[whose work is]

designed to reconcile both the history and destiny of the newly Christian Empire with the Bible-centred historical perceptions of early Christianity (7-8).

In *De excidio*, the British monk Gildas pursues an explanation of the Germanic invasions of Britain through the prism of moral providence; specifically, he examines how the British defeat reflects their moral shortcomings within the larger pattern of providential history. Such a concept, as Hanning notes (46-47), had precedence in Salvian's *De gubernatione Dei* (c. 340), in which Roman decadence is offered as the primary cause for the Empire's sufferings at the hands of barbarian sackers. Using the biblical history of Israel as the means by which to illuminate the pattern of God in history,

Salvian's method consisted first in mining the Old Testament for *exempla* chosen to demonstrate the activity of providence in man's life through the immediate reward and punishment of holiness or sin, and then in using these *exempla* to explain contemporary happenings. (Hanning 46-47)

In such a context, the barbarian attackers become God's scourge upon a corrupt and decadent Roman people who have failed His edicts. Like the Romans, so too, in Gildas' project, the Britons have fallen into sinful ways and thus warrant similar punishment. The ultimate lesson to be learned by such a work aims toward the restoration of God with the Britons, which would heal the disunity provoked by historical actions led by vice, and not virtue. Throughout

his work, the authority of Rome is held up as a guiding principle for British society.

Kenneth Tiller notes how Gildas' "stressing of [the] divine over the human agency" (59) reduces the role of individual agency in history, a point made by Hanning as well, who comments that the "effect of Gildas' persistent rhetorical organization is to emphasize the universal community of sin and vice" (55). Specific events, therefore, serve as indicators of the prevalence of the biblical pattern of history, and (local) actions receive true meaning when measured as exemplars of God's providence. This universalizing quality is similar to the hagiographical and typological ethos displayed by the above historians.

About 250 years after Gildas, the prolific Bede completed his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (c.731)--a text that is also ensconced in providential history.¹⁷ The English are featured as the "chosen" people for God's plan, while the British are relegated to the margins of divine historical evolution--having failed to pursue conversion of the English actively, they are quickly dispensed with in the earliest part of the narrative.

Extant in over 150 manuscripts--and translated into Old English in the late 800's (this version is specifically cited by *Lazamon* as one of his sources)¹⁸--Bede's *Historia* traces in five books the chronological history of the

English as the story of a people's Christian evolution, markedly highlighting Augustine's conversion of the English people. George Hardin Brown stresses that Bede's is an "ecclesiastical history" in the Eusebian tradition, and therefore shares with that genre biblical concepts of time and event in a "theocratic universe" (86). But, Brown continues,

Bede's ecclesiastical history is "of the English people,"...and this marks it off from the universal history of Eusebius....Bede accomplishes an unprecedented synthesis of Eusebian historiography with local history....In showing that the English Church developed according to the Eusebian model, Bede is making the people of England...one of God's chosen tribes. (86)

Bede's attention to the English as a "chosen tribe" reinforces the nature of the Britons' loss of such status. This element is important, for it reestablishes the notion that within the movements of salvation history, a Christian people can lose favor (ultimately, Gildas' central lesson)--that is, by focusing on not the universal history of Christians but on the history of given peoples, the issue of their favor or disfavor within that very universal schema becomes more sharply delineated. Such plot-lines, which tell of Christian peoples' competing ends and merits, produce interesting consequences in twelfth-century Insular historiography. As Tiller notes:

Bede ironically provides precedence for twelfth-century historical authors whose project, at least in part, is

to justify the suppression of the Anglo-Saxon nation and its ecclesiastical orders. In the context of Bedean historiography, the Norman Conquest...becomes another providentially ordained and ultimately beneficial conquest of the isle by a Continental power. (66)

This analysis, however, may overemphasize the assumption that twelfth-century historians uniformly sought to justify Norman hegemony; although this sentiment is certainly a strong element for some of these authors, their "historical imaginations" display great variety in how they view their respective subject matters.

The surge in historical writing in England during the twelfth century seems to have arisen, in the recent words of historian Ann Williams (1995), "almost *ex nihilo*" (165). But certainly the greatest facilitator of this renaissance of historiography was the Norman Conquest, for with the change in political order came the desire by Normans and English alike both to explain and often to justify events in the present and to preserve the memory of the pre-Norman past. Hanning, in his select examination of the historians Henry of Huntington (1089-c.1160), Ordericus Vitalis (1075-c.1142), and William of Malmesbury (1090-1142),¹⁹ notes how they devoted large portions of their histories to the Anglo-Norman kings in a manner that explains their political successes through the prism of God's judgment--that is, they appear on some levels to work within the assumptions of providential history. But these works were not merely

propaganda for Norman rule; in fact, they wrestled with combined historical objectives that were not always without mutual antagonism:

In keeping with [the] judgment [of the Norman invasion as ordained], they attempt to explain the Norman Conquest in terms reminiscent of those used by Gildas to interpret the ruin of Britain, i.e., as the work of God operating figurally in history to punish sinful men and nations....From one point of view, then, the Normans are God's chosen people--the latest heirs of Israel....But this is only one side of the story. From another point of view...the Normans are imperial repressors of English liberty. The juxtaposition of this theme to the first creates a tension within the historiography of the Anglo-Norman historians, and reflects the coexistence in the minds of the writers of two mutually distinct views of the past, the legacies of two different moral and rhetorical traditions. (128-9)²⁰

The tensions created by the clash of "rhetorical traditions" appear more explicable when one considers that twelfth-century history writing lacked clear-cut guidelines. As Nancy Partner observes, historiography was not a structured discipline that appeared explicitly in either the *trivium* or the *quadrivium*--though it was often included in the former under Grammar (186):

The absence of history writing from school lectures and exercises (as distinct from simple reading of history for general knowledge and exempla) ensured that its principles and methods as a special form of literature would not be debated, refined, and taught to every new writer....In compensation, history writing was left to develop freely. (187)

While theoretically one could employ the inherited models of salvation history for the structure that was

absent from pedagogical dictates, such a task may have been confounded by the press of contemporary events, and the manner in which Anglo-Norman kings appeared to writers of history. In addition, as Partner remarks,

European Christendom was old by the twelfth century.. ..[T]he urgent occasions for Augustine's *City of God* and Orosius's *Against the Pagans* belonged entirely to the past. The insistent and present sense of a large and inclusive plan for mankind, the need for that sense, had subsided into a quiet acceptance of the *idea* of such a plan without the need for very specific understanding of its provisions. (221, emphasis hers)

Whether from the absence of rhetorical dictates, or the perceived remoteness of earlier salvation models, or, as Hanning postulates (130-35), spurred by a new interest in the details of individual experience and psychology, twelfth-century Anglo-Norman historiography produced texts of high complexity. While they did not overtly question early providential models, "neither were...[those models]...applied very thoroughly by working historians" (Partner 228-9). In the case of one historian in particular, this complexity is evident in his attempt to balance the two roles of the Normans as noted by Hanning above; that is, the providentially ordained rulers vs. the colonizing oppressors of the English. In *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, the Benedictine monk William of Malmesbury narrates Insular history from the coming of the Saxons to the reign of Henry I. William, of English and Norman parentage, literally embodies the

complexities inherent in recounting the Norman invasion and its effect upon the English. In his prologue to Book III, he proposes his mixed heritage as the impetus for steering a "middle course" in his historical analysis of the Conquest: "Ego autem, quia utriusque gentis sanguinem traho, dicendi tale temperamentum servabo" (403) ["For my part, as the blood of either people flows in my veins, I shall steer a middle course" (trans. Giles 258)]. While William appears convinced by the righteousness of the Norman victory (favored by the hand of God),²¹ this sentiment is balanced by a melancholic empathy for the defeated English:

Illa fuit dies fatalis Angliae, funestum excidium dulcis patriae, pro novorum dominorum commutatione. Jam enim pridem moribus Anglorum insueverat, qui varii admodum pro temporibus fuere: nam, primis adventus sui annis, vultu et gestu barbarico, usu bellico, ritu fanatico vivebant; sed postmodum, Christi fide suscepta, paulatim et per incrementa temporis, pro otio quod actitabant, exercitium armorum in secundum ponentes, omnem in religione operam insumpsere.
(vol. 2: 417)

[This was a fatal day to England, a melancholy havoc of our dear country, through its change of masters. For it had long since adopted the manners of the Angles, which had been very various according to the times: for in the first years of their arrival, they were barbarians in their looks and manners, warlike in their usages, heathens in their rites; but, after embracing the faith of Christ, by degrees, and in process of time, from the peace they enjoyed, regarding arms only in a secondary light, they gave their whole attention to religion. (278)]

William, in the process of narrating the seminal event that will, in a sense, partially efface the English from

Insular history, recounts their very history on the island as a countermeasure to exclusion. In addition, his clear empathy for the English ("funestum excidium dulcis patriae") prevents their submission to the one-dimensional role of disfavored and sinful people, "on the outs" with God. Such a measured and circumspect depiction keeps William's history from overtly recalling the universalizing tendencies of earlier writers like Gildas, though at the same time the idea of providence is fully evident in God's favoring of the Norman victory (hence the split focus mentioned by Hanning above). This narrative tone--evident throughout his history--along with his penchant for anecdote and royal character profile, exemplifies perfectly the twelfth-century change in historiography noted by Hanning:

[T]he Anglo-Norman historians appeal to the complexity of life as lived at a less exalted level [than found in earlier salvation models]....The divergence of the history of kings and nations from the history of human experience as a continuing, self-justifying phenomenon marks a sharp break in the development of medieval historiography....[T]his new distinction separates the work of Anglo-Norman historians from the tradition of Christian historical writing, in which personal history and national history run on parallel tracks under God's guidance toward his chosen end....Unlike Bede's Oswald or Eusebius' Constantine, the man behind the office matters to the historian. (131)

If such innovations contain the seeds for a more complete secularization of history, then in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* they are displayed in full bloom. One may presume from Geoffrey's cognomen that he

was from Monmouthshire, along the Welsh borders; if so, it is likely that Geoffrey was himself Breton, since many from Brittany' settled in that region. He lived in Oxford from 1129 to 1151, during which time he composed the *Historia*, and in that final year he became bishop of St. Asath.

In his project, Geoffrey attempts to relate the history of the Britons from the founding of Britain by Brutus to the coming of the Saxons. By doing so, he was delving into uncharted historical regions: Insular historians such as Gildas and Bede had said little on this period; their lack of interest in pre-Saxon British history was coupled with a lack of source material from that period. A notable exception can be found in the *Historia Brittonum*, a text compiled from various works written from the seventh to ninth centuries (in several manuscripts, the compiler identifies himself as "Nennius"). The *Historia Brittonum* offers the first detailed account of the pre-Christian Britons, and establishes the Brutus legend concerning the foundation of Britain, providing Geoffrey with a basic outline for his treatment of pre-Saxon history (and thus providing Wace and Laȝamon with theirs). Hanning notes the secular and British-nationalistic feel of the *Historia Brittonum*, a tone which he identifies as emanating from a growing sense of value and autonomy within the power bases of the British Church. In addition:

[The ninth century] saw the rise of a British hope that the Saxons might at last be driven from the island of Britain. These appeals to a glorious national past and hopes for a glorious future were secular in feeling; they stressed national, rather than ecclesiastical, traditions and aspirations. (95)²²

The Brutus legend found in the *Brittonum* portrays the Britons not as beholden to Roman cultural superiority (as Gildas would have it); nor are they, as Tiller points out (69-70), a people providentially ordained to be colonized.²³

Both in sentiment and in historical record, "Nennius" provided Geoffrey of Monmouth with fodder for his ennobling vision of the Britons' past. In his prologue, Geoffrey proclaims his work as a redress to the gaps in Insular history evident in Bede and Gildas:

Cum mecum multa & de multis sepius animo reuoluens in hystoriam regum britannie inciderem. in mirum contuli quod infra mentionem quam de eis gildas. & beda luculento tractatu fecerant nichil de regibus qui ante incarnationem christi inhabitauerent nichil etiam de arturo ceterisque compluribus. qui post incarnationem successerunt repperissem. cum & gesta eorum digna æternitate laudis constarent & a multis populis quasi inscripta iocunde & memoriter predicarentur.

(Ed. Griscom 219)

[Whenever I have chanced to think about the history of the kings of Britain, on those occasions when I have been turning over a great many such matters in my mind, it has seemed a remarkable thing to me that, apart from such mention of them as Gildas and Bede had each made in a brilliant book on the subject, I have not been able to discover anything at all on the kings who lived here before the Incarnation of Christ, or indeed about Arthur and all the others who followed on after the Incarnation. Yet the deeds of these men were such that they deserve to be praised for all time. What is more, these deeds were handed joyfully down in oral tradition, just as if they had been committed to

writing, by many peoples who had only their memory to rely on. [Trans. Thorpe 51]

Oral history, authorized implicitly as a type of text ("quasi inscripta"), is offered as one of the viable sources for the *Historia*, but more controversial to scholars is Geoffrey's other stated source: Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, has given to Geoffrey an ancient Welsh or Breton book, which he has translated into Latin.²⁴ Whatever his possible sources may be, it is clear that Geoffrey's project cuts a path far from the ones laid down by works of providential history. Hanning, who notes that Geoffrey, displaying a "cavalcade of national heroes," shows obvious relish in depicting secular events, concludes that:

The inspiration for Geoffrey's concern with secular greatness was undoubtedly the Anglo-Norman historians' presentation of William the Conqueror and other Anglo-Norman monarchs and barons. (139)

But Hanning surmises that this perceived fondness for the "secular greatness" found in Geoffrey's presentation of characters such as Brutus and Arthur is set against a larger historical backdrop--one that is also decidedly *unprovidential* in its execution:

[I]f the heroic deeds of men emphasize human control of history, the view of history as an endless series of cycles emphasizes the power of history over men. Operating through Fortune, the inexplicable and fickle force which raises man on her wheel and then throws him off, history tyrannizes over man and mocks his efforts to control his fate and that of his nation. (139)

Unconstrained by the auspices of providential history, and manipulating fully the secular elements found in the complex twelfth-century historiographic trends of his time, Geoffrey of Monmouth opened new vistas of influence. Vernacular writings, as Hanning notes (173-76), were to represent a prominent venue for this influence, as evidenced from the two most notable non-Latin "translations" of the *Historia* by Wace and Laȝamon. Wace's courtly romance medium (rhyming octo-syllabic couplets) provides Laȝamon with precedence for composing his own poetic redaction of British legendary history. Nothing in Wace's chronicle poem, however, could have predicted the "lofte-songe" (36) construed by Laȝamon. In fact, the unprecedented and unique character of his *Brut*, both in its form and content, belies the possibility of understanding the poem without recourse to its "historical imagination." Tiller notes astutely that "[b]eginning with his 'Prologue,' Laȝamon, unlike Wace, introduces his text as an historical document" (18). It is as such a document that I examine the *Brut* in this study.

Laȝamon's *Brut*: An Outline

Many readers come to the *Brut* with little awareness of the broad sweep of its narrative content. Indeed, Laȝamon's English redaction of British legendary history is usually

approached piecemeal; most commonly, one reads exclusively his Arthurian material. Because I deal with the *Brut* as a narrative whole and employ examples that range from episode to episode, a summary of the chronicle is provided below, thus supplying unfamiliar readers with a narrative context for the critical discussions that follow. Due to the *Brut*'s imposing size, I have omitted many minor details and subplots, while including those that I consider to exemplify the poem's more remarkable narrative moments.²⁵

Prologue (1-35)

Composed in the third-person, the prologue identifies the narrator, *Lazamon*, as a priest operating in *Areley*. It comes to his mind to tell of the nobles of England; he travels around the land and gathers three books, then compresses them into one by extracting the more truthful words from each. This is followed by a plea to the reader to recite the poem, to learn its runes, and to pray for the author and his parents.

Brutus and the Founding of Britain (35-2150)

(35-551:) *Aeneas*, son of *Priam*, flees the destruction of *Troy* by the *Greeks*, sailing off with twenty ships; he lands in *Italy*, marries the *King's* daughter, and eventually inherits the throne. *Aeneas'* granddaughter dies giving birth to *Brutus*, who later kills his own father in a hunting accident: both of these fates were foretold by sorcery.

Brutus, scorned as a parricide, is exiled from Italy; he finds his way to Greece, discovers and frees enslaved Trojan kin, and, by process of secret council, becomes their leader. The Trojans sail collectively west, where on Spanish soil they discover and unite with more Trojans, led by the giant Corineus. (552-1051:) The sailing Trojans come upon the deserted island Logice (its inhabitants had been slaughtered by marauding robbers). Here, the pagan goddess Diana reveals to Brutus, worshipping at her altar, how he will "discover" Albion. On route to this foretold land, they stop at Brutaine (Brittany), or Armoriche. The King's steward, chancing upon the Trojans hunting on royal land, attempts to stop them, but Corineus smashes his skull. This event sparks a plundering spree by the Trojans, after which they embark for Albion. Brutus and his men kill off the giants inhabiting the isle, colonize the land, and re-name it Britain. Brutus then fashions names for various territories and parcels them out, founding New Troy (London) as his chief residence, a name, *Lazamon* tells us, that has changed with the flux of people who have colonized the island.

(1052-1886:) After Brutus' death, Britain falls to his three sons, who divide the land into three regions. Eldest son Locrin abandons his wife Gwendoleine (daughter of Corineus) for an enslaved German princess, Astrid, whom he

keeps in a secret earth-house and impregnates; he is killed by the men of Cornwall, who are led by Locrin's jilted wife, Gwendoleine. Out of jealousy, she has Astrid and her illegitimate child tossed into a river, re-named Avren (Avon) to commemorate the event. Locrin's son, Madan, rules successfully; his two sons, however, do not: one brother kills the other, and then proves a disastrous ruler. While some Britons settle with kinsmen in Lombardy, most stay in Britain, where various reigns follow, eventually leading to Bladud, founder of Bath, who attempts to fly in a feather suit of his own design, but fatally crash lands squarely onto Apollin's temple. His son, Leir, assumes the throne. After ruling well for sixty years, Leir decides to dole out the kingdom to his three daughters by testing their love for him. The eldest two, Gornouille and Regau, opportunistically flatter their father and as a result each gets part of the kingdom, as well as powerful husbands. The youngest daughter, Cordoille, refuses to speak falsehoods and states gaily and without reserve that all will love him relative to his riches. The furious father orders her out of his sight and strips her of her dowry. Despite this, the sympathetic and loving Aganippas, King of France, marries her. The two favored daughters progressively strip their father of his former royal trappings, until, left with nothing but a single serving-man and a boat, he flees to Cordoille in

France; father and daughter reconcile and, with the aid of French power, Leir returns to his rule. Cordoille ascends the throne at her father's death, but after being widowed, she is deposed and driven to suicide by her brothers-in-law and by attacking Scots, who deplore the idea of a female ruler. (1887-2150:) The brothers-in-law in turn squabble, and one kills off the other. Violent and brief reigns follow: Poreus kills his brother Fereus, who is then poisoned by mother Judon, who clearly favored the former son. Finally, Dunwale--the most distinguished king ever to rule England--unites the kingdom, establishes peace, and creates laws that protect the common folk. After his death, the kingdom goes to his two sons, Brenne and Belin.

Brenne and Belin and the Conquest of Rome (2151-3586)

(2151-3158:) The brothers rule jointly for a time--one north of the Humber, the other to the south--but Brenne follows bad counsel, rebels against his brother, and joins forces with the King of Norway, whose daughter, Delgan, he marries. Brenne attempts to return to Britain, but his plan is thwarted by his wife's lover, the Danish king, after she sends him secret letters ("stille boc-runen" [2244]). The fleeing lovers wash ashore on Belin's land; Brenne, in an attempt to retrieve his estranged wife by force, is defeated by Belin and flees to France. He distinguishes himself there, turns bigamist and marries a duke's daughter, and

invades Britain. On the verge of war, the brothers are reconciled by the forceful prompting of their mother, Tonwen, who bares her naked breasts to remind them of their fraternal ties. United, they conquer France, and then turn to Rome. The Romans initially dupe the invading brothers by pretending to sue for peace, sending 24 children of noblemen as hostages. The brothers figure out the ruse and hang the young pledges, to the dismay and anger of their onlooking Roman parents. Rome falls to Brenne and Balin, the former stays and rules there, while the latter returns to Britain. (3159-3586:) Various reigns lead to Marcie, who compiles the code of laws known as "Mercian." (In a reference to an historical event several centuries beyond the purview of the narrative, Laȝamon informs the reader that Alfred the Great will later translate these laws into English). After several more reigns, Lud is crowned, a king who once again establishes stability throughout the land (in part by building a wall around London). Upon his death, the kingdom falls to Cassibellaunus, uncle to Lud's infant sons.

Cassibellaunus to Constantin and Resistance to Rome

(3587-6473)

(3587-4520:) The Romans approach under Julius Caesar, who, upon viewing the British Isles from Flanders, proclaims that whatever lands he sees must belong to him. Caesar demands tribute from Britain, but Cassibellaunus refuses,

citing the past conquest of Brenne and Belin. Though Caesar's first two attempts to invade Britain prove only minimally successful, he is ultimately given a strong advantage when Androgeus, angry at the British king because a royal nephew has killed his son in a fight, joins up with Caesar. This time Caesar is successful, and, defeated, Cassibellaunus agrees to pay tribute to Rome. (4521-5671:) Later, during the reign of his grandson, Kinbelin, news comes of Christ's birth, and the prophet Teilesin explains the import of this event. This prompts Lazamon to interject a hymn to the Trinity that endorses the Roman papacy. The reign of Wither follows, as do battles with the Roman emperor Claudius, until Wither is killed. Peace follows when Wither's son marries Claudius' daughter, inaugurating a period of several uneventful reigns. Luces becomes the first Christian king of Britain; under his command, pagan temples are gutted and cleaned, and the bishops establish churches. Luces dies without an heir, and the Roman Severus steps in to fill the void. His sons, however, eventually engage in civil war; Coel, the victorious one, weds his daughter, Helene, to a Roman commander. Helene eventually leaves Britain in search of the True Cross, which she finds with the help of the Jews. Constantin, Helene's son, marches on Rome at the urging of the Romans, and becomes emperor there. (5672-6473:) In Britain, Octaves, a Welshman, comes to

power; he marries his daughter to Maximien, a Roman, who later conquers Brittany and orders Britons to settle there. Athionard, a protector of Britain, agrees; he sends his daughter, Ursula, along with ships full of women, but on their way to Brittany they are lost in a raging storm, only to be abducted, tortured, and raped by pirates, who make Ursula their whore and then attempt to invade Britain from the north. After many ignored pleas to the Romans, Constantin comes from Brittany. He defeats the invaders with the great assistance of women, who gleefully rip Melga, the pirate leader, to shreds. Constantin becomes king, but is soon assassinated by a Pict, who stabs him while they hold private council in remote woods.

The Sons of Constantin and the Coming of the Saxons
(6474-8432)

(6474-6878:) Constantin leaves behind three sons: Costans (a monk), Aurelien Ambrosien (a child), and Uther (an infant). The Britons confer and select Aurelien as king, but Vortigern, a Welsh chieftain, has other plans in mind: he coaxes Costans out of the monastery and has him crowned. Constans proves a puppet-king, with Vortigern holding the strings; the wily Welshman recruits Picts, has them assassinate the king, and then takes the crown for himself. Aurelien and Uther flee to Brittany, where they are raised in safety. (6879-7182:) Eventually, three hundred Saxons

from Angles (in Germany) land on the British shore; Vortigern, though publicly expressing his dismay that the Saxons are pagan, nonetheless employs them as mercenaries against the Picts and allows Hengest, their leader, to bring over more of his tribe. Hengest asks for a portion of land, but only that which can be covered by a single bull's hide. Vortigern agrees, but is tricked by Hengest, who cuts the hide into an extremely long thong and encircles enough land to build a town, which he names Thong-chester (Lancaster). While at a banquet, Vortigern and Hengest's beautiful daughter, Rowenne, toast each other, though neither understands the other's language; this playful toasting further fans Vortigern's lust for her, and--completely smitten--he marries her in a pagan ritual. (7183-7644:) The Britons become infuriated by increasing Saxon migrations, and they turn to Vortimer, son of Vortigern, as their new king; he drives out the Saxons, and seeks missionary support from Rome so as to reestablish the waning Christian presence. His reign is short lived. Rowenne, repeating the same toasting scenario as before, poisons him at a banquet: Vortigern reclaims the throne, and the Saxons are called back. This time, Hengest arrives with 700 shiploads of Saxons. At a reconciliation meeting between the Britons and the Saxons, the 400 Britons are slaughtered on Hengest's command in the Saxon tongue (a language the British have

failed to learn). (7645-8432:) Hengest seizes Britain, the Saxons rape and pillage, and Vortigern flees to Wales, where he attempts unsuccessfully to build a fortress: the walls collapse repeatedly. As a remedy, he seeks the blood of a child not born of a father. This leads him to Merlin, whose father was an incubus. When the boy finds out that he has been selected for human sacrifice he becomes enraged. Exhibiting special insight, he soon reveals to Vortigern that two combating dragons beneath the foundation of his fortress prevent its construction. In addition, Merlin foretells what the dragons symbolize: vengeance will fall on Vortigern. Aurelien and Uther return, Vortigern burns in his fortress, Hengest is executed, and the surviving Saxons plead for mercy. They are allowed to convert to Christianity, which leads to their pardon and their acquisition of lands in the north.

Uther and the Struggle Against Saxon Conquest (8433-9908)

(8433-9098:) At the command of King Aurelien and under the guidance of Merlin, a monument--what is today called Stonehenge--is erected to memorialize the murdered Britons. The stones for the monument are taken from Ireland by Uther's army and by benefit of Merlin's magic. Pascent, Vortigern's son, seeks vengeance and does battle with Aurelien and his forces, first with assembled forces along

the Humber River, then with the aid of an Irish army. Aurelien lies ill, and a Saxon posing as a physician poisons him. At that time, Uther sees a shooting star in the sky, a sign that Merlin interprets for him: Uther will be king, his son (Arthur) will be a legendary conqueror of many lands, and his daughter will give birth to successful rulers. Uther's victory over Pascent wins him the crown, as well as the cognomen "Pendragon." (9099-9908:) The Saxons, tired of their lands in the north, decide to march south and conquer. Uther and his forces engage, and, following sound military advice from Gorlois, Earl of Cornwall, defeat the Saxons, taking their leaders captive. At a victory banquet, however, Uther lusts after Gorlois' wife, Ygerne, much to the anger of the Earl, who storms out and then rebels. The smitten Uther disguises himself as Gorlois through Merlin's magical talent, has intercourse with Ygerne, and fathers Arthur. With Gorlois ultimately killed in battle, Uther takes Ygerne as his wife; they have a second child, the daughter foretold by Merlin. Uther rules for a long time, but eventually he grows weak with age. Meanwhile, the imprisoned Saxon leaders escape, gather troops in Saxony, and invade Scotland. Though old and feeble, Uther participates in the battle, and his army proves victorious at St. Alban's. The defeated Saxons, now led by Colgrim, send spies who kill Uther by poisoning

his well water. He is buried beside his brother at Stonehenge.

Arthur and the Achievement of British Sovereignty
(9909-12026)

(9909-11475:) The clergy retrieve the fifteen-year-old Arthur from Brittany, and he is crowned by collective approval. He promptly swears to God--in a single couplet--that he will avenge his father and drive all Saxons from British soil. He battles Colgrim but must contend with Chidric, a Roman who also invades. Arthur forms alliances, wins battles, and ultimately defeats his opponents. Having distinguished himself as a warrior, Arthur rewards his nephews and weds Guenevere. He then forces the kings of Ireland, Scotland, Iceland, Orkney, Gotland, and Winetland (territories near the West Baltic) to submit to him as their lord. These submissions are followed by a Christmas victory feast, at which a riot breaks out. The furious Arthur orders the instigator hanged in a bog, his male kin decapitated, and his female kin mutilated. Afterward, the Round Table--seating 16,000--is constructed to establish and preserve unity among all. Here Lajamon interjects his views on what may or may not be historically accurate in the oral and written accounts of Arthur's deeds, indicating that the quintessential English king's accomplishments were already judged to be fact mixed with legend. (11476-12026:) After

obtaining submission from Norway and Denmark, Arthur invades France; there, Frolle (a Roman sovereign) sends for Roman assistance, but Arthur proves too strong. Frolle, cornered in Paris, challenges Arthur to single combat; Arthur slays him, and France submits.

Arthur and the Quest for Imperial Power (12027-14297)

(12027-12800:) Arthur remains in France for nine years, then doles out its territories among his vassals. Home in Britain, Arthur orders three days of feasting; but in the middle of the festivities come messengers from Lucius, emperor of Rome, who demands Arthur's submission and tribute payments. A council is held: Cador, advocating warfare, argues with Gawain, who urges peace. Arthur cites the precedents of Brenne, Belin, and Constantin, and concludes that he has the right to govern Rome. Lucius, in response, assembles a huge army (made up largely of pagans and non-Europeans). Arthur sets sail, leaving the kingdom in the hands of the queen and his nephew, the treacherous Mordred. En route, he has a nightmare, which no one dares to interpret negatively, though it seems to imply ill omens for the king. (12801-14087:) After killing a giant at Mont St. Michel, he sends Gawain and two others to Lucius as his emissaries; they are to demand that Lucius withdraw, but Gawain becomes angered by a slight and slays a kinsman of the emperor. They flee and the Romans pursue, only to fall

into an ambush: after prolonged battle, the Romans are defeated. Lucius is slain in a second encounter, and Arthur is once again triumphant (though many notable Britons have fallen). Just as Arthur is set to launch the final assault on Rome, he has another ominous dream. This time, its veracity is confirmed via messenger: Mordred, with Guenevere's approval, has seized the throne. (14088-14297:) Arthur turns back to re-take Britain. Gawain is killed in a first encounter that sends Mordred fleeing to Cornwall and the fleeing Guenevere to take the Veil as refuge. In the final battle, Mordred is slain, but this is of small consolation: the Round Table has been obliterated, and the wounded Arthur is taken to Avalon by fairies, who (legend tells) will minister to his injuries. He has yet to return. Lazamon recounts Merlin's prophecy that Arthur will return someday to aid the people of England.

The Collapse of Britain and the Triumph of the English

(14298-16095)

(14298-14694:) Constantin, Arthur's successor, slays Mordred's sons but is killed in the process; he is buried at Stonehenge. His nephew Conan proves a poor ruler, and the kingdom suffers greatly. Several kingships follow that pale when compared to Arthur's. During this time, Saxons in the north ally themselves with Gurmund, an African prince, and they devastate Britain, then ruled by Carric. Many Britons

flee, and Gurmund attempts systematically to eradicate Christianity from the land. He hands the kingdom over to the Saxons, and Britain is renamed England. (14695-15844:) In Rome, Pope Gregory takes notice of two Saxon slave boys, and sends a mission to England led by Augustine; he is met with some resistance, but eventually succeeds in converting the English. The British clergy state their disgust with the English and reject Roman Church authority. Prompted by Augustine, Athelbert of East Anglia sends Ælfric of Northumbria to attack the British, but under Cadwan the English are defeated. After peace is achieved, Ælfric rules north of the Humber, and Cadwan south. Their sons, Edwin and Cadwalan, though raised together, rekindle the old British-English rivalry. Battles ensue. Edwin receives help from a Spanish sorcerer, Pelluz, who is killed by Brian, Cadwalan's retainer; Cadwalan eventually kills Edwin. Edwin's kinsman, Oswald, rebels, but is murdered by Penda of Mercia. Oswald's brother Oswy is also slain, but Penda is wounded and flees back home; meanwhile, Oswy's son becomes Cadwalan's liegeman, which enables an alliance to form between the two related opponents. (15856-16095:) Cadwalan dies after ruling peacefully for 47 years, after which pestilence and famine severely wrack the land, until his son, Cadwalader, abandons the kingdom for Brittany. When things begin to improve, the remaining Saxons send for their kinsmen: 50,000 arrive and

settle there, electing Athelstan as ruler of all England. Cadwalader, bemoaning Britain's "Saxonification," plans to reclaim his throne, but a prophetic dream instructs him that the British will not rule in England until Arthur returns from Avalon, as Merlin prophesied. Cadwalader, following the dream's instructions, travels to Rome and dies; his kinsmen dwell in Wales, and the English hold England.

* * *

As evidenced by the summary above, the *Brut's* overall plot, with its succession of rises and falls, usurpation and defeat, migratory comings and goings, would seem to buttress the notion cited by Partner that much medieval historical writing reads like "just one damn thing after another" (194). Indeed, the very sprawl of the *Brut's* narrative events seems to stymie--or, at least, render *difficult*--the notion that a unifying historical perspective can be extracted from the poem. Again, while I attempt to demonstrate in various ways that the *Brut* indeed is too multivalent in scope to bestow a singular overarching historical vision, in each chapter below I elucidate dominant thematic strains that, when taken together, reveal

that the poem is in a sense unified by its ranging desires for interpretative perspicuity. The means by which La3amon contends with this desire will be unfolded in the following chapters.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹All references to and citations from the *Brut* are from the edition by Brook and Leslie (see "Works Cited," under "Lajamon"), unless otherwise stated. All translations of the *Brut* are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

²A full discussion of the various attempts to date the composition of the *Brut* can be found in Le Saux (*Lajamon's Brut*, 1-13).

³For dating of MSS, see Stanley, "Date," 85-88.

⁴I speak here of the 35-line prologue in the *Caligula* manuscript (the *Otho* prologue, seven lines shorter, lacks metaphors and crucial information). Indeed, throughout this study and unless indicated otherwise, I will consciously privilege this version of the *Brut* over the *Otho* one; all citations will be from the former. While the strength of the several cases made for viewing *Caligula* as closer to an authorial original could serve alone to justify this choice, I also consider the two versions of the *Brut* to be different enough, both in language style and content, that each warrants individual attention, apart from the other. Like many others, I am interested in *Caligula* because it is more elaborate, both stylistically and in content. This is not to say, however, that *Otho* holds no significance for study (see Christopher Cannon, W. J. Keith, and Elizabeth Bryan, respectively, for their literary analyses of the *Otho* version).

⁵Citing A. J. Minnis' study on medieval authorship, Allen notes that "Lawman is using an informal version of the Aristotelian Preface, with its four divisions of *Causa efficiens...causa materialis...causa formalis...[and] causa finalis...*(411)." Minnis, who attempts to glean the literary theories found in the late medieval Scholastic glosses and commentaries on the Latin *auctores*, also identifies the Aristotelian prologue, which came to fruition in the early thirteenth century, as the most common form to diversify and shape notions of medieval authorship: "Various writers [both Latin and vernacular] took the 'Aristotelian prologue' from the context of commentaries on *auctores* to provide the basis of introductions to their own works" (161), moderating its form in the process. As examples, Minnis demonstrates how both Chaucer and Gower utilized and adopted aspects of the Scholastic theories to authorize their poetry (160-211).

If Allen is correct in identifying *Lajamon's* prologue as an example of a modified and adapted Aristotelian Preface--and I think she is--then the *Brut* provides an extremely early example of vernacular appropriation of this academic practice; thus, it also serves as an indication of *Lajamon's* sophistication as a poet, and counters notions that he is a mere backwater priest.

⁶For a discussion of these and other possibilities, see Le Saux (*Lajamon's Brut*, 14-23).

⁷No mention is made of Wace and his *Roman de Brut* throughout the Otho Prologue, as a possible source or otherwise.

⁸The single usage of the verb *brumde* recorded in the OED is this one, which obviously makes the task of pinpointing the word's definition educated guesswork at best. In his dissertation (Notre Dame, 1996), Kenneth Jack Tiller notes that *brumde* has been glossed as "condense," or "push together"; thus, he argues, the word "suggests an activity involving violent force" (109). He also posits the Old Norse *bramma*--"trample"--as a possible cognate. Tiller concludes that "[t]he violence implicit in *Lajamon's* choice of vocabulary for describing his methods of composition" suggests that the "unity" of historiography is achieved not through providence, but "through the 'conquest' and suppression of competing textual traditions" (110). Given the lack of evidence for the word's denotations, however, Tiller's thematic reading of the prologue--describing historiography as an act of violence and suppression of source material, a theme central to his reading of the poem throughout--must *itself* suppress the less-violent semantic possibilities of *brumde*.

⁹Bzdyl equates "runan" with (the singular) "story" (1); Barron and Weinberg translate the line as "study these writings" (3); Madden reads: "learn this council" (3). *Lajamon's* penchant for nunnation--the addition of /n/ after final vowels--can sometimes make it difficult to determine singular from plural constructions in the poem. However, the phrase "peos runan" is likely plural, for in his variations on *run(e)*, *Lajamon* mostly does not apply nunnation when using the word in singular constructions, but opts instead for "rune." See chapter two, n. 9, for a complete list of the uses of *run(e)* in all of its various manifestations in the *Brut*.

¹⁰See Tiller's discussion of *run(e)* and its usage in Old English literature (114-5). Tiller views *Lazamon's* instruction to the reader to "learn these runes" (Tiller's translation) as an exhortation "to look beneath the surface contours of historical narrative," where one may uncover "the peoples and traditions suppressed by hegemonic history" (114). I make a somewhat similar argument in chapter two, though I find that the theme of *runen* points less to *what* can be uncovered and more to the difficulties inherent in the act of uncovering meanings.

¹¹By "polyvocality," Otter simply means that medieval historical writings were far from being univocal and consensus driven; instead, these texts are marked by variety, both individually and as a genre. Her project investigates "fictionality" in twelfth-century English historical writing, and how selected narrative episodes of discovery mirror and organize the texts' overall functions. In doing so, Otter addresses the interpretative limitations created by imposing modern distinctions between "truth" and "fiction" on medieval historical discourse. She is able to overcome this inadequate dichotomy because she does not view the texts she examines through the narrow prism of mimetic historical veracity--an Enlightenment idea that is of little applicable value to the study of medieval texts. For another, complementary view, see Ruth Morse's study of notions of rhetorical "truth" in medieval historical narrative, in which she cogently states that, as opposed to our modern "empirical" notions of historical truth, "[i]n the...conceptual space of the Middle Ages, 'true' might mean 'in the main' or 'for the most part' true, or even 'it could have happened like this'....[H]istory was a broad church, teaching by precept and example" (6).

¹²By "classical Old English verse," Donoghue means the standardized alliterative metrical forms found in much--but certainly not all--surviving Old English poetry. The *Brut* does not, in general, accurately replicate these forms; thus, some critics have posed the idea that it may represent a similar, though undocumented, "popular" poetic style. Many widely anthologized Old English poems, such as *The Dream of the Rood*--or "The Seafarer," with its changing metrics--serve as reminders that Anglo-Saxon poetry does not come to us in a homogeneous form. For a review of classical Old English metrical forms, see Bliss.

¹³The most thorough discussion to date on the theme of prophecy in the *Brut* is Kelley Wickham-Crowley's Cornell dissertation (1992). Using Mikhail Bakhtin's theories, she posits that *Lazamon* "creates a sequence from heritage, ancestry, and duty that ends in a transcendent (i.e., not finite) historical perspective best exemplified in how *Lazamon* treats prophecy in the *Brut*" (10). While her examination of prophecy is often astute, I believe she stresses too strongly its unifying and central thematic role in the narrative. As I discuss in more detail below, I find the *Brut's* representations of prophecy, which are sometimes pagan and other times Christian, distinctly unconsolidating.

¹⁴This is particularly true of critics who search for *Lazamon's* vision of the past by addressing the issue of style/content disparity: i.e., the chronicle's apparently positive depiction of the British vs. its negative one of the Saxons. See my discussion of Neil Wright, in chapters one and four, who questions whether this disparity actually exists.

¹⁵*Le Saux* (*Lazamon's Brut*) gives an exhaustive examination of *Lazamon's* possible Latin, French, Welsh, and English sources.

¹⁶See Hanning (5-43) for a discussion of the foundation of early Christian historiography, especially by Eusebius, Augustine, and Orosius.

¹⁷See Hanning (63-90) and George Hardin Brown (81-96).

¹⁸One assumes that *Lazamon* is citing this particular text, but perhaps there were other translations of Bede, now lost.

¹⁹See Hanning (126-35); I discuss William of Malmesbury in more detail below.

²⁰In addition to these two "distinct views," Hanning notes that the Norman barons--"a colorful and tempestuous lot"--were also scrutinized in the works of the Anglo-Norman historians: "The political world of the Anglo-Norman historians was therefore of greater complexity than they could compress into one consistent historiographical vision or system" (129).

²¹Concerning William the Conqueror's military success during the invasion, William states: "[P]roculdubio divina illum manus protexit" (vol 2: 416)--"[N]o doubt the hand of God so protected him" (278).

²²For insight into the problematic nature of applying the term "nationalism" to events preceding the thirteenth century, see my discussion of Daniel Donoghue in chapter one below.

²³Tiller is working from Hanning's conclusion that in the *Historia Brittonum* "the fall of Britain is the result of external pressure, not internal disorder and vice; forces beyond the individual's control and not dependent upon his virtue decide national destiny" (110).

²⁴See Lewis Thorpe's review of Geoffrey's possible sources (14-18). Thorpe, addressing the existence of Walter the Archdeacon's ancient Welsh book, which has been regarded to be fictive since William of Newburgh first expressed doubts about it in the 1190's, speculates:

By this "very ancient book," was Geoffrey perhaps thinking symbolically? By this "ancient book" did he really mean the knowledge of early British history which his friend Walter the Archdeacon had culled from a lifetime of talking to fellow enthusiasts and of extensive reading, he being so "well-informed about the history of foreign countries," which knowledge he had shared with Geoffrey during the long years of their acquaintanceship? (15-16)

²⁵The section headings to the outline are those found in Barron and Weinberg.

CHAPTER I:

On Native Soil: Laȝamon's "Englishness" and Its

Critical Reception

By electing to translate and craft an English adaptation of British legendary history as first construed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Laȝamon was embarking on a unique literary venture. Following the Norman Conquest of England and well into Laȝamon's own time, the predominant languages of the Court and Church were Anglo-Norman French, Latin, and, to a lesser but not insignificant extent, Continental French (though mastery in English was still esteemed in prestigious levels of society, since it was the language necessary for communication with commoners during the post-Conquest period).¹

Thorlac Turville-Petre (1996) notes the dangers of sweeping generalizations about the status of English during this period, commenting that different regions developed and maintained different language patterns and cultural identities.² Existing in Laȝamon's south-west Midlands area, for example, was

a tradition of respect for works in English that must itself have acted as a stimulus to writings throughout the thirteenth century. Indeed the quality and diversity of the English texts composed or copied in this region is striking. (182)

It should be noted, however, that the earliest possible date for the *Brut* would position it as a forerunner to this

Midlands tradition, rather than as a contemporaneous participant. Also, despite the favorable nature of this regional context for works in English, a poem of the length, breadth, and style that one finds in *Lazamon's Brut* is clearly an anomaly for its time. Indeed, the major points and questions raised by the past 150 years of *Brut* scholarship have addressed the perceived singularity of this English usage. What motivates *Lazamon* to write an English language version of British legendary history? Is the poem's unique language a surviving example of an otherwise undocumented popular verse style? Or is it an imitation of classical Old English verse--that is, not a surviving example but an attempt to revive, or reclaim, a voice for that which has been supplanted by newer ones?

If it is the former, then the poem could be viewed as genuinely *archaic*, meaning that it is an actual representation of an art form that, though still practiced, is nonetheless outdated and antiquated for its time, perhaps occurring as an anomaly, a hold-over from a bygone era. However, if it is the latter--a conscious imitation--then the poem is *archaistic*, meaning that it is not directly representative of an actual outmoded art form, but is instead a conscious replication, or perhaps attempted resuscitation, of one no longer in existence.³ This conundrum is directly related to the perplexing question of

the poem's "apparent inconsistency between...its [pro-English] verse style...and its [anti-English] content" (Donoghue 537). Just how one attempts to answer this "apparent inconsistency" depends, of course, on whether one views the poem as genuinely archaic or as an archaistic imitation. A review of the *Brut* scholarship engaged in these primary issues highlights the importance critics have placed on Laȝamon's relationship to England itself. In fact, it seems that locating his position vis-à-vis the possibility (or lack thereof) of an English identity--racial, linguistic, and nationalistic--underscores much of the critical discourse covered below.⁴

The *Brut* was first edited by Sir Frederic Madden in 1847, under the auspices of the Society of Antiquaries. This three-volume edition, though today not readily available, is still the most complete: it gives the Caligula and Otho texts in parallel format with a meticulous translation running along the bottom of every page, and contains notes, a glossary, and an influential introduction in which Madden plants Laȝamon's roots squarely in pre-conquest English poetic soil. According to Madden, that Laȝamon's status as native poet had not been recognized earlier "can scarcely be wondered at, when we recollect at how recent a period the structure of our language has been critically studied or

understood" (vii). He places the *Brut* in the "Semi-Saxon" period of the English language, a term (now seldom used by linguists) that covers 1100 to 1230. As the name indicates, this state of the language is transitional, half-Saxon in form, but evolving into the French-influenced Middle English period. In this mutating condition, and particularly in *Lazamon's* poem, Madden perceives the distinct residue of a receded Anglo-Saxon past:

It is a remarkable circumstance, that we find preserved in many passages of *Lazamon's* [sic] poem the spirit and style of the earlier Anglo-Saxon writers. No one can read his descriptions of battles and scenes of strife, without being reminded of the Ode on *Ethelstans* [sic] victory at Brunanburh....Very many phrases are purely Anglo-Saxon...(xxiii)

As Leslie Johnson notes ("Tracking," 141), while the term Semi-Saxon was not widely used in subsequent *Brut* scholarship, Madden's treatment of the *Brut* as a work ensconced in a native Anglo-Saxon tradition influenced many future critics' perceptions. Richard Wülckner (1876), for example, concluded that in some episodes the *Brut* demonstrates specific parallels to *Beowulf*. He extends Madden's critical view by stressing that *Lazamon* is an author who took *Wace's* French poem and transformed--rather than merely translated--his principal source by crafting it within his Anglo-Saxon native ethos and popular tradition. Rudolf Imelmann, however, later countered Wülckner's view in his dissertation, published in 1906. His thesis--referred to

by some critics as the "expanded Wace theory"--stresses the opposite point: Lazamon was in fact a mere translator and any perceived expansions of Wace reflect Lazamon's use of a French source that was either an expanded version of the *Roman de Brut* or a compilation of Wace and another source, probably a section of Gaimar's *Rhyming Chronicle*. Imelmann glosses over the lack of an extant manuscript to validate his theory, and stresses French dominance over the insular literary culture of the time. In addition, he rejects the importance of the Germanic elements in the *Brut* on the grounds that they offer no explicit insights into the poem's sources; he thus passes over any detailed examination of them.

In her review of *Brut* scholarship, Le Saux finds that the early contrasting views of Wülckner and Imelmann have established a binary opposition for subsequent critics of the *Brut*, a pattern whereby they treat the poem either in terms of Germanic or of Romance culture:

These two strains run throughout the history of Lazamon research, gradually blending into a more realistic view of things, but still recognizable as a sort of Anglo-French rivalry, expressing itself on the one side in terms of nationalistic pride, and on the other, through the underlining of the prestige of France and French literature throughout the ages. (*Lazamon's Brut*, 185)

The point Le Saux makes about "nationalistic pride" is exemplified by English critics such as Henry Cecil Wyld

(1930), who, in reply to Imelmann's thesis, reasserts Laȝamon's English-Germanic roots. One of the most explicit voices on the "pro-English" side, Wyld presents a case for Laȝamon's excellence in terms of racial superiority:

The outstanding quality of Laȝamon's work, and this is found on every page, almost every line, is the essential poetical character of the diction. We feel in reading the work, as we feel in reading Anglo-Saxon poetry...[h]is vocabulary and spirit are theirs. His poetry has its roots, not merely in the old literary tradition, but also, like this, *in the essential genius of the race.* (1-2, emphasis mine)

While Wyld's point of view clearly evinces part of Le Saux's thesis, her broader emphasis upon the English-French binary and its racial overtones has the net effect of glossing too readily as "nationalistic" any early critic who argues for the prominence of Germanic elements in the *Brut*, or who deems the poem superior to its principal French source. Indeed, she begins with vociferously adamant critics like Wyld, and then moves to more subtle examples, some of whom do not seem to belong in Wyld's company. One such scholar is Frances L. Gillespy (1916), the first person to write a book-length literary analysis of the *Brut* in English. Le Saux regards Gillespy as "[a]n early member of an English, (timidly) nationalistic outlook" (186). While she qualifies the degree of Gillespy's nationalism by describing it as equivocal, she nonetheless concludes:

As was to be expected, Gillespy tends to underrate the French element in the poem, and expresses the

relationship between the English *Brut* and the *Roman de Brut* in terms of relative inferiority and superiority.
(186)

Le Saux's conclusion begs the question: why is such a view "to be expected?" In fact, an examination of Gillespy's study shows that while her conclusions are indeed favorable to *Lazamon*, her reading of the poem is more complex and varied than Le Saux's brief assessment suggests.⁵

Gillespy's methodology involves bracketing off references to *Lazamon*'s possible sources, and then closely reading the entire narrative for its formal relations and recurrent themes. She carries out a similar procedure on the *Roman de Brut*, arriving at a comparative analysis of the two works. She draws an interesting parallel to defend her methodology:

If the discussion were to be on the *Canterbury Tales* one would not subtract all the elements that might be derived from every possible and impossible source, and then judge the author's skill by the mangled remains. For this reason I have emphasized the features of the English *Brut* as it stands, and have introduced a comparison with Wace's work chiefly for the purpose of throwing *Lazamon*'s methods into higher relief. (365)

After examining time and place, character, and plot, Gillespy concludes that these elements are more developed in *Lazamon* than in Wace, meaning that the former has creatively enhanced and expanded Wace's plot by improving its fictional quality: "His additions have for the most part a purely literary value....[His] is a better piece of fiction, rather

than a more detailed pseudo-history....[He] has a far keener dramatic sense" (500). She finds Wace a poorer poet because his aim is different in kind. He keeps the "pose of critical historian" (510) whereas *Lazamon's* poetic acumen and narrative expansions result from his investment in "the dictates of imaginative truth," dictates that derive their impetus "from the Germanic side." Although Gillespy underscores this German aesthetic, she is nevertheless wary of identifying direct Anglo-Saxon analogues such as *Beowulf* to the degree that Wülckner had done (indeed, she is critical of his conclusions in this regard); however, she finds the meter, epic formulas, and themes (such as *wyrd*) to constitute convincing proof that *Lazamon* was *in general* working in the native Anglo-Saxon tradition. Ironically, she concludes that this tradition, while providing *Lazamon* with fodder for his imaginative and poetic aims, is the very thing that doomed him to obscurity among both his contemporaries and later medieval poets:

Unfortunately, his influence on later works was not great. His nationality, his language, his meter were against him. His development of many elements was out of accord with the prevailing conceptions current at the time, so that to his contemporaries he must have appeared decidedly antiquated. (510)

The charge that *Lazamon* writes in an "antiquated" Anglo-Saxon medium that makes his work obsolete and inconsequential for its time becomes a prevalent strain in

the scholarship of those who appear to share in Gillespy's conclusion. While J. S. P. Tatlock (1950), Dorothy Everett (1955), and R. S. Loomis (1959) find that Wace exerts a higher substantive influence on the English *Brut* than Gillespy had concluded, they too perceive the poem, both in terms of style and theme, as an Anglo-Saxon continuation--one much diminished and corrupted by time. As Johnson surmises, this charge of subordinated obscurity leads these critics to conclude that *Lazamon* is

a 'native' writer, a conquered Englishman, who speaks in an indigenous if not local voice....[He is] a writer speaking from a culturally subordinate status and whose work reflects less sophisticated ideals [than those of the French-influenced court]. ("Tracking," 142)

Or, as Tatlock bluntly puts it: in comparison to Wace's milieu, *Lazamon's* is "primitive" (*Legendary History*, 489). This is not to say that Tatlock thinks the English *Brut* inferior as a literary product. In fact, he marks *Lazamon* as "the best [English] poet before Chaucer" (522), a view that is later echoed in an essay by C. S. Lewis (posthumously published in 1966), where he comments that on rare occasions *Lazamon's* passages display "imaginative power beyond the reach of any Middle English poet whatever" (19).

But while such critics as Tatlock and Lewis seem to grant *Lazamon* a favorable literary position because of his effective utilization of an outmoded Anglo-Saxon style and

its themes, it is, ironically, because of this style that he has been cast in the role of anomaly-poet, of literary aberration. This view becomes compounded by the perception that the *Brut*, as a linguistic anomaly, also has an inherent paradox at its narrative core, an ironic clash of form and content: its poetic style is Anglo-Saxon, but its subject matter glorifies the British and defames the Saxons. Jorge Luis Borges, in a very brief essay on *Lazamon* (1966), takes this point to its extreme, and casts the poet as an utterly confused man who "sang with fervor about ancient battles of the Britons against the Saxon invaders, as if he were not Saxon and as if the Britons and Saxons had not been, since Hastings, conquered by the Normans" (170). *Lazamon* was, in Borges' estimation, "the last Saxon poet and never knew it" (171).

Daniel Donoghue, in a highly provocative essay (1990; reviewed in full below),⁶ summarizes a differing critical view of this style/content disparity:

Borges's quaint and unflattering portrait of *Lazamon* has found little favor among other students of *Lazamon*, who prefer to reconcile the discrepancy between his style and content in terms of irony. According to this view, any possible contradiction is neutralized under the unifying claims of nationalism, and the struggle between the noble Britons and the villainous Anglo-Saxons is interpreted as a temporary stage in the teleological movement of history toward nationhood, where the competing races merge into a united England. This higher principle of nationalism thus reconciles the irony of *Lazamon's* use of an Anglo-Saxon verse form to disparage the earliest Anglo-Saxons. (537)

E. G. Stanley ("Antiquarian Sentiments," 1969) considers the thematic influence of nationalism and its larger implications for the poem. His view departs from those who perceive *Lazamon* as the last hold-out in a bygone tradition. Instead, Stanley argues that *Lazamon*, far from being an unsophisticated and provincial poet reflexively writing in a passé tradition, was rather highly conscious of his style as one imitating and "re-animating fossils of an extinct art form" (30). Since Stanley holds that *Lazamon* purposefully gives his poem an antique quality, this leads him to conclude that the *Brut* displays "antiquarian sentiments": a conscious and deliberate, perhaps nationalistic, choice to replicate the Anglo-Saxon poetic style, motivated by a nostalgic love for the bygone English past. Furthermore, in choosing to "write an anti-Anglo-Saxon *Arthuriad* in an archaic, perhaps *archaistic*, idiom consciously, perhaps artificially, derived from Anglo-Saxon poetry" (34, emphasis mine), *Lazamon*, Stanley argues, was drawing a parallel between the Anglo-Saxon conquest and the more recent Norman one. By using the word "archaistic," Stanley means to stress that *Lazamon* was concerned with creating the appearance of antiquity in his imitative style. In other words, an archaistic style attempts to appear archaic--archaic being, by implication, a genuine example of

outdated usage. He describes this archaistic quality as manifesting itself in a two-fold manner: 1) as an attempt at forging the appearance of a historically authentic, truly archaic, document, and 2) as the nostalgic equivalent of putting up *ye olde* signs, with the net-effect of highlighting the imitative antiquity of the work. However, Stanley concedes that the two styles are not so different that each can easily be detected: "It is very often impossible to distinguish in the archaism of the *Brut* the archaic from the archaistic" (27).

In a posthumously published essay on early-thirteenth-century insular culture and literature, Elizabeth Salter (1989) analyzes the *Brut* and argues the polar opposite to Stanley's "antiquarian" thesis (48-70). Salter, who recasts the *Brut* in a contemporary, international, and polyglot setting, takes the poem as much too varied, both stylistically and thematically, to be viewed as an overall archaistic work. Though she concedes that *Lazamon* does at times employ an antiquated syntax and diction, she maintains that this is only one example of the poem's vast repertoire of innovative and "international" stylistic choices. Such a view reconciles the style/content disparity by dismissing it altogether. The episodes where this supposed disparity arises in the narrative are too few and too unimportant to provide for an overarching thematic reading of the poem:

[I]t is the compilation and modulation of multiple literary styles that we notice in the *Brut*, rather than the single-minded advocacy of one particular style, resuscitated from a moribund past. What *Lazamon* achieves is as much an extension of the range of English verse-writing, under the influence of twelfth-century material and forms, both French and Latin, as is the *Owl and the Nightingale*. In that sense, at least...[*Lazamon* is] very much a man of his time.

(48-49)

Salter is not alone in wanting to recast *Lazamon* as a cosmopolitan "man of his time" by minimizing the perception of the *Brut* as singularly--or even significantly--archaic in its style. Le Saux (1989) also counters Stanley, and sees a greater continental and (possibly) Welsh influence in *Lazamon*. As mentioned above, she finds, in her review of *Brut* criticism, that the stress upon *Lazamon's* so-called "Englishness" is rooted in the patriotism of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century English critics, who, for ideological reasons of the time, would like to see the poem as a racial and national epic of resistance to things foreign. Thus, like Salter, Le Saux attempts to rescue the *Brut* from the hands of the pro-Germanic "socio-cultural background of pre-world war I Europe" (185) by offering an internationalist perspective, one that finds *Lazamon* to be a multi-culturalist of sorts who has "no compunction in mixing cultural references" (225), and who harbors strong sympathies for Welsh/English unity:

Whatever may be said about the 'Englishness' of *Lazamon*, the poet's loyalties are not expressed in ethnic terms, but proceed from a sense of institutional continuity, and the acceptance of cultural admixture. More than Germanic, English or Anglo-Saxon, *Lazamon's* outlook is already British, in the modern sense of the word. (227)⁷

While the critical divide is indeed wide between these "nationalist" and "internationalist" hypotheses, Daniel Donoghue (1990) offers a reading of *Lazamon* that attempts to bypass the binary established by Stanley and Salter. Concerning the apparent style/content disparity, the disjunction between the *Brut's* antique Anglo-Saxon poetic style and its British subject, Donoghue succinctly posits a "middle way":

I argue that there is no need to reconcile the style and content, because the disparity is consistent with an ambivalence toward the past which *Lazamon* demonstrates throughout his chronicle and which can be seen as part of a wider cultural ambivalence in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England. (537)

Donoghue suggests that critics who focus upon the relation between *Lazamon's* archaism and a type of English nationalism are going down the wrong interpretive path, because it is anachronistic to speak of nationalism at the time of the poem's composition.⁸ In place of nationalism, he views race as the delineating agent:

[T]he competing parties in his chronicle are defined by race (*leoden*), and he is careful to keep the two main races, the *Brutten* and the *Anglen*, distinct.

...Lazamon's nationalism, like his irony, is a modern invention. (557)⁹

But while Donoghue argues that Lazamon is not nationalistic, he stresses that it is also incorrect to argue, as Salter has, that the *Brut* exemplifies the internationalist culture of its time. Donoghue finds Lazamon simply too archaic, too resistant to French influence. He reinforces this position by reminding the reader that Lazamon, working almost exclusively from a French source, uses only a few dozen French loan-words in his entire 16,095 line poem: "Translating from a French source would have tempted any other English translator to borrow words...but Lazamon takes pains to recast the language and meter into recognizably Germanic forms" (540). Donoghue also notes that contemporaneous English works written in Lazamon's southwest Midlands region (the *Owl and the Nightingale*, *Ancrene Wisse*, *Sawles Ward*, among others) use many more French and Latin loan-words. These points go unmentioned by both Salter and Le Saux.

Along with Stanley, Donoghue views the text's archaism as a manner for drawing a parallel between ages, and he concludes that Lazamon's thematic point is the following: "[J]ust as the Britons had been punished for their wickedness by the invasions of the Anglo-Saxons, so the Anglo-Saxons were punished by the Norman Conquest" (558).

According to Donoghue, this parallel derives from an established historical tradition that dates back to Gildas's sixth-century *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, a work, as I have previously discussed, that recounts the fall of the British to the Anglo-Saxons, and that this tradition stresses providential history as a pattern of divine salvation and retribution. Donoghue suggests that this model was used successively by, among others, Bede, "Nennius," Wulfstan, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Florence of Worcester, and William of Malmesbury: "In the broadest terms, writers from Gildas to William of Malmesbury established an Anglo-Saxon historiographical tradition that *Lazamon* inherited independent of Wace" (559). Furthermore, Donoghue concludes, *Lazamon's* choice of style means that he does not have to spell this parallel out; its very archaism stands as proof that old orders pass. Therefore, the different races stand in typological relation to one another. But despite the clear historical precedent that *Lazamon* has, his project ultimately leaves him in a state of ambivalence:

He remains caught between the old and the new, the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman, in an age of competing allegiances, and from his middle position he balances the oppositions within the scheme of a historiographical tradition more complex than most of his modern admirers have allowed. *Lazamon* does not abhor his Anglo-Saxon heritage--he cherishes it, but he does so in an way that justifies its decline. This is his final ambivalence. (563)

Three important investigations into the dilemma of pinpointing *Lazamon's* vision of history that follow after Donoghue's appear in a volume of essays edited by Le Saux (*Text and Tradition*, 1994), where--both directly and implicitly--Donoghue's ambivalence argument is addressed. After examining the twists and turns of fortune found in the *Brut's* narrative, Leslie Johnson ("Reading the Past," 141-160) concludes that, while the *Brut* does to a limited extent encourage its audience to draw parallels between different ages,¹⁰ one is hard-pressed to find a coherent and providential history in the poem that puts races and events into typological relation. Instead, Johnson stresses the poem's portrayal of the "unpredictability of the outcome of events, the difficulty of reading signs of the times, and the ironic reversals in the flux of political power" (158-59).

Neil Wright (1994; 161-170) explores the frequently expressed notion that *Lazamon* explicitly distinguishes between the evil, pagan Saxons and the redeemed, converted Angles. This view is often used to help explain the so-called content/style disparity raised by Borges and others. But contrary to this view, Wright finds that, far from distinguishing between these two Germanic groups, *Lazamon* adds to his sources to emphasize their shared identity. To take just one example: in *Wace*, Hengest and his men are

clearly represented as Saxons ("De Saxione,' dist il [Hengest], 'venum'--"from Saxony,' he said, 'we come.'" [6731]). Laȝamon alters this reference and has them come from the land of "Angles" (6912). Wright asks: "If Laȝamon really aimed to separate Angles from Saxons, would he have complicated the issue in this way...in direct contradiction to what he found in Wace?" (166). Wright cites other such examples, concluding that there is little basis behind a moral interpretation of the passing of dominion from the Britons to the English.

James Noble (1994; 171-182), however, does find a strong anti-Saxon sentiment in the poem, despite Wright's conclusions. He argues that Laȝamon portrays the Saxons--or any race that would invade and conquer the island--as wicked. The negative portrayal of the Saxons changes only when they are no longer pagan invaders of the land, but (now as Christianized Angles) are recipients of the land:

[What] lie[s] at the root of Laȝamon's so-called cultural ambivalence, mistaken patriotism, etc. has been a failure on the part of his critics to recognize the distinction in the poet's mind between the would-be Saxon usurpers...and...the Germanic immigrants who, some years later, are invited to assume stewardship of the island in the wake of Gurmund's invasion. (181)

Thus, all three critics reassess Donoghue's ambivalence reading. Johnson does so by stressing the *Brut's* lack of an underlying typological parallelism--or of any historical approximation of the salvation and retribution model. Wright

implicitly reinforces a degree of ambivalence in the poem by demonstrating that one counter to this notion (the separation of the Saxons from the Angles) is inaccurate. But he erases the type of ambivalence Donoghue argues for, since the passing of dominion from the British to the Angles loses its thematic power in terms of a Gildian typology; instead, given Wright's reading, Fortuna's Wheel seems the apt historical model for the *Brut*. Finally, and in opposition to Wright, Noble concludes that critics' readings of ambivalence in the *Brut* is a "failure" to note the thematic distinction made between the Germanic invader and the Germanic immigrant, a distinction he finds clearly made in the poem.¹¹

In terms of stylistics, the major thrust of *Brut* criticism covered so far has viewed the Anglo-Saxon verse qualities in the poem as either attributable to an enduring popular style (and hypothesized, since there are no other surviving records) or to Laȝamon's less-than-perfect understanding of the classical one, which he desires to imitate. But as early as 1969, N. F. Blake was arguing a very different approach to the issue of Laȝamon's possible knowledge of, and influence by, Anglo-Saxon sources. Concluding that the popular verse hypothesis "is invented to explain Laȝamon's *Brut*" (118), Blake proposes that the loose alliterative meter one finds in the poem, as well as several

other west Midlands Middle English poems, derives not from poetry, but from Old English alliterative prose. In the Conquest period (Blake argues), the manuscript evidence shows that people discontinued copying Old English poetry in its classic form. This was not the case with prose works, however, particularly the alliterative prose of Ælfric and Wulfstan:

Manuscripts of their works...were copied in the twelfth century, whereas there are no late copies of Old English poetry. It was from this rhythmical alliteration, which represents a merging of Old English poetry and prose, that *Lazamon* and other early Middle English poets drew their examples and inspiration.

(120)

Blake posits that prose was the natural medium through which poetic traditions would travel, since prose was adaptive to Middle English linguistic change in a way that classical Old English meter, with its rigid rules and structures, was not. Also, he is not surprised that this amalgamated form of Middle English alliteration would develop in the west Midlands area, where Wulfstan, the Anglo-Saxon Bishop of Worcester, maintained his see in the late eleventh century despite the Norman appropriation of virtually all insular Church offices. Indeed, much of the active copying of Old English prose occurred in Worcester well into the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

S. K. Brehe (1990) has most articulately extended Blake's "rhythmical alliteration" theory, and has

demonstrated conclusively the stylistic linkage between Elfric's and Laȝamon's compositional styles; in so doing, he has in some measure helped to clarify the source of the *Brut's* unique style. Brehe argues that Laȝamon's style results from his desire to imitate an alliterative form that would be associated with Elfric (who Brehe, like Blake, assumes was likely known to some of Laȝamon's possible readers in that region) in order to lend his writing a pre-Conquest historical pedigree, and that this "[alliterative] form does not appear to have been customary for narrative....[I]ts main appeal...may have been its associations with the Anglo-Saxon past" (230). In addition, Brehe uses metrical analysis to demonstrate that in the poem's battle scenes Laȝamon shows a working knowledge of certain features of classical Old English verse, and that he seems to have made a deliberate attempt to replicate its meter in these lines; however, these passages also reveal Laȝamon's distance from that "authentic" verse, for it lacks many elements of the classical form, such as the particular kennings associated with Old English poetic descriptions of battles. Brehe argues that these select passages most explicitly demonstrate the type of imitative, or antiquarian, intentions that Stanley argues characterize Laȝamon's work. He also concludes that Laȝamon was utilizing an alliterative poetic form that would appeal to "the

patriotism of his readers," and to their "sense of national identity" (230),¹² noting too that *Lazamon* not only chose to write in English over Latin and French (English being the least prestigious of the three languages), but in an English with "an unusually small proportion of French loan words" (230). Of course, Brehe's argument--rooted as it appears to be in English nationalism--raises the questions posed by Le Saux's treatment of nationalistic readings above.

Both Donoghue and Brehe invest their studies with Stanley's "antiquarian" thesis, with whom they concur that *Lazamon* is a conscious imitator trying--sometimes successfully, sometimes not--to reanimate the Anglo-Saxon past; they both also inherit the difficulties raised by Stanley's use of the terms "archaic" and "archaistic," for distinguishing between the two is very difficult in the context of Stanley's thesis. While Stanley introduces the valuable notion that the *Brut* is an archaistic imitation, he does not put forth a clear strategy by which one can distinguish the genuinely archaic from the archaistic in the poem. Indeed, he specifically notes that such a task is "often impossible." Stanley argues that *Lazamon* aspires to create an archaistic impression. If so, his success is contingent on his degree of accuracy in imitating actual and recognizable archaisms. Even if this imitation is highly

superficial, it must call to mind that which it is imitating to a minimal degree. At the same time, while Lazamon's thematic point is to draw parallels between ages, as Stanley argues him to be doing, Lazamon cannot be so accurate in his imitations that this parallel is lost to the reader, who mistakes these imitations ("forgeries") for the very past they aspire to thematically comment upon--that is, for the "real thing." This possibility for mistaken identity, which I find inherent in Stanley's antiquarian thesis, has already occurred with the *Brut*: many scholars (Madden et al.) have erroneously identified the poem as the "real thing" (or, at least, an anemic version of it), as an exemplar of a living (though undocumented) poetic tradition, "Semi-Saxon" or otherwise.

The ability to distinguish between an archaic and archaistic English is a crucial element to a typological reading of the poem that transcends the so-called "ironic clash of style and content," for it goes to the heart of Lazamon's thematic intentions. For those who read the *Brut* as providential history, it is the archaistic design that creates and telegraphs the parallels drawn between the ages that point to a Gildian tradition; it is the consciously antique style that "by itself evokes memories of an Anglo-Saxon golden age" (Donoghue 561). For Stanley, it is Lazamon's conscious intention to archaize in a manner that

provides a parallel between the Norman conquest and the earlier Saxon one that saves him from succumbing to the irony of being the author of "a major ethnographic howler" (33); that is, a poet unaware of his clashing style and content, destined for the literary joke-pile.

Is there a coherent means by which one can specifically separate the archaic from the archaistic in the *Brut*, and thus buttress prominent claims for interpreting the poem as typological history? I return to Donoghue's seminal essay, where he does attempt such a reading of the *Brut* and outlines a program for separating the archaic and the archaistic--one that, upon closer scrutiny, does not satisfactorily resolve the issue.

While Donoghue reacts positively to Blake's conclusion that Old English alliterative prose is a likely source to the *Brut's* style, he does not rule out poetic sources (though he is chary about positing a popular poetic source).¹³ Laȝamon, he reminds, viewed his work as poetry: "The internal evidence is clear: early on he calls it a *loft-songe*" (539). While the meter of the *Brut* is clearly looser than classical Old English verse (the poem shows various forms, including end rhyme, as well as a wider variety in the number of stresses per line), "it is safe to say that the basic verse structure consists primarily of

two-stressed half-lines linked by alliteration" (539).¹⁴ But it is the *Brut's* vocabulary that, for Donoghue, most forcefully illustrates Laȝamon's "Englishness" and, significantly, his distance from the original Old English poetic ethos. As mentioned above, the *Brut's* vocabulary is almost never derived from a Romance language, despite the poem's French (and supposedly Latin) source(s). This point factors prominently in Donoghue's rebuttal to Salter, who views the *Brut* as a decidedly eclectic work. Concurring with Stanley's thesis that the *Brut* is an antiquarian work, and desiring to explore Laȝamon's successes and failures in recalling "the Old English heroic ethos" (538), he examines those words "omitted or replaced" by the "Otho Reviser," arguing that "by identifying [these] words...we can reasonably guess what elements of Laȝamon's original were the archaistic *ye olde* signs of his time" (544).

Donoghue's search for evidence of archaistic elements is restricted to the poem's battle scenes: "A number of scholars have noted that Laȝamon's verse form most closely resembles that of classical verse in such scenes" (544-45). He points out that Laȝamon takes the battle scenes in Wace and translates them from a Norman context into a pre-Conquest one, transforming "chivalric knights into Germanic foot soldiers" (546).¹⁵ Not only does he do so in terms of fighting materials, but "[i]n a complete reversal of his

source, *Lazamon* substitutes an older form of fighting for Wace's modern, complex tactics" by eliminating references to archers and crossbowmen, opting instead for the "Old English shield wall" (549). But it is in such "translated" Anglo-Saxon battle scenes that *Lazamon* reveals his distance from the Anglo-Saxon past. This failure to capture accurately the heroic ethos of the past is exemplified for Donoghue in two thematic forms: "the exhortation and the boast" (550). In the former, *Lazamon's* accounts of exhortations by Belin and Brennes (2924-29) and by Hengest (8209, 8213-14) fail to reflect the highly codified notion of the exhortation found in the Old English heroic ethos: "This ethos seems to be beyond *Lazamon's* recall" (551). In both instances, the exhortations are instead merely generic rallying cries.

Donoghue gives more attention to the second example of "replication failure": the heroic boast. In the highly codified world of the Anglo-Saxon warrior ethos, the Old English words *beot* and *gielp* denote a formal vow or boast; once a warrior has made one, he must keep it, or die in the attempt (a fate that does not diminish the warrior's status); not to follow through on a boast would result in ultimate disgrace. Both of these words appear in the *Brut*, but, according to Donoghue, they have lost their codified heroic meaning. *Yælp*, the early Middle English form of *gielp*, appears in several Middle English works that

demonstrate that, unlike its Old English cognate, the word has come to mean simply "boast." But the other word, *beot*, survives only in the *Brut*. Donoghue turns to the *Middle English Dictionary*, as well as Madden's glossary and his translation of the following battle scene passage, to demonstrate that this word too has lost its earlier ethos, and here means simply "threat" (522):

Helmes þer gullen. beornes þer ueollon.
 sceldes gunnen scenen. scalkes gunnen swelten.
 at þan forme rese. fifti þusende.
 baldere beornen. heore *beot* wes þæ lasse.
 (15590-93, Donoghue's emphasis [535])

[Helms there resounded, knights there fell; shields gan shiver, warriors gan perish; at the first assault fifty thousand bold men,--their *threatening* was the less!]

Donoghue then notes that the "Otho Reviser" tends to avoid the use of *beot*: "[he] deleted six passages where the word occurs; damage to the [Otho] manuscript has obscured two more places. For another five he substituted five words: *thret*, *broc* ('threat'), *prude*, *bold wordes*, and *drede*" (552). The variety of substitutions suggests for Donoghue that the scribe was unsure of the word's meaning in these passages. However, the scribe does retain *beot* in a passage where Donoghue finds its usage to capture its original Old English meaning as a warrior's vow:

And whaðer unker þe geð abake. & þis feoht wulle for-
 sake.]
 beon he in ælche londe. iqueðe for ane sconde.
 þenne mæie me singe. of ane swulche kinge.
 þe his *beot* haueð imaked. and his cniht-scipe for-

saken.]

þæt iherde Frolle. þe king wes of France.
 þat Arður fehten wolden. him-seolf buten cnihte.
 Strong mon wes Frolle. and sterc mon on mode.
 and his *beot* imaked hafde. bi-foren al his dugeðe.
 and [h]e ne mihte. for scome muchelen. scenden hine
seoluen.]
 bi-læuen his balde *ibeot*. þat he i burh hafde iseid.
 (11810-19, Donoghue's emphasis)

['And whoever turns back and wants to forsake this fight will be in each land proclaimed a coward. Then men may sing of such a worthless king, that he had made his *beot* and forsaken his knighthood!' Frolle, who was king of France, heard that Arthur wanted to fight him without any knight. Frolle was a strong and courageous man and had made his *beot* before all his retainers, and he could not, because of the great shame, disgrace himself by forsaking his firm *ibeot* that he had said in the stronghold.]¹⁶

The first two uses of *beot*, Donoghue finds, approximate the original Old English meaning of formal boast (as opposed to generically meaning "threat"); the third use, which does not, has been omitted in *Otho*. This retention leads Donoghue to the following conclusion:

Lajamon's attempt to reanimate *beot*, which was of central significance in Old English heroic poetry, and the *Otho* Reviser's cautious treatment of it indicate that the word was *truly archaic rather than archaistic* in Lajamon's time. If one wished to pinpoint when the Old English heroic tradition gave way to something else, a good choice for the terminus ante quem would be *Brut*, where *beot* has only the faintest echoes of the old ethos. It is convincing evidence that for Lajamon the heroic tradition was a faltering memory.
 (554, emphasis mine)

In order to support this reading, Donoghue invests the scribe who copied the *Otho* manuscript with a clear directive to remove archaistic words, but to maintain cautiously and

respectfully the "truly archaic" ones, at least in places where he recognizes their "proper" usage. Hence, the scribe is given the name "Otho Reviser," a clear indication that Donoghue perceives that an almost author-like persona with a clear and recognizable agenda is documented in Otho: the archaic words that he recognizes and deems properly utilized pass muster and stay, the archaistic words in Caligula are jettisoned. But while one can generally deduce from the revisions that the Otho scribe "was out of sympathy with the antiquarian modulation of the poet" (Stanley, "Antiquarian Sentiments," 29), it is difficult to take the further step of ascribing a specific methodology to those revisions. For example, many words in Caligula, like *run(e)* and *leod(e)*, are clearly archaic and not archaistic (that is, according to Donoghue's criteria, these words are frequently used in their former, "genuinely" Old English senses); but often *run(e)* is deleted in Otho (in the prologue, for example), as is also the case with *leod(e)*. According to Donoghue's criteria, one would expect the Otho Reviser to maintain these "genuinely archaic" words, particularly *run(e)*, which is found in contemporaneous English works, and was therefore probably recognizable.¹⁷

Donoghue also limits the possible translations of the first *beot* passage (15590-93) to Madden's, where the word is translated as "threat," and he cites the *MED*'s definition

even though the word's only Middle English occurrence is in the *Brut*. Like the Middle English word *brumde*, its perceived meaning is difficult to apprehend conclusively. Others, for example, have glossed this passage and the word *beot* differently: Allen translates 15593 as: "Very brave warriors; their boasting would be weaker!" (398); Barron and Weinberg read: "...their power to threaten was reduced!" (801). One could also read the passage as an example of *Lajamon's* frequently sardonic narrative wit; here, he could be simply pointing out that, *being dead*, the warriors' boasts no longer carried much weight with those at whom they were directed. Such a reading would not negate the Old English ethos so much as comment upon it--in fact, such an ironic reading would be quintessentially Anglo-Saxon. Furthermore, the Old English usage of *beot* was not limited to the heroic boast, but might also convey a general threat.¹⁸

In general, then, Donoghue's method for distinguishing the archaic from the archaistic cannot resolve the issue of whether *Lajamon's* was "a faltering memory," or whether he was indeed "an antiquary, one of the first students of Old English literature" (554). This difficulty is not surprising. References to external criteria for separating the archaic from the archaistic in the *Brut* will remain doubtful, due most prominently to the very limited primary

resources available for the study of early Middle English language and literature. The surviving texts are few, and those in the loose alliterative style that *Lazamon* utilizes are fewer still. Critics such as Donoghue who attempt to locate the archaistic qualities in the *Brut* and distinguish them from the archaic face, ultimately, the following obstacle: the poem provides the solitary evidence for the existence of many English words (this is particularly true of the poem's compound words, only roughly half of which have Old English cognates). While it is certainly plausible to go on to argue, as many critics do, that *Lazamon* invented those words unique to the *Brut*, and then to cite them as examples of his archaistic tendencies, of his desire to create an antique effect by making up old-sounding words,¹⁹ this certainty should be checked by the *Brut*'s other unique aspect: namely, its great length, which must account for some, though certainly not all (or perhaps even most), of its unique word usage. Being the longest poem in early Middle English, it is likely to have a more extensive vocabulary than other contemporaneous English works, and to contain words that do not appear elsewhere within a relatively small corpus of texts. Given this lack of documentary evidence, one is hard-pressed to posit an encompassing methodology for separating the archaic from the archaistic in the *Brut*. While it is best to apply external

criteria only gingerly, another recourse needs further examination. The arguably irreconcilable nature of Laȝamon's language medium--the resistance it offers to those critics seeking its precise historical footing--may communicate issues best elucidated by recourse to the poem's thematic treatment of history, language, and change. To such matters I turn below.

The problems encountered by Donoghue and others in their attempts to link the *Brut's* English usage to linguistic history resonate with those demonstrated in the poem itself: what Laȝamon states about words and their connections to history reveals that the author too is wrestling with how and where to place his language. In certain instances, one need not infer the meaning and historical status of particular words, for Laȝamon provides the reader with their history. While the examples of this phenomenon are few, they are offered by Laȝamon in a manner that highlights their importance (as I demonstrate below). Indeed, such examples also provide insights to his own view of history, his overarching, thematic motivations for using an antique poetic style, one that simulates an historical, diachronic truth: things, ideas, places, and actions unfold upon a path that may be historically traced and interpreted. This is most explicitly evident in Laȝamon's proclivity for

rehearsing and clarifying the etymological changes in toponyms.²⁰ In such episodes, he most clearly demonstrates authoritative historical interpretation as a vertical ascent or descent on the diachronic ladder of time. According to Johnson ("Reading the Past"), these "micro-histories," as she calls the *Brut's* toponyms, are "the only occasions when the narrator explicitly remarks on the larger patterns of historical and political change recounted in the narrative" (156-57). In doing so, these narrative locations also embody the tensions inherent in *Lazamon's* attempt to represent the past, for while recovering meaning they necessarily highlight the loss inflicted by change.

Lazamon demonstrates that toponyms are inexorably connected to and derived from narrative actions. Examples abound where place-names are extensions of characters who imprint their identities onto their surroundings via their own names: *Cambrie* after *Cambert* (1058), *Leirchester* after *Leir* (1456), and, most famously, *Brutaine* after *Brutus* (978). Place-names, not only marks of victory, also arise from the fallen and defeated: the *Humbre* commemorates the place where the invader *Humber* was slain by the defending Britons (1104), and the *Auren*, where *Abren* was drowned by the jealous *Guendoleine* (1250). Exemplifying this process of extension is a passage notable for its poetic refinement, where *Lazamon* depicts the process by which internalized

meaning. Also, as Otter notes, this contemplation of the land leads Brutus to name his capital city *Troye þe Newe*, demonstrating how he "is led by his *affectus* to reestablish an interrupted tradition, to close the gap in his history" (89) created by his exile.

It is with this capital city of London that the reader encounters the most explicit and sweeping narrative commentary on place-names. *Laȝamon*, after recounting Brutus's founding of *Troye þe Neowe* (London), passes through centuries of history by listing successive re-namings of the British capital:

Soððen þa leodene. longe þer-after.
 leiden adun þene noma. & Trinouant heo nemneden.
 Binnen feola wintre. hit iwerð seo[ð]ðen.
 þat aræs of Brutus kunne. þat was an heh king.
 Lud wes i-haten. þas burh he luuede swiðe.
 Ðe king i þere burh wonede. swiðe feola wintre.
 he lette heo lude clepian. ȝond his leod-folke.
 hehte heo nemnen Kaerlud. æfter þone kinge.
 Seo[ð]ðen com oþer tir. & neowe tidinde.
 þat men heo clepeden Lundin. ouer al þas leode.
 Seoððen comen Engliſce men. & clepeden heo Lundene.
 Se[ð]ðen comen þa Frenſca. þa mid fehte heo bi-wonnen.
 mid heora leodðeawe. & Lundres heo hehten.
 Ðus is þas burh i-uaren. se[ð]ðen heo ærest was
a-reræd.]
 þus is þis eit-lond. i-gon from honde to hond.
 þet alle þa burhȝes. þe Brutus iwrohte.
 & heora noma gode. þa on Brutus dæi stode.
 beoð swiðe afelled. þurh warf of þon folke. (1019-36)

[Then the people long thereafter laid aside that name (*Troye þe Neowe*) and named it *Troy Novant*. After many winters, it later happened that there arose a kinsman of Brutus who was a high king; he was called Lud--he loved that city greatly. The king dwelled in that city a great many years; he had it communicated widely among his people, ordered that they name it *Kaerlud*, after

the king. Later came other glory and new tidings so that men called it Lundin all over this land. Later came English men and called it Lundene. Later came the French who won it in battle--according to their customs, they called it Lundres. Thus has this city fared since it first was reared; thus has this island passed from hand to hand, that all the cities which Brutus wrought and their good names that stood in Brutus's day have been greatly felled through changes in the people.]

In this passage, *Lazamon* equates accurate knowledge of the past with the recovery of true names, as if they were concrete entities grafted by history upon a fixed location in time, only to be severed and replaced by that same history.²¹ Thus, his explanation concerning such change embraces both the loss inflicted by history (i.e., the "noma gode" that, having been employed in the days of Brutus, are effaced by the "warfe" of "folke") and the recovery of that loss. Therefore, *Lazamon's* etymological catalogue is no mere enumeration. If, as *Lazamon* claims, the old names are lost to common discourse, they are apparently not lost to him, or to his "sources." *Lazamon's* catalogue is a display of his authority, and the veracity of his sources (which he "authorizes" in his prologue). The question of the narrator's authority is central one, for it goes to the heart of understanding, on the one hand, the degree of historical veracity claimed by *Lazamon* in his narrative interjections, and, on the other, the limitations revealed

by those very passages (see the following chapters, and particularly chapter three).

If Laȝamon establishes himself as an authority on the accurate history of names, he implies the same for his language--one that approximates the poem's place upon the diachronic ladder. It is necessarily older in appearance because the truth it is recouping and reflecting is in the past (as are his purported textual sources). Indeed, his decision to write in an English that eradicates virtually all foreign words--remember, his main source is French--means that he is not only recouping past events, but a language that precedes its current historical (French-influenced) status.²² Speaking *about* the past is tantamount to attempting to speaking *in* the past. Of course, this connection between the poem's language and its narrative events is exemplified by its toponyms, which signify concurrently both past events and the past names. If we are to believe Laȝamon's report on the accuracy of certain names, then we are presumably to believe in the accuracy of his language. Both his language and historical narrative seek to "close the gaps" between past and present. This overall strategy of linking history to language is antithetical to Wace's, who, by writing in Norman French, makes the past relevant by dressing it in a contemporary courtly garb, and in the currently popular literary

language. Laȝamon works in a reverse manner. As Derek Brewer notes in his comparison of Laȝamon's Arthur to Wace's: "[He] is creating an archaic king and society, surely consciously imposing an ethos quite different from what he found in his source, but which he must have decided was more authentic" (199). Thus, Laȝamon's stylistic archaism reflects his quest for "more authentic" historical interpretations, as well as the authority of those interpretations. What Otter claims for twelfth-century English hagiographical stories of digging and discovering saints' relics can also be said of Laȝamon's own "diggings":

When [monastic histories] tell foundation stories that involve digging up saints' relics, the dig--the search and descent to a "deeper level," the "opening up" of what lay "hidden"--says as much about the intellectual process of projecting a past, a historical origin, as it does about the physical origin of the physical relics kept in a monastery. (4)

Laȝamon's foundation stories, his projecting uncoverings of the "hidden" meanings behind place-names, mirror an "intellectual process" striving for continuity, for diachrony. Thus, his antique style attempts to legitimize the veracity of applying lessons of the past to the present to which it is necessarily connected, for diachrony is continuity. But this "linguistic authenticity" is only part of the equation. Ironically, diachrony is also change, and, while demonstrating continuity in history,

obviously reinforces the flux of time, thus creating the linguistic ambivalence stressed by Donoghue:

One can see...a[n]...ambivalence between the desire for permanence and the inevitability of change in language. Lazamon's cultivation of an archaic diction cleansed of foreign elements points to his desire for stability.
(562)

Given this duality between the poem's narrative content and its language venue, this "desire for stability" is not only linguistic, but interpretative as well. Hence, the implicit tone of regret found in lines 1032-36 that the old names have been lost (if not to Lazamon, then to most). This desire for interpretative stability may also account for Lazamon's proclivity for repeating and revising this same place-name lineage. After reciting in very similar fashion London's etymological history for a second time, he adds the following group to the *uncuðe*--"foreign"--*folke* that have come to Britain's shores and altered its language:

Seoððen comen Normans. mid heore nið-craften.
and nemneden heo Lundres. þeos leodes heo amærden.
Swa is al þis lond iuaren. for uncuðe leoden.
þeo þis londe hæbbeð bi-wunnen. and ef[t] beoð idriuen
hennene.]
And eft hit biȝetten oðeræ. þe uncuðe weoren.
& falden þene ælden nomen. æfter heore wille.
of gode þe burȝen. & wenden heore nomen.
swa þat nis her burh nan. in þissere Bruttene.
þat habbe hire nome æld. þe me arst hire on-stalde.
(3547-3555)

[Later came the Normans with their evil manners, and named it Lundres--they destroyed this land. So has all this land fared because of foreigners, who have won this land, and have afterwards been driven hence; and afterwards it was begotten by others who were also

foreign and, after their will, would overthrow the old names of the good boroughs and alter their names, so that there is not one borough in this Britain that has the old name with which they were first established.]

The implied tone of regret found in the first instance of this place-name catalogue has been replaced here by clear condemnation of foreign influence: in the *Brut's* single reference to Norman occupation, *Lazamon* seems to equate their destruction of the *leod(e)* with their "destruction" of London's previous name, and, in a sense, their destruction of history, which is embodied in the *nome æld*. Foreigners--*uncuðe leoden*--are altering the land, its language, and, thus, its history. To recover the old names is to recover the true history; in his attempt to do so, *Lazamon* approximates a language that resonates the *nome æld*--that is, a language unaltered by the current settlement of *uncuðe leoden*.

Lazamon's desire for a linguistic medium unstained by the pollution of time is also a preeminent concern for literature's most notable archaizer of the English language, Edmund Spenser, who as Christopher Cannon points out, lauds Chaucer's "undefiled" English ("Myth of Origin," 650). In so doing, Cannon argues, Spenser is, on the one hand, self-authorizing his own language, which imitates Chaucer's, by giving it an historical authenticity, and, on the other, establishing it in a tradition with a locatable origin. One

can speculate that the desire to archaize itself reflects a desire for an authoritative origin; whether this is generally so, it aptly serves to describe Laȝamon's strategy (though, of course, Laȝamon was not imitating any one author in particular, as Spenser was).

Laȝamon's unique strategy for bestowing his historical claims with veracity develops from his given status as a vernacular author. *Auctoritas* was bestowed only to the Latin *auctores*, those classical authors and Church Fathers whose works were the foundation of the school commentaries. As A. J. Minnis writes: "[n]o 'modern' writer could decently be called an *auctor* in a period in which men saw themselves as dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants" (12). Nor did mere recourse to the Latin medium suffice; indeed, Geoffrey of Monmouth must authorize his legendary history by tracing its origin in part to an ancient Welsh book. For a vernacular author, the task of authorization is greater still. But as Tim Machan has argued in regard to late Middle English works, such limitations, so seemingly crippling, presented strategic opportunities for authors as well:

There is a great deal of variety in the strategies writers use--and therefore in their conceptions of literary authority--and several of these strategies suggest that the absence of official authority was itself, in fact, a significant condition of existence for late Middle English works, shaping both stylistics and thematics....Since Middle English writers were officially denied auctorial status, a diminished sense

of self for both narrators and authors informs and, more importantly, enables Middle English writing.
(98, emphasis his)

In *Lazamon's* unique instance, however, this ambivalent-yet-enabling status must be factored somewhat differently: the language he appears to be imitating, Old English, though not the language of *auctoritas*, was in pre-Conquest times a vernacular with its own officially invested authority as the language of government. In addition Old English was second only to Latin in its high regard and use in Anglo-Saxon monasteries. If the post-Conquest displacement of Anglo-Saxon as the language of government caused written English to diversify more greatly into regional dialects, as it surely did, then can *Lazamon's* attempt at a purified and archaistic form be viewed as an attempt at the re-standardization of English? As Christine Franzen (1991) has aptly demonstrated in her study of the "Tremulous Scribe" (a person so-named for the shaky hand that annotates a number of manuscripts containing Old English), interest in Old English is documented in *Lazamon's* Worcester area, where manuscripts containing Old English continued to be copied and glossed well into the thirteenth century: "A revival of interest in the Anglo-Saxon past could have developed when the canonization of *Wulfstan* began to be discussed at the

turn of the century, and the promotion of his cult could have sustained it" (190-91).²³

In sum, such speculations, though strong possibilities for explaining the project of the *Brut*, remain difficult to authenticate, as does the specific status of Laȝamon's English. However, at least two conclusions can be drawn. First, no other work from the early Middle English period seems so heavily invested with a desire to avoid French linguistic influence, despite its major French source and great length. Attempts to place the *Brut* in company with other contemporaneous works so as to counter arguments that find its English antiquated (as Salter *et al.* have done) are rendered insufficient by this fact. Second, one is hard-pressed to find a medieval vernacular poet so pointed in his desire to authenticate his poem's linguistic medium in relation to the "true" history it recounts.

Ultimately, and despite what appear to be irreconcilable readings concerning the *Brut*'s English and its thematic implications, in place of Donoghue's "middle way" between opposing views upon the "style-content" disparity, I offer a new middle way that considers the critical divide opened between those who view Laȝamon as exclusionary ([racially] pro-English, "nativist," nationalistic, anti-Norman, and archaizing) and those who

view him as *inclusionary* (the "internationalist" readings of Salter and others who find in *Lazamon* an eclectic, synthesizing, and quintessentially modern poet at peace with continental literary influences). I do so with these factors in mind: I find that drawing decisive conclusions about the *Brut* by relying upon a clear distinction between the poem's so-called archaistic (versus its "genuinely" archaic) qualities is untenable. Donoghue is right to see in the *Brut* an "historiographical tradition more complex than most of his modern admirers have allowed" (563); this historical complexity extends to *Lazamon's* English, which belies Donoghue's attempts to delineate its archaistic elements. I find equally untenable Salter's minimization of the *Brut's* antiquated style. Clearly, as I have argued above, *Lazamon's* English reflects a deeper thematic motivation than Salter has concluded.

The tradition of viewing the *Brut* in, as I put it, either exclusionary or inclusionary terms is not surprising given that these two options have been embedded in the poem's critical reception from its beginning by the two manuscripts in which the poem survives. The Otho version, which "updates" the poem by adding French words and removing infrequently used English ones, commences the critical tradition of viewing the *Brut* as antiquated. Indeed, it is worth considering how "archaic" the *Brut* would have appeared

to scholars if the Otho version were not extant as its "modernizing" nemesis. At the same time, Leslie Johnson, who argues against viewing the *Brut's* poetic medium in purely exclusive terms, notes:

Lazamon seems to have created a narrative medium which itself exploits the historicity of the English language, but this is not one which necessarily excludes readers of French, or Latin (to judge from the evidence of the Caligula manuscript). (158)

Indeed, the Caligula manuscript, which has an assortment of French, Latin, and English works, also contains an Anglo-Norman prose history that follows the *Brut* both in the manuscript and in its subject matter: its narrative picks up Insular history where the *Brut* has left off. Apparently whoever was responsible for compiling the Caligula MS was not stymied by issues of linguistic plurality, and appears to have found the linking of a highly-stylized English work with an Anglo-Norman one to be unproblematic.²⁴ Thus, the documentary evidence also displays a tradition of inclusion from the beginning that is juxtaposed to the Otho scribe's apparent need to "up-date" the *Brut*.

The *Brut's* critical reception, reflecting various attempts to sort through and comprehend Lazamon's vision of the past, has built upon these two traditions, and has, in general, reflected their binary means for understanding the

poem. But these earliest traditions need never been perceived as mutually exclusive. Donoghue is right about *Lazamon's* ambivalence--so much so, that both his conclusions concerning the poem and *Salter's* are not irreconcilable; in fact, each sheds some light upon a poem that embraces both readings. *Lazamon* attempts to authenticate his historical project with an English that, as *Brewer* notes, reflects a "true" past by excluding contemporary influences, while at the same time he reveals the flux and instability of time by describing the processes of linguistic change, a change that leads eventually to Norman rule. By fully "exploit[ing] the historicity of the English language," as *Johnson* notes, *Lazamon* has written a poem that embraces a tradition of seemingly contrary critical conclusions. In the final analysis, this is his ultimate ambivalence, and serves as fodder for the chapters to follow.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹See Elizabeth Salter (4-74) for a thorough discussion of the patterns of language use in twelfth-century and early-thirteenth-century English culture. Her discussion of *latimers* (9)--that is, court translators--nicely delineates the polyglot culture of the period. For an additional discussion of the role of *latimers*, particularly in relation to Welsh tradition, see Le Saux (*Lazamon's Brut*, 143).

²Turville-Petre concludes from the study of manuscripts containing English, French, and Latin that, while these languages "were not interchangeable...they also show that there were considerable areas of overlap, and that distributional patterns [of language use] depended as much on situation, context, and audience as on subject-matter and style" (181). See below for more discussion of the possible cultural and political motivations a poet might have for writing in English in the south-west Midlands during *Lazamon's* time.

³The archaic/archaistic issue is not simply a matter of formalistic questions concerning the *Brut's* alliterative style. The historical status of the poem's vocabulary is perhaps a more fundamental point of contention, as I discuss below.

⁴In my review of past and present *Brut* scholarship, I am particularly indebted to Le Saux (*Lazamon's Brut*) and Johnson ("Tracking"). Though neither of them claims to have compiled a comprehensive review of the entire critical reception of the *Brut*, their projects nonetheless provide valuable outlines to *Brut* criticism, particularly in regard to the ongoing critical dispute over the extent to which *Lazamon* was an English nativist--as opposed to internationalist--writer.

⁵See below for more discussion of Le Saux's critical conclusions on this matter; like Salter (also discussed below), she finds that the poem is not insular, but "internationalist" in its various themes and eclectic style.

⁶I credit Donoghue for pointing out the Borges essay, as he credits Fred Robinson for doing the same.

⁷Le Saux's argument for racial and nationalistic influences on the *Brut*, along with her emphasis on possible Welsh sources, leads Wickham-Crowley to point out astutely that Le Saux's highlighting of "minority cultures...[is] itself a politically loaded viewpoint not unrelated to more recent trends in cultural perspective" (8).

⁸See V. H. Galbraith's argument that linguistic consciousness does not equal national consciousness, an argument that Donoghue relies upon. Donoghue argues that nationalism as a recognizable cultural force in England cannot be identified until the mid-thirteenth century; thus, the *Brut* is too early to exemplify such notions. This point is weakened by the awareness that concepts like "nationalism" do not arise as fully-formed historical events; as with most complex cultural phenomena, antecedents may be traced back to various events and regional outlooks. It is perfectly reasonable to find clear indications of growing English nationalism in *Lazamon's* west Midlands area, where, as Turville-Petre's study clearly shows, such a polemic was forming (see, in particular, chapters five and six of his study). Of course, identifying nationalism assumes a working definition of the term--itself a complex task; see Benedict Anderson's study, where he identifies nationalism as "an imagined political community--and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (15). That is, the nation is imagined because it is bound by an "image of communion," despite the fact that most of its members are not acquainted with each other; they only imagine such a bond.

⁹Oddly enough for someone addressing ambivalence, Donoghue appears to simplify the meaning of the word *leod(e)*, which denotes more than simply "race": this highly nuanced word can mean "people/race," "land," "nation," and, in a few instances, "language." He later makes clear that he does not use the word in its narrow sense, but that *leod* evokes "a cluster of associations that include language, social structures, and a common myth of origin" (560). In pointing out this term's flexibility, however, one questions his more rigid demarcation of what constitutes "nationality," and whether *leod* in fact denotes a type of nationality.

¹⁰Johnson identifies the "micro-histories" of place-names as encouraging the chronicle's audience to "consider the connections between earlier and later epochs and to

exercise their historical imaginations in using a narrative about the political formations of the past to meditate upon those of the present" ("Reading the Past," 158).

¹¹It should be noted that Johnson, Wright, and Noble do not discuss the archaistic language of the *Brut* as a central component to their readings of *Lazamon's* treatment of the past--at least, that is, not to the degree that Donoghue does. Perhaps this absence represents Salter's influence on *Brut* scholarship--an influence most obviously on the editor of their essays, Le Saux.

¹²Brehe disputes Donoghue's objection to a "nationalist" reading: "This may be merely a terminological quibble, but it seems to me that Donoghue's term 'racial identity' is even more slippery than 'national identity.' In the case of England I do not see how to distinguish between these two kinds of identities" (250, n.84). Yet he does not scrutinize the notion of "nationalism," simply stating that it is perhaps less slippery than "race."

¹³Donoghue does cite examples of poetry found in some manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as possible antecedents for *Lazamon's* writing style (540), as does Derek Pearsall, who states of one chronicle poem on the death of William the Conqueror (found in the entry for year 1086 in the Worcester Chronicle): "From one point of view this poem looks like the last staggering steps toward dissolution [of Old English verse]; from another, it seems to contain the seeds of *Lazamon*" (72). If this statement is accurate, then *Elfric's* prose was not the single inspiration for the *Brut's* style, as Angus McIntosh argues: he finds that the *Brut* is closer to *Elfric* than classical Old English verse in metrical respects, but in terms of diction and syntax, the poem more closely resembles the latter (26).

¹⁴In terms of prosody alone--apart from lexical considerations--the *Brut* is not, in fact, an anomaly for its time. Instead, it shares many of the features commonly found in the several early Middle English "loose" alliterative works of its day. See Eric Kooper's stylistic analysis of the *Brut*, which he compares to several contemporaneous Middle English alliterative works, where he finds common features such as a heavy use of assonance and rhyme, and a less frequent use of enjambment than one finds in Old English verse.

¹⁵Le Saux and W. R. J. Barron (1989) attempt to demonstrate that the "chivalric" dimensions to Wace's poem, along with Lazamon's Germanic revisions of these courtly elements, have been overplayed by critics ("Two Aspects," 25-56).

¹⁶Donoghue's translation (553, n.65).

¹⁷Two of the recent essays on the *Brut* edited by Le Saux (1994) attempt, like Donoghue, to distinguish the poem's archaic, archaistic, and "modern" elements by focusing on specific linguistic points: Marshal S. Grant and Douglas Moffat (15-28), in their study of Lazamon's use of the Old English prefix "to-", find that at times Otho omits both genuinely archaic examples of this prefix (that is, examples with clear Old English precedents) and those that they deem to be archaistic (meaning that they cannot find an Old English precedent, and its appearance is unique to the *Brut*). Yoko Iyeiri (29-46) examines the various forms of negation in the poem and finds that, while demonstrating both older and newer forms, "on the whole the text seems to present an extremely early and stable state of affairs" (45). The conclusions of both studies reinforce the notion that the *Brut* seems in general both archaic and archaistic, though it is difficult to specify where with any systematic precision.

¹⁸See, for example Cynewulf's *Juliana* (Woolf, ed.), l. 176, where, in reply to clear threats of torture, Juliana states: "Næfra þu 3epreatast þinum beotum"--"never will you intimidate me with your threats." While one might argue that this context does not evoke the scenarios found in heroic poetry, and thus is not an example of the formal heroic boast, it also demonstrates that there was no single precedent for *beot*'s use in Old English. If Lazamon is indeed using the word as "threat," this choice has as much of an Anglo-Saxon pedigree as the "heroic boast" meaning does, and is, therefore, legitimately "archaic" by Donoghue's standards.

¹⁹Le Saux, arguing that the *Brut*'s poetic compounds do not show an indebtedness to Old English antecedents, states that "[a]...proof that Lazamon's compounds must have been widely intelligible [to his contemporaries] is that even some fifty years later, the Otho scribe retains 203 of them in his modernized version" (*Lazamon's Brut*, 191-92). That is, the scribe kept roughly half, meaning, of course, that

he expunged the other half--which I consider to be a very large number. For the most systematic study of the *Brut's* compounds, see Hans Sauer. For a discussion of the type of compound words removed in *Otho*, see Brehe (9-13), who finds that words of an Anglo-Saxon flavor (like *scop*) are often replaced.

²⁰See Roland Blenner-Hassett's thorough catalogue of the *Brut's* place-names.

²¹The example of London is *Lazamon's* most explicit and detailed instance of linguistic change; no other place undergoes so many transformations in name. Given the city's symbolic importance as Britain's capital, of course, one is justified in perceiving it as the main playing ground for the island's larger shifting fortunes. See below my discussion of *Lazamon's* important repetition of the London passage.

²²While it is possible that English as it existed around 1190--the poem's earliest possible date of composition--was not yet influenced by French loan-words, this scenario is unlikely. Even if other English works in the west Midlands area that display much greater French and Latin influence were composed later than the *Brut* (i.e. *Ancrene Wisse*, most likely written c. 1215-20, and *Sawles Ward*, before 1225), their probable dates are close enough to render such an argument suspect. This scenario is even more unlikely when factored with *Lazamon's* main French source, as I have previously commented, for it is through such textual venues, among others, that French words entered into English usage.

²³See in particular chapter six of Franzen's study (183-194).

²⁴See Jane Robert's examination of *Caligula MS* (*Text and Tradition*, ed. Le Saux, 1-14); also see Carole Weinberg's analysis of the *Brut's* Latin annotations (103-120).

CHAPTER II:

**Intimate Places and Contested Spaces: Runen, Secrecy,
and the Interpretation of Power**

Lazamon's choice of language is but one facet of the *Brut* in relation to which issues of historical interpretation may be examined. Another resides in Lazamon's repeated and provocative use of the word *run(e)*, which appears in various lexical forms and narrative contexts. In fact, I argue in this chapter that these usages constitute a central theme in the poem that is communicated through the variety of interpretative acts performed by the characters within the narrative. But before examining this theme in its multifarious guises, I discuss briefly what critics contend is the formulaic nature of the *Brut's* compositional style, for not only is the word *run(e)* arguably presented in such compositional fashion, but--as one critic makes clear¹--Lazamon's innovations upon what some perceive as the "rules" of formulaic composition provide yet more evidence of the poet's inventiveness.

When scholars attempt to explain how the *Brut* differs from its main French source, they frequently turn to its compositional style. Specifically, they note how Lazamon

repeatedly employs key-words, motifs, and verbal formulas in order to highlight particular themes--in other words, they find that the poem demonstrates clear signs of the repetition found in what some scholars describe as formulaic composition.² As Johnson notes:

Lajamon cultivates a highly stylized, formulaic mode of narration which itself heightens the patterned effect of the historical sequence....It is as though the narrative sequence taken from Wace has been subject to structural analysis and the key motifs and themes which compose the events of British and English political history have been indexed, and to a certain extent evaluated, for Lajamon and his audience.

("Reading the Past," 150)

This "formulaic mode of narration" in the *Brut* serves as critical evidence for Madden and others who argue that the poem echoes Old English poetry, insofar as these modes bear a resemblance to those found in that body of work. Tatlock, for example ("Epic Formulas," 1923), identified and catalogued many of the *Brut's* key repeated words and word-groups as "epic formulas"; while he concludes that some formulas have clear antecedents in Anglo-Saxon usage, others do not, though he finds they give the impression of an Old English, archaic style. Everett too has commented that such stylized formulas and repeated words and motifs--which, she believes, provide insights into the poem's unique "artistry"--demonstrate its participation in the older English tradition (23-45).³ Håkan Ringbom (1968), in an

examination of the narrative techniques of both *Beowulf* and the *Brut*, was the first to systematically apply oral-formulaic principles to *Lazamon's* work. In so doing, he was following the work of F. P. Magoun, Jr., a prominent figure in the application of Parry and Lord's oral-formulaic theories to Old English poetry. In analyzing *Beowulf* and the *Brut*, respectively, and then comparing his findings, Ringbom finds the latter non-exact, lax, and predictable in its formulas. He arrives at the now-familiar conclusion that categorizes *Lazamon* as a less-than-certain writer working within a declining poetic milieu.⁴

The shortcoming of conventional formulaic analysis is that when applied too strictly it has the net-effect of ignoring those thematic elements and compositional devices that do not fall under its often inflexible purview. Challenged by this disadvantage, Denis P. Donahue (1991) has found Ringbom's analysis--indeed, conventional formulaic analysis itself--wanting. In place of Ringbom's review of the *Brut's* formulaic composition, which concludes that *Lazamon* composed in a poetic tradition that he only partially understood, Donahue applies a formulaic model in his discussion of the *Brut* that is much more expansive and flexible in terms of its applications:

If we are going to understand the place of repetition in *Lawman's* method of composition, we are going to have

to find a method of analysis other than the one developed by Parry and Lord. Their method...cannot explain why adjoining passages in the poem have such different percentages of formulas. Nor can it account for the many word groups that are repeated in different syntactic forms....A complete analysis will have to include study of other types of repetition as well, for when we examine all of Lawman's *Brut*, we become aware that Lawman used several types of repetition, repetition of word groups that share structural patterns, of phrases (some fixed in form, others free), and of groups of ideas that form descriptive or narrative passages. (3)

For example, when Ringbom examines what he calls the Feast theme (85-90)--narrative representations of the Feast that contain a repeated set of "sub-themes"⁵--Donahue finds that he overly restricts his search to a limited set of key words, and thus "places too much emphasis on the similarities existing among the many occurrences of a given theme and so overlooks the differences" (74). For Donahue, to miss these differences is to miss *Lazamon's* subtlety as a poet. For example, *Lazamon* flexibly uses the Feast theme's key-words to describe Arthur in Eucharistic terms (11492-99), where *gleomen* create a feast *borde* from Arthur's *breosten*. Such flexible and inventive uses of a formulaic theme are overlooked if one seeks only incessant verbal consistency, as Donahue finds Ringbom to do.

Donahue views his more flexible method of finding verbal patterns as not beholden to an over-reliance on exact repetition--"similarity, but not identity" (69)--thus

granting much greater flexibility as to how formulaic composition possibly operates in the *Brut*. This mode of analysis allows one to grasp the broad range of Laȝamon's narrative inventiveness, where "[t]he stable core of words and concepts...are [sic] constantly being reworked into new forms that convey the full range of ideas that the poet wishes to present" (222). Flexibility becomes a poetic virtue, and not the sign of an inability to maintain a rigid prosodic form; the lax sloppiness perceived by Ringbom is replaced by a poet's compositional and thematic innovations.⁶

Laȝamon's multifarious narrative uses of the theme of *runen* clearly and profoundly exemplify Donahue's thesis, for, far from being presented in uniform formulas, the theme appears in many guises and contexts, both in terms of lexical variation and narrative location.⁷ Indeed, I find that these repeated uses allegorize the chronicle's various interpretations of the subject of history by constituting a complex theme in the poem that: 1) represents the successes and failures of interpretation embodied by the narrative's characters in their quests for power; and 2) addresses how the audience's interpretative task is to be imagined and pursued (again, with the entire narrative being pointedly identified in the prologue as *runan*). Below, I examine

narrative episodes in the poem where the theme of *runen* is employed in a variety of manners. As the reader will see, while the narrative contexts in which the runic theme appears vary, they all appear to highlight Lazamon's concern with both the exigencies and dangers of close interpretation, as well as the clear folly brought on by a lack of exegetical scrutiny. I pay particular attention to the Vortigern section (roughly 6470-8400), for it is there that Lazamon renders his most distinct and sustained treatment of *runen* and their uses.

As I maintained in the Introduction, various definitions exist for the noun and verb forms of *run(e)*, both in Old and early Middle English, that denote, most generally, "secrecy," "secret meeting," "conspiracy," "mystical council of God," "hidden written or oral message," "a text itself that is either divine or contains divination and private codes."⁸ This variety is fully evident in the *Brut's* narrative, where Lazamon takes full advantage of the word's semantic options (and may, in fact, be investing the word with some of these options). Episodes abound that describe *ræd*--or counsels--hatched out in secret *runen*, intimate and whispered meetings where key narrative events come to fruition. Often these secret councils provide the

impetus for key narrative turns in the *Brut's* plot. For example, the ascension of Brutus himself to the position of leader of the disenfranchised Trojans comes about through "diȝenliche runen" (209)--"secret councils." In this sense, then, the genesis of Britain itself is born out of runic secrecy, for in such counsel lie the early seeds for that nation's foundation and the birth of the British people.

Runic meetings are not solely the productive domain of the narrative's "heroes," such as Brutus, but are equally held by those characters cast by the narrator in a less positive light. For example, in the Leir episode, the plot against the king is born of a secret meeting between his sons-in-law, Meglaunus and Hemeri, who, upon conspiring amidst a "stil rune" (1622), conclude that they will take all of Leir's land "on heora hond" (1624)--"into their hands." If the *ræd* of private runic council can lead to the founding of a nation--in the *Brut's* case, the nation around which the entire poem revolves--this episode demonstrates clearly that it can also bring about the disruption of that very nation's rule.

In addition to foundation and disruption, runic meetings can also conspire to promote the overthrow of a nation's usurper, as witnessed by the "som-rune" (2645) held by the Roman wise men, who desire to deceive the British

invader Belin, who, with his brother Brennes, has successfully conquered Rome. Here, the subject of their secret meeting results in a plot to deceive, as with the Leir plot; but instead of conspiring to wrest a ruler's power into their hands, they are in fact seeking the return of power that has been snatched from them.

These three examples demonstrate a cycle of sorts: one *run(e)* leads to escape from tyranny and to the founding of a great nation, another conspires to overthrow the proper chain of rule in that very land, while the final example is resonant of both, for it condenses the respective themes of escape from tyranny, a desire to deceive, and a desired reclamation of power into a single *run(e)*.

While these examples of runic council are presented as oral in nature, this need not always be the case, as indicated by the compounds *run-staf* and *boc-runen*. Secret communications can supersede physical presence, for the written medium is available in lieu of speech. When Dalgan, daughter of the King of Norway, is forced to marry Brennes as part of a political deal, she sends a secret message-- "stille boc-runen" (2244)--to her lover, Godlæc. Here, the intimate secrecy is conducted by inscribed characters of some kind. But what is unclear in this episode is the very nature of these "runes"--are they secret characters in a

private alphabet, understood only by the initiates? Does "stille boc-runen" simply refer to the covert manner in which the letter is dispatched to Godlæc? The context remains unclear, leaving both options as possibilities. What is unambiguous, however, is the private and secretive quality of the message, whose specific format is kept secret from the reader of the *Brut*. We do not hear or read these runes, for they are translated only as indirect discourse.

Another example of written runes can be found in the Maurius episode. As with the previous example, writing removes the need for the physical presence of the author, while still maintaining communicative value. It also serves as a permanent record of sorts, a standing code to be deciphered by subsequent generations of readers. King Maurius travels with an army up to Scotland, where he defeats the Scythian marauder Rodric and his Picts. To commemorate the victory, he erects a monument:

Ðer dude Maurius þe king. a wel swuðe sællech þing.
 uppen þen ilke stude. þer he Rodric uor-dude.
 he lette a-ræren anan. enne swuðe sælcuð stan.
 he lette þer-on grauen. sælcuðe run-stauen.
 hu he Rodric. of-sloh. & hine mid horsen to-droh.
 & hu he þa Pehtes. ouer-com mid his fæhtes.
 Vp he sette þæne stan. 3et he þer stondeð.
 swa he deð al swa longe. swa þa woreld stondeð.
 (4964-71)

[There Maurius the king did a very amazing thing: upon that same place where he overcame Rodric, he had at once reared a very amazing stone. He had there engraved strange rune-letters, describing how he slew Rodric and

had him drawn apart by horses, and how he had overcome the Picts with his combat. Up he set that stone--still it stands there, as it shall so long as the world stands.]

"[S]ælcuðe run-stauen"--"strange rune letters"--stand to memorialize a decisive victory for all time, a permanent monument that will last as long as the world does. Unlike Dalgan's secret dispatch, these public letters appear in plain view, for any reader who stands before them on that field of victory. But while the monument may in theory be read by the public within the narrative, for the reader *outside* the narrative the message is again accessed only through indirect discourse--we must rely upon Laȝamon to inform us of its general content. In addition, an interpretative stumbling block is shared by the narrative's characters and readers alike: the choice of the message's medium is runic, and so its communicative value rests on one's ability to decipher its meaning. It is a seemingly public monument with an exclusive, indeed hidden, language--this is no Gothic cathedral, with its visual book accessible for most to read. So, then, what public function does this "monument" serve? In his analysis of the history of Italian epigraphy, and its relations to the changing modes of political power in that country, Armando Petrucci makes the following observation:

We should remember that the functions of writing always correspond to the type of materials used, and therefore those functions correspond to the typologies of products created. These will be rich and varied if the functions are manifold, but they will be limited and simple if those functions are few and unvaried. (2)

The runic material employed in Maurius' *swuðe sælcuð stan* monument implies the following complex function for its writing: it is a *potentially* public text, but it requires an interpreter, who may, as exemplified by *Lazamon*, inscribe it in yet another text (one that also requires an interpreter). The history that the text is commemorating is public, as is, in a sense, all history. But the popular event that goes unread remains only potential history, for though it exists in the open, it stands undeciphered. The meanings in history--the victories, the defeats, the changes in a country's populace--are lost (indeed, never found) without the proper frame of reference, the proper mode of interpretation, and, significantly for *Lazamon*, the proper interpreter to undertake the task of reading runes in order to write them, though the message may stand, in this case, "swa longe. swa þa woreld stondeð." This phenomenon is exemplified by the plethora of place-names in the narrative whose "truthful" origins *Lazamon* must set straight. Indeed, it is true of the text of the *Brut* itself, for the interpretative difficulties posed by runic letters mimic

those found in Laȝamon's archaic language, insofar as both appear in forms that do not offer information--historical or otherwise--in a readily accessible fashion. This strategy of representation, or course, centralizes Laȝamon's narrative authority, for he not only shows the reader that history, like the written and linguistic media that communicate it, is a set of *runen* that he can translate, but he also reinforces the notion that to understand--that is, to translate--history for oneself requires that one scrutinize closely that which is right under one's nose, or, in this narrative instance, inscribed in stone and out in an open field.

To unlock the runic meaning leads to power gained via access to its cloaked knowledge, hidden beneath "seven seals." But the temptation to insinuate oneself into the secret councils of runic plottings can create its own perils, for the *run(e)* falsely packaged and incorrectly interpreted serves as a snare in and of itself, as subterfuge created to bait and entrap the unknowing pursuer of a hidden lore. For example, King Constantine, grandfather of King Arthur, is successfully assassinated because he falls for the ruse of intimate communication with Cadal, a Pict who seems to be a "hende cniht" (6453)--a "courteous knight"--but who is rather motivated by nefarious desire.

Here, the runic meeting Cadal proposes to Constantine is dressed in the most seductive of garbs, for he promises the king not mere secret knowledge, but "uncuðe spællen. / swulc þu næuere ære. an ærde ne herdest" (6461-62)--"amazing lore such as never been heard on earth before." Once alone with the king in the woods, "þe swike set adun. also he wolde holden run. / & he bah to þan kinge. also mon dæð of runinge" (6467-68)--"The traitor sat down as if he would hold secret council, and he leaned over to the king, as one does in private conversation." A feigning of shared runic council provides the physical intimacy and the physical isolation necessary for Cadal to drive his knife into Constantine. In a sense, Cadal is holding his own private and successful *run(e)*; here the result of the private meeting (the King's assassination) is concomitant with the meeting itself, which only proves successful because intimacy has been accomplished. In addition, Cadal's *run(e)* seems a mirror-like extension of Cadal himself, for both the man and the *run(e)* appear one way to the unscrutinizing observer, yet both cloak hidden intentions that prove the observer's demise.

The example of Constantine's dual traits--that is, a lack of awareness of the dangers of intimate secrecy coupled with the desire for powerful secrets--introduces a dimension

to the runic theme that receives its most articulate representation in the episodes that involve Vortigern, the conniving British duke whose cunning political maneuvers ultimately gain him the Crown. Indeed, an analysis of the occurrences of *run(e)* in its various lexical forms throughout the entire *Brut* demonstrates that with the Vortigern section also comes an increase in the diversity of the word's uses and forms. Of the fifty-six instances of the word in the narrative, almost half appear with the alliterating word *ræd*. But this formulaic pair sharply declines commencing with Constantine's murder and continuing throughout the Vortigern section, where self-standing variations on the word proliferate.⁹ The alliterating *run(e)/ræd* formula is apparently too conventional for the runic theme's complex and varied uses in this section of the narrative. The theme must be re-worked and stretched to accommodate subtle intricacies too fine for a single formula to convey.¹⁰

Vortigern, along with the narrative events that unfold around him, serves as the perfect vehicle for such involved permutations of the runic theme, for this lord is a character abundantly described by a series of appositive phrases that articulate his cunning awareness of evil, as well as his own deviousness: "of ufele he wes wel iwar"--"of

evil he was well aware." Indeed, the two seem connected, for his supposed awareness of evil manifests itself as an awareness of how to manipulate this knowledge toward his own ends; it also implies that those he is manipulating are distinctly unaware of this knowledge, like the unsuspecting Constantine. For Vortigern, evil is a card played close to the vest: "þe Wurse him was ful neh" (6630)--"the Devil was very close to him." As this narrative aside insinuates, the intimate awareness of evil as a quality manifested in the intimate spaces of deception apparently attracts the Devil. This focus upon "nearness" and intimacy should not be undervalued, for just as it draws the Devil, it also seems the essential component of runic manipulation--whether for good or ill, decipherment or deception.

Indeed, Laȝamon's descriptions of Vortigern further this point, for he is often presented as a figure who feigns a truthful candor, and who speaks in familiar proximity and folksy tones with those from whom he desires knowledge, or whom he wishes to manipulate. From the very beginning, Laȝamon presents Vortigern in a bifurcated manner: the reader is made well aware of the duplicity of Vortigern's intentions by narrative asides; for the Britons and others in the narrative, however, his motives remain cloaked, and he comes forward as a man of truth who "wullen suggesten

soð[ð]ere wordes" (6462), a phrase that ironically echoes Laȝamon's own proclamations in the prologue. To the detriment of many characters in the *Brut*, Vortigern is a misread rune--when he is read by the poem's characters at all.

An examination of Vortigern's actions throughout his labyrinthine rise to power nicely illustrates his capacity to manipulate intimate runic spaces. Desiring to make Costanz, son of Constantine, king, Vortigern gains entry into the monastery that houses him by speaking "mid mildere speche" (6804)--"with soothing words"--thus winning the monks into his confidence. There, he holds council with the malleable Costanz and seduces him with false professions of endearment: "for monne leofuest ært tu me" (6519), and successfully convinces him to become his puppet king. He is able to smuggle Costanz out of the monastery by having him pose as a knight, while a servant dons his black monk's habit. Nobody sees past this disguise because Vortigern fakes a run(e) with the disguised servant; thus, the other monks respectfully keep a distance from the conferring pair. Yet again, Laȝamon's aside to the reader reinforces the gap between his knowledge of Vortigern's duplicity--which, by Laȝamon's authority, is now the reader's knowledge--and the characters' apparent lack of awareness: "Vortiger [wes]

(3)æp and war. þat he cuð[d]e wel iwar" (6536)--"Vortigern was cunning and wary, that he made well known." It is an ironic line, for no one at this point in the narrative, it seems, is "wel iwar" of *anything* concerning Vortigern's evil intentions.

Once fully ensconced in behind-the-scenes power-brokering, Vortigern holds the royal reins and expands his circle of manipulative intimacy. Convincing Costanz that foreign threats are imminent, he proceeds to assemble an elite army of Picts, to whom he proclaims: "3e sculleð beon me leofue" (6685)--"you will be most dear to me"--echoing the terms of endearment that he had initially professed to Costanz. In addition, he promises them that he will cater to their will both "lude & stille" (6686)--both publicly and privately, thus drawing lines of intimacy and inner-circle privilege, and setting the groundwork for future manipulations. It is this false impression of solidarity with the Picts that gives Vortigern the ability to carry out his plot to assassinate Costanz. After beckoning the Picts to "comen her" (6715) into his intimate space--where he proceeds to get them drunk--Vortigern gives a teary-eyed speech concerning his imminent departure from them, for his position as designated by the king is such that he cannot provide for his beloved troops in the manner they deserve.

The inebriated Picts are outraged, and, in a *run(e)* made comical by a complete lack of awareness of their manipulated status (6748), they decide to kill Costanz so as to retain their solidarity with Vortigern.

But the Picts are rivaled by the British in lacking interpretative savvy, for when Vortigern, conspiring to play the Britons and Picts against each other, brings to the former the news of Costanz's murder, he is able to disarm the British citizens completely by feigning emotional distress over the regicide, leading them to inquire: "Lauerð Vortigerne. Whæht is þat þu murnest. / Nert þu na wimman swa sære to wepen" (6803-04)--"Lord Vortigern, what are you mourning over? You are not a woman to weep so sorely!" Lagamon provides an insightful reason for the Britons' easy manipulation by Vortigern: "þe swiðe balde weoren" (6798)--that is, the "very bold" British are over confident in the public affairs of state, for they seem to read Vortigern's political actions as in an ideal *husting*,¹¹ as an uncomplicated event where speech and motives are purportedly in full and public display. Without the caution and interpretative scrutiny that come with suspicion, they easily succumb to Vortigern's disarming ("womanish!") state, and he successfully convinces the British to slaughter his now useless Picts. Vortigern's secret

ambitions hold, and he appears to leaves no tracks to his political rise. If the *Wurse* likes to play in closeness, so too, apparently, does Vortigern.

Ironically, it is this very realm of secret proximity that proves Vortigern's downfall, for his awareness falters when it is his own intimate space that is being manipulated, as the episodes following the coming of Hengest and the Saxons clearly show. This arrival and its subsequent results provide the most crucial of narrative apexes, for it marks step one in the eventual Saxon dominion over Britain. Vortigern thinks to utilize the foreign Saxons as a means to further his British ends, for his former Pict allies are now invading from the north; he thus allows these heathens into his circle (indeed, he goes so far as to promise them land [6966]). Though he feigns despair over their pagan beliefs, this public concern is belied by his eventual actions. Just as he once favored the Picts, Vortigern treats his new Saxon allies lavishly: "bett weoren iscrudde. & bed weoren iuædde. / Hængest swaine. þene Vortigernes. þeines" (6978-79)-- "Hengest's servants are better fed and clothed than Vortigern's [own British] thanes."

Within the inner circle of power's proximity, however, arise competing political ends, for Hengest's ambitions and wily ability to manipulate the intimate spaces created by runic counsel rival Vortigern's. At a festive banquet that

follows the Saxons' successful repulsion of Pict attacks, Hengest ponders his next best course of action: "Hengest hine bi-pohte. what he don mihte. / for he wolde wið þan kinge. holden runinge" (7020-21). He plans to hold a *runinge*, yet the content of the meeting is still being pondered. In other words, it is the notion, or essential quality, of a *runinge* that Hengest seeks to implement his plans; its content, while obviously paramount to a successful plot, follows the idea of a runic meeting, not the other way around. Intimacy itself is the ascendant vehicle that Hengest seeks to ride to power.

In order to insinuate himself with Vortigern, Hengest moves to the king and sits "bi him-seoluen" (7023)—"close by him." After drink and merriment—a strategy earlier employed by Vortigern—and with guards lowered yet further, Hengest pounces: "Lauerd hærcne tiðende. / & ich þe wull ræcchen. deorne runen" (7025-26)—"Lord, listen to tidings and I will reckon to you secret runes." Interestingly, the *runen* Hengest imparts to Vortigern are of other *runen*: Vortigern's malcontented men "stilleliche speakeð. & spilieð mid runen" (7037) a plot against Vortigern. In a sense, this narrative event demonstrates that the intimate spaces of whispered councils provide a nexus for various antagonistic intentions, all bent on manipulating the possibilities

al. / & don al mine dæde æfter þine ræde" (7074-75). He is indeed performing Vortigern's will--that is, an imitation of its self-serving dimensions. In fact, as the narrative unfolds, Hengest's successive manipulations appear to be taken from Vortigern's political play-book. Even his very phrases mimic the professions of love and loyalty that Vortigern once lavished upon Costanz and the Picts: "Hærcne me lauerd king. þu ært me leof þurh alle þing" (7211). Lazamon elucidates the fundamental pattern in the devious ascent to power as one that follows a particular script.

Of course, Hengest's most successful coup in his runic meeting with Vortigern is the acceptance of Rouwenne's arrival on British soil, which provides the lynch-pin for Vortigern's downfall. The beautiful daughter of Hengest also proves a synecdochal figure of the larger Saxon threat: secrets need no longer be hidden in private *runen*, for language differences allow for secrets to be displayed in the open, in full-yet-hidden view from the linguistically ignorant. This situation is forcefully illustrated during the banquet at which Rouwenne is introduced. So as to defuse any suspicions of this new linguistic weapon, Hengest has Rouwenne create a visual ruse by maximizing her beautiful presence in the finest of clothes. Hence, her successful introduction of the Saxon toast "wæs hæil," a greeting that

will on occasion in the narrative precede the literal poisoning of the toast's recipient. To emphasize the historical importance of this toasting event as a key augury for the eventual Anglo-Saxon conquest of the island, *Lazamon* pointedly states that this was the first time it was performed "in Englene londe" (7140)--"in the land of the Angles." The Saxons' ability to hold a public *hustinge* that for the Britons remains a private *runinge* (from which they are, though present, excluded) marks the beginning of the end of British rule. (Given the scale of Vortigern's manipulation by the Saxons, the formula describing him, "of alchen vuele he was war," here evokes its most pungent irony.)

Language differences along with visual seduction offer but two elements in the power snare. Not the least of the reasons for Vortigern's susceptibility to the above trap is Rouwenne's clever manipulation of Vortigern's space:

Rouwenna þe hende. sat bi þan kinge.
 þe king heo georne biheold. heo was him an heorte leof.
 ofte he heo custe. ofte he heo clupte.
 al his mod & his main. hædde to þan mæidene.
 Ðe Wurse wes þer ful neh. þe in ælche gomene is ful
ræh.]
 þe Wurse ne dude næwere god. he mæingde þas kinges mod.
(7165-70)

[Rouwenna the beautiful sat by the king. The king yearningly beheld her; she was dear to him in his heart. Often he kissed her, often he embraced her; all his thoughts and passions were focused on that maiden. The Devil was fully close there--he who in such games

is fully bold. The Devil has never done good: he agitated the king's feelings.]

Unlike the earlier reference to the *Wurse's* proximity to Vortigern (6630), which implied that Vortigern was something of a Devil's accomplice, here complicity is reversed, and it is Rouwenne who is at the advantage. As with Hengest's appropriation of the devious qualities initially evident in Vortigern, so too with Rouwenne. But her advantage, like Vortigern's (and, ultimately, like her father's), is temporary and contingent, for it seems that intimately deceptive *gomene* in and of themselves beckon the Devil and breed his presence, but to the advantage of no one: "þe *Wurse* ne dude næuere god." Power snatched with veiled hands proves to be transient at best for the holder.

But before the reins of power drop away from the Saxons, two more crucial events occur in which they again successfully manipulate the advantages created by linguistic difference. When Vortimer, the son and Christian nemesis to Vortigern, is named proper king by the Britons, and he successfully expels the Saxons, Rouwenne seeks revenge for her outcast people and her deposed husband: she follows her own *ræd* and decides to poison Vortimer. By professing to convert to Christianity (for even the intentions of "converts" must be scrutinized), she insinuates her way into his space, and he naively invites her to banquet. There,

assuming the deferential role of cup-bearer, she serves at the king's high table, leading off with the familiar *wæs hail*:

Hærcne hu heo toc on. þ[i]s swicfulle wimman.
 In hire bosme heo bar. bi-neoðen hire titten.
 ane guldene ampulle. of attere i-fulled.
 & þa luðere Rouenne. dronc þene bolle.
 þat heo hafde half don. after þes kinges dom.
 Ða while þe þa king loh. þa ampulle heo ut droh.
 þene bolle heo sette to hire chin. þat atter heo halde
in þat win.]
 & seoðen heo þa cuppe. bitahte þan kinge.
 Ðe king dronc al þat win. & þat atter þer-in.
 þe dæi forð eode. blisse wes on hirede. (7475-84)

[Now listen how she took on, this wicked woman. In her bosom, beneath her breasts, she bore a golden ampulla filled with poison. And the evil Rouenne drank from that bowl until it was half gone, as the king ordered. While the king laughed, she drew out the ampulla; then she set the bowl to her chin and tipped the poison into the wine, and afterward she gave the cup to the king. The king drank all the wine and the poison in it. The day went forth; bliss was among the assembly.]

Lazamon begins this account with a call to listen closely, which he has already done several lines earlier (7469), with the net effect of underlining the poisoning episode. As with previous accounts of Vortigern's deceitfulness, his instruction to the reader to *hærcne* stands in stark contrast to the characters' actions and awareness. Indeed, Vortimer has not yet learned the lesson of wariness, either in terms of language ("Fortimer spæc Bruttisc. & Rouenne Saxisc" [7473]), nor in terms of physical proximity, for his jocular relaxation opens the

door to her success at dispensing the poison: she shrewdly draws the ampulla from beneath her *titten* at the very moment he laughs. Those who will destroy you, *Lazamon* seems to warn, are the ones who prompt you into relaxed *gomen*.

This literal poisoning by *Rouwenne* initiates the return of *Hengest* and his army, thus culminating in that deeper "poisoning" of British power by the Saxons: the massive slaughter at *Amesbury*. *Hengest*, presiding over his proposed reconciliation meeting between the Britons and Saxons, asks *Vortigern* to persuade the Britons to disarm as a sign of diplomacy; this leads *Lazamon* to chime, "her he wes to vnwer" (7601)--"here he was too unaware." Of course, that unawareness extends fatally to the unarmed British, who mill around with the secretly-armed Saxons. *Lazamon* notes that the "Bruttes þer weoren riche. ah ne cuðe heo noht þa speche. / whæt þa Saxisce men. seiden heom bi-tweonen" (7612-13)--they do not understand what is said by the Saxons amongst them, though they are supposedly enlightened nobles (*riche*). The British have placed themselves squarely in a private Saxon *run(e)*, completely ignorant of the trap they stand in. When *Hengest* gives the command to kill the Britons with *sexes*--knives--the word play between *sexes* (read "weapon"), *Saxisce* (read "race"), and *Saxisc* (read "language") underscores how each element has been

indispensable to the other in the Saxons' ascent, for the hidden--because unlearned--language of a slaughtering race has proved as deadly as any concealed weapon. At this juncture, Hengest has clearly earned the formulaic epitaph bequeathed to him a bit earlier in the narrative: "Hengest was of ufele war" (7543)--the title of which Vortigern has been stripped.

Vortigern's descent from power reaches its nadir in his inability to build a standing castle that would protect him from the Saxons, an obvious metaphor for his political instability, but also of his lack of good *ræd*, as *Lazamon* clearly informs us. Unable to explain his continually falling edifice, Vortigern seeks the "leod-runen" of "worlde-wise monne" (7733), whose readings, however, prove futile. When Joram, a *witie* (wise-man), comes forth with a solution, *Lazamon* strongly pronounces its fraudulence:

Buten witie þer was an. he was ihaten Ioram.
 he seide þat he hit afunde. *ah hit þuhte læsinge.*
 he seide 3if mon funde. in auer æi londe.
 æuer æi cniht bærn. þe næuere fæder no ibæd.
 & openede his breoste. & nomen of his blode.
 & mengde wið þan l(i)me. & þæne wal læide.
 þenne mihte he stonde. to þere worlde longe.
 Ðat word com to þan kinge. of þere læsinge.
 & he hit i-lefde. *þah hit læs weore.*
 (7745-53, emphasis mine)

[But there was one wise-man--he was named Joram--he said that he found it, *but it seemed like lies*. He said that if man found in any given land any little boy who never had a father, and opened his breast and took his blood and mixed it with the lime, and laid that wall,

then might it stand until the world's end. That word came to the king of those *lies*, and he believed it, though it was a *lie*.]

This false counsel leads to the introduction of Merlin, a figure whose claims of truth counteract the falsehoods of others in the poem, and thus seem to provide some means by which the reader may navigate through the narrative's variety of *runen*. Unlike Joram and the *worlde-wisse monne*, Merlin is quickly able to dispel any false notion of the efficacy of blood sacrifices--specifically, his own--whose pagan impotence he juxtaposes to a Christian truth: "Nulle hit nauere God seolf. þe gumenene is lauerd. / þat þi castel stonde. for mine heorte blode" (7906-07)--"God Himself, Lord of men, will never allow this castle to stand, because of my heart-blood." The wise men of the world speak falsities--"lesinge"--and Merlin will counter them with the truth: "soðe mine worde" (7916-17). By introducing a character who denounces the same falsities as he himself does, Laȝamon has set up a symbiotic relationship with Merlin, for his authority has been verified by the author himself. Merlin's words are as "true" as the narrator's, for on many occasions both confirm the same points of veracity in the narrative (as I discuss at the beginning of the next chapter).

Merlin's unmasking of Joram's false *runen* and the revelation of truthful prophecy involves a literal

unmasking, for meaning is hidden under "æne stan. wunder ane ueire. / he is ueir and brad. volke to bi-halden" (7933-34)--"a wonderful and fair stone, massive and beautiful to behold," under which are two warring dragons. As with *Lazamon's* narrative uses of *runen*, this unique addition of the stone is not found in his sources. Why a beautiful stone, splendid to view? Perhaps it harks back to the earlier uses of beauty found in Rouwenne's episodes; if those events are any indication, it demonstrates the need to interpret past the fair surface, for if one stops at the sensually seductive cover, one remains blind to the hidden truth, which stands undeciphered.¹³ And deciphered it must be, for if the dragons are any indication, meaning is not self-evident, but, as Merlin demonstrates, requires the interpretative insights of one privy to truthful revelation.

But just what may serve as the grounds for delineating proper interpretation and truthful revelation remains difficult to clarify, though *Lazamon* seems to invest his depiction of Merlin with one clear possibility. Indeed, as narrative events unfold and culminate in the reign of Arthur, it becomes readily apparent that the prophecies and sooth sayings of Merlin provide the central vehicle in *Lazamon's* strategy for presenting a truth that counteracts false *runen* and wrongful interpretation. But whether this

strategy is dominant enough to overcome the eclectic possibilities raised by narrative events is uncertain. As the next chapter demonstrates, *Lazamon's* linkage to the veracious Merlin contains its own interpretative dilemmas, for both make proclamations about a central figure who, upon closer scrutiny, appears steeped in exegetical opacities: King Arthur himself.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹Denis P. Donahue (1991); discussed more fully below.

²In the scholarship of oral-formulaic composition, verbal formulas are viewed as established word patterns utilized by the composer (often but not exclusively considered to be working in an oral performance environment) to construct and relate given themes. For example, a verbal formula like "the fated fell" could be one phrase of many used in different combinations to convey the theme of warfare. Milman Parry, along with Albert B. Lord, were the first modern scholars to systematize the analysis of oral-formulaic composition. For a general review of their theories, see Foley. For its specific application to Old English poetry, see Magoun, Jr.

³See Donahue's study of formulaic composition in the *Brut*, specifically the Introduction, where he surveys earlier critics' analyses of the *Brut*'s formulas (1-12).

⁴Ringbom finds in *Brut* and other alliterative early Middle English works

the decline of the heroic tradition in Old English poetry: not only did the characteristic poetic diction with its originally oral formulas fall into oblivion, but the old heroic themes were treated much more briefly, and new sentiments such as nationalism began to be reflected in the verse (153).

He does not elaborate specifically on how these nationalist sentiments are "reflected in the verse," nor what positions they reveal. In contrast to Ringbom, see Mark Amodio's argument that *Lazamon*'s diction and poetic formulas demonstrate that he was inspired by an active English oral tradition (49-58).

⁵Ringbom identifies these sub-themes as: 1) blowing the horn; 2) laying the table; 3) sitting down to table; 4) bringing water; 5) serving food and drink; 6) drinking and eating; 7) music and singing; 8) exchanging gifts; and 9) phrases denoting happiness (85-90). Each sub-theme uses repeated key words, such as the use of *drinken* in sub-theme 6, or *gleo* in sub-theme 9.

⁶Brehe makes a similar point in reference to the *Brut's* meter: "Clearly Middle English verse forms could be disorderly creatures. Modern readers are conditioned to read such metrical 'inconsistency,' particularly in a narrative poem, as a failure of the poet, but many Middle English poets seem not to have been burdened with such a preconception" (219).

⁷The Otho scribe reacts in two ways to the repeated instances of *runen*: 1) he omits the word altogether (as he does with the crucial line 31 of *Caligula*: "leornia þeos runan"); 2) he alters the spelling to *roun(e)*, a form less common to the west Midlands dialect.

⁸For an excellent survey of the literary uses of *run(e)*, particularly in relation to divination and magic, see R. I. Page, 105-26. As he clarifies, epigraphic runes were long thought to be absent from the west Midlands area, and any knowledge of runic characters in that region during the later Anglo-Saxon period was assumed only from a few manuscripts. Recent archeological finds, however, have altered this perception (1-3). Also see Albert Cook's speculations on *Lazamon's* possible knowledge of runic inscriptions. While other early Middle English poems from the west Midlands area make use of *run(e)*, such as the Katherine Group and (singly) *The Owl and the Nightingale*, in no other text is the word used as extensively and variously as it is in the *Brut*.

⁹*Run(e)* and its variations appear in the following lines and in the following forms (numbers with an asterisk indicate that the word appears in alliterative formula with *ræd*; compound forms are included): 31: runan, 180*: runen, 190*: runen, 209*: runen, 222*: som-runen, 435*: runun, 1166*: runan, 1596*: runen, 1623*: stil-rune, 2087: som-runan, 2244: boc-runen, 2645*: som-rune, 2732*: som-rune, 2868: writ-runen, 2901: runden, 3259: run-hende, 4549: leod-ronen, 4917*: runden, 4967: run-stauen, 5797*: rune, 6467: run, 6468: runinge, 6540: rune, 6583*: runden, 6748*: rune, 7021: runinge, 7026: runen, 7034: ronen, 7037: runen, 7263: leod-runen, 7370: rune, 7734: leod-runen, 7740: leod-runen, 7756: runen, 8483*: runen, 8871: rune, 9600*: rune, 9797: som-runen, 11317: runen, 12063*: rune, 12420: rune, 12538: runen, 12642*: rune, 12646: runen, 12958: runen, 13247: rune, 13548*: som-rune, 14318*: som-rune, 14327*: som-rune, 14723: som-rune, 15303*: som-rune, 15681: rune, 15775*: rune, 15974: runen, 16033*: runen, 16039*: rune.

¹⁰This is not to say that the *runen* theme diminishes in importance in the latter part of the poem. Instead, I would speculate that while this thematic importance is given fuller and more explicit scrutiny in the Vortigern section--which contains the seminal event of the Saxons' arrival--the weight of the theme reverberates throughout the narrative (as does the presence of the Saxons!). In similar fashion: while I argue in chapter three that the Arthurian section deals most explicitly with the issues of prophecy, this is not to say that this theme is unimportant throughout; in fact, it is closely linked to the *runen* theme.

¹¹Indeed, Vortigern himself has summoned the British to *hustings*; he is apparently adept at manipulating public space too--provided of course that those partaking in the assembly do not "read" closely.

¹²See chapter four for my examination of the inseparable relationship between land, language, and identity in the poem.

¹³It should be noted that Rouwenne is not the only "fair" threat: not only is her father described as having great physical beauty, but so is the entire Saxon race.

CHAPTER III:

*Merlin al hit bodede: Merlin, Arthur, and the
Authority of Prophecy*

The most lexically varied representations of the runic theme found in the *Brut* appear in the Vortigern section of the narrative. This is so, I have argued, because it is there that Laȝamon seems to be scrutinizing most closely the interpretative dilemmas and pitfalls encountered in secretive power struggles. Given this heightened emphasis, it merits particular note that Merlin, the vehicle for many of the *Brut's* narrative proclamations of truthful revelation, arrives upon the scene at the very point that Vortigern's power is crumbling away. Unlike Vortigern's wise men with their unreliable interpretative crafts, the child Merlin is gifted with the ability to cut through layers of opacity and false *runen* so as to arrive at the kernel of truthful meaning. The conclusions revealed by this veracity, whose accuracy is attested by the narrator, further intensify when Laȝamon begins to focus on King Arthur. Indeed, Laȝamon's treatment of Merlin in the Arthurian section is one of the most evident expansions from his source materials. Unlike Wace, who minimizes the prophetic dimensions of Geoffrey's Merlin, and who remains decidedly

agnostic about his claims about Arthur, Lazamon amplifies the seer's role and grants him an authority unmatched by any other character in the entire chronicle--he is, indeed, on par with that of the narrator himself, who demonstrates his symbiosis with Merlin by repeatedly citing him for his *soð*.

In addition, Lazamon appears to heighten the Christian dimension of Merlin's character, a strategy that occurs elsewhere in the narrative (as I will discuss below), and he invests Merlin's Arthurian prophecies with rich Eucharistic symbolism. His emphasis upon the Christian dimensions of certain prophecies stands in contrast to those that do not contain such elements. Is Lazamon setting up a binary opposition between Christian and pagan authority by enhancing the former? By doing so, is he presenting the reader with an interpretative compass by which the poem may be navigated? Does Christian revelation become the means in the chronicle by which interpretative certitude may be located? I consider these and related critical questions below. In particular, I examine how prophetic discourse appears set apart from other forms of discourse in the narrative by virtue of its truth function--that is, these utterances delivered in this mode are recognized by the narrator as unusually veracious. Ultimately, however, through examining Merlin's prophecies, the narrator's comments on them, and, finally, the narrative events

surrounding both, I find that the possibility of a clearly demarcated, Christian interpretive basis for establishing an overarching truth in the *Brut* proves untenable.

The term "prophecy" is such a loaded one--its sundry ideas and associations cast nets far and wide--that even to attempt to distill a dominant essence to this multivalent term would prove futile. To discuss prophecy in the Middle Ages alone would require one to sort through a variety of popular traditions, from biblical to classical. In their introduction to a volume of wide ranging essays on prophecy and history, Bertrand Taithe and Tim Thornton (1997) wrestle with prophecy's broad applications:

There is a real paradox in attempting to write the history of what is either fundamentally a-historical or itself the motor of history. A quick glance at various University library catalogues shows how loosely the term *prophecy* has been used....One reason for this slippage is that the meanings of the word prophecy are multifarious. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, loosely summarized, a prophecy is 'divinely inspired utterance or discourse,' which leads us to the definition of a prophet as 'one who speaks for God or for any deity, as the inspired revealer or interpreter of his will.' It is also... 'one who predicts or foretells what is going to happen, a prognosticator.'

(1, emphasis theirs)

Of course, dictionaries, by definition, codify the meanings of words, and thus move from heterogeneity to standardization, from the "multifarious" to the contained. This definition of prophecy fails to capture an important

dimension of prophecy that Richard Emmerson notes in his discussion of the prophetic and apocalyptic in medieval literature:

Often, a "prophecy" is considered any message about the future....Yet...prophetic literature is not concerned primarily with the future but with the present, and it certainly is not predictive in nature. Events in the future will resemble those in the past, for Yahweh controls both. When the prophet does warn of future judgment, the warning is conditional, intended to elicit change in the present, and the future is dependent upon the decision of the present. (46)

Put another way, prophecy is often not so much a prognosis, a "pre-knowing," as it is a type of hermeneutic, a way of interpreting what has often already occurred, or is in the process of occurring. This mode of "reading" the world and its events may then be extended to explain the future possibilities, or to prescribe a course of action for which one wishes. Robert E. Lerner states as a "working assumption" in his study of medieval religious prophecy (1976): "[M]uch of the content of medieval religious prophecy can be read as the expression of dissatisfaction with the present and hope for the future" (7).

Lerner's study includes a sound taxonomy of medieval prophecy that adds coherence to what is an often confounding diversity, and thus it is helpful to recall his proposed categories before proceeding specifically to English political prophecy. Lerner organizes medieval prophecy into four general groupings (8): the visionary, the Biblical, the

astrological, and the pseudonymous (the broadest of the four). Visionary prophecy, originating in Biblical tradition, often details how an individual (sometimes in prayer, or in bed, or participating in mass, etc.) is granted a vision of the future (Daniel provides a clear biblical precedent for this type of visionary prophecy, as do such seers as Hildegard of Bingen). Biblical prophecy entails the exegetical discovery of prophetic knowledge contained within scripture (i.e., Revelation and, again, Daniel). "More controversial as a source of prophetic knowledge than visions or Biblical exegesis was astrology" (10), which, though initially held in disfavor by the Church Fathers, gained currency in the twelfth century due to Arabic influences. Finally, Lerner identifies pseudonymous prophecy as a "cover-all term for a wide variety of bogus productions" (10) performed by those seeking authority by writing under the auspices of recognized prophetic voices: "Pagan Mediterranean and Celtic mythology made their contributions in the form of newly-minted prophecies attributed to various Sibyls and Merlins" (11).

This last--and very broad--category includes one genre of prophecy that concerns my investigation: political prophecy and, in particular, the "Galfridian" political prophecy in England. This subject has been studied extensively by Rupert Taylor (1911), particularly as it

manifests itself in Geoffrey's work.¹ He sets out the distinctions between European political prophecies and those occurring in England in the twelfth century. In Europe, the predominant method was Sibyllic, in which individuals were symbolized through the use of their initials. In England, however, a different and unique method was being utilized in political prophetic texts:

The most distinctive feature of the English method is the use of animals and birds instead of men and women. An English prophecy containing this peculiar symbolism reads very much like some animal story. There is, however, this difference; the animals are constantly felt to represent individual men and women who are never lost sight of behind the mask, even if their identity is unknown. This amounts, really, to little more than giving animal names to men and women. This vaticinal method may be called the *Galfridian*, for it is used extensively for the first time by Geoffrey of Monmouth in [his *Prophetiae Merlini*]. (4)

This animal symbolism, found in the *Prophetiae* (c. 1135), is unlike that found in other literary instances, where an animal may personify an abstract idea.² Taylor, after investigating vaticinal literature before 1135, also concludes that Merlin's prophecies lack any clear antecedents, save one: the episode of the warring dragons found in one of Geoffrey's sources, the ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* (25-39).³ Extant as Book VII of the *Historia*,⁴ the *Prophetiae* has Merlin revealing roughly two hundred and seventy prophecies, each in general corresponding to one sentence. Placed within the narrative

events surrounding Vortigern's inability to maintain a standing castle, the prophecies begin with an interpretation of the warring dragons beneath the castle's foundation and then continue with the future fortunes of the Britons up to an apocalyptic vision. After events leading up to the Norman Conquest are presented, the prophecies become "Galfridian," as such figures as William the II and Robert the II, both mentioned as dragons, and Henry the I--the Lion of Justice--are "foretold."⁵

Geoffrey can be credited with catapulting Merlin into widespread literary fame and use, particularly through his most popular work, the *Historia*. How much, however, his rendition of Merlin in the *Prophetiae* and *Historia* is drawn from the antecedent Welsh Myrddin tradition (discussed below) is questionable. As Jan Ziolkowski notes:

Although the prophecies attributed to Merlin in the *Prophetiae* and *Historia* reflect knowledge of the prophecies ascribed to the Myrddin of Welsh poetry and tradition, the narrative surrounding them seems to have been composed in ignorance of the stories about the Welsh Myrddin. In fact, the Merlin in the narrative portions of the *Prophetiae* and *Historia* is a refashioning of a character named Ambrosius, who originally had no connection with Myrddin. (152)

"Ambrosius" is the name of the fatherless boy who originally figures in the "two dragons" scenario found in the *Historia Brittonum*.⁶

Indeed, the Merlin of the *Prophetiae* and *Historia* lacks a clear textual antecedent, save Geoffrey's unsubstantiated

source for his history: the British "vetustissimus liber" ("very ancient book"), which, like his characterization of Merlin, may or may not have been derived solely from his considerable imagination. Since, however, the *Historia* provides the basic narrative outline for the *Brut's* expanded treatment of the Seer, it is how Geoffrey uses him that concerns me. Merlin's most important actions in the *Historia*, outside of the inserted *Prophetiae*, are his prophecy of Arthur's birth and his substantial role in propagating it (as in the *Brut*, he uses magic to disguise Uther as Gorlois, thus enabling him to impregnate Ygerne). Robert Hanning, noting Merlin's claim that his prophetic powers are "a gift available to him only in times of great need and distress" (153-54), regards the Seer's unique historical position in the *Historia* as follows:

Merlin's insistence that his prophecy is a special, occasional art places him under the control of history, which determines the circumstances of his utterances, and thereby makes of him an exemplary creature of historical destiny or fortune. His use of his special power to perform magic deeds, however, reverses this relationship, and puts him in contemporary control of national progress, as with Arthur's conception. At such moments, Merlin exemplifies human greatness creating history and its own destiny. Since, however, he has predicted Arthur's coming in his vatic seizure, he acts here too as an agent of inexorable [sic] history, bringing to fruition that which he knows must happen. It might be said that Merlin is Geoffrey's symbol for the artist-historian, whose insight into predetermined history gives him some control over the historical process.

(Hanning 154)

If one concurs with Hanning's summation of Merlin as artist-historian--as recipient, prophet-interpretor, and maker of historical events--then *Lazamon's* expansions and highlighting of Merlin's role take on a larger thematic importance in the narrative, especially given the congruencies that exist between *Lazamon* and the prophet-soothsayer. Jeff Rider (1989), after comparing Wace's portrayal of Merlin (which Wace diminishes from that in the *Historia*) with *Lazamon's* heightened treatment, finds that the *Brut* expands upon Merlin's role as "artist-historian."

I return to Rider's study below, but before treating *Lazamon's* narrative reconfiguration of Merlin, a brief review of influences outside of Geoffrey and Wace is in order. Françoise Le Saux believes that *Lazamon* may have drawn indirectly from the very Welsh tradition that Ziolkowski finds conspicuously absent in Geoffrey's *Prophetiae*.⁷ Beside noting *Lazamon's* physical proximity to the Welsh marches, she cites the following evidence to buttress her claim: 1) parallels can be found between the *Brut* and the Welsh poem *Armes Prydain* (c. 930); 2) *Lazamon* shows possible knowledge of triads, a popular Celtic compositional device, whereby short lists of persons or objects were used, probably as mnemonic formulas; and 3) one

of *Lazamon's* expansions of Merlin's episodes resembles the vaticinal state attributed to Celtic poets and seers.⁸ In this episode (8910-79), Uther seeks from Merlin the meanings portended by a huge and far-ranging comet, which results in the following:

Mærlin sæt him stille. longe ane stunde.
 swulc he mid sweuene. swunke ful swiðe.
 Heo seiden þe hit isejen. mid heore ajen æjen.
 þat ofte he hine wende. swulc hit a wurem weore.
 Late he gon awakien. þa gon he to quakien. (8935-39)

[Merlin sat still for a long time, as if he were dreaming a very troublesome dream. They say, those who witnessed it with their own eyes, that often he wiggled as if he was a worm. Finally he began to awaken, then he started quaking.]

Le Saux notes the similarity between this description and that related by Gerald of Wales in *The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales* (c. 1188), where he tells of the shaman-like states of Welsh seers who, when induced, "immediately go into a trance and lose control of their senses, as if they are possessed."⁹

Le Saux's investigation, however, arrives at no clear and explicit evidence of a direct Welsh source, and she remains circumspect in her Welsh attributions:

Taking all...[possible Welsh influences]...into consideration, the probability is that *Lazamon* heard a number of tales, of various origins, from a number of minstrels. His special interest in the history of pre-Saxon Britain...would have led him to enquire further on the subject. The authority with which the English poet speaks of the Welsh people and customs suggests that he found himself an informant...from whom he

gathered some knowledge of Welsh prophetic poetry...among which one may postulate a direct influence of *Armes Prydein*. (154)¹⁰

Although Le Saux does not discuss Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini* in her chapter on Welsh sources, this work too can be added to the list of indirect Welsh possibilities.¹¹ Ziolkowski discusses this work as more representative of the Welsh Myrddin tradition, and finds that the Merlin character is composed of three influences: "one part [pagan] wild man engaged in shamanlike practices...one part [Welsh] political prophet...and one part a Christian poet combining traits of Old Testament prophets and Christian saints" (154).¹²

This possible influence enhances arguments that *Lazamon* depicts a Christianized Merlin in the *Brut*. For Wickham-Crowley, *Lazamon* emphasizes Christian qualities in Merlin's character as part of a larger project: "[Merlin is] *Lazamon's* Christianized key to understanding his expectations of readers" (13). Using Bakhtin's theories on the novel, she argues that "*Lazamon's* perception of morality creates a sequence from heritage, ancestry, and duty that ends in a transcendent (i.e. not finite) historical perspective best personified in how *Lazamon* treats prophecy in the *Brut*" (10). This transcendent perspective embodies the infinite and open-ended possibility of Christianity, communicated through prophecies and set against a "finite backdrop for individual action that can either destroy or

create the fulfillment of prophecy" (13).¹³ For Wickham-Crowley, this Christian emphasis in the *Brut* on the possibility of unity ultimately overcomes the ambivalence described by Donoghue (of whose conclusions she is highly critical) since it offers a possibility that supersedes all others--nationalistic, racial, or otherwise.

On the face of the evidence, Wickham-Crowley is right to turn to Christian ideology as a significant and heightened component in the *Brut*. Le Saux points out that *Lazamon* expands and adds such Christian elements in his narrative: "[T]here is no doubt that *Lazamon's* moral consciousness comes through more forcibly than that of *Wace* [and *Geoffrey*]" (155). She continues:

Moreover, *Lazamon's* independent additions and expansions often underline the actively Christian, rather than the negative pagan element. This may be seen from the expansions concerning the birth of Christ, followed by...*Taliesin's* prophecy to King *Kinbelin*....The Christianizing of Britain is also extensively reworked, to include a vivid image of the bishops *Dunian* and *Fagan* preaching to the Britons, their idols being destroyed, and King *Luces* having those who refuse baptism slain. (157)

Whether this emphasis points to a "transcendent historical perspective" remains to be seen. Does *Lazamon's* active underlining of the Christian component in certain narrative expansions result in a diminishment of the

"negative pagan element?" Not if one is to judge by the authority of pagan prophecies. While the Devil may be indicated as an active agent in such episodes, *Lazamon* does not question their veracity. For example, in the beginning of the poem Brutus' parricidal actions are correctly foretold by wise men: "Heo wrpen heore leoten. þe Scucke wes bi-tweonen. / heo funden on þen crefte. carefule leoðes" (140-41)--"They cast their lots; the Devil was among them. They found through their crafts ominous signs." And later in the narrative, the very foundation of Britain itself is foretold to Brutus by the pagan Goddess Diana in a solitary temple:

muchel & mære. þe Wrse hit hafde to welden.
 Ðer-inne was an onlicnesse. a wifmonnes liche.
 feier hit was & swiðe heih. an are hæitnesse nome.
 Diana wes ihaten. þe Deouel heo luuede.
 Heo dude wnder craftes. þe Scucke hire fulste.
 (572-76)

[...grand and fair; the Devil had it in his power. Therein was an image in a woman's likeness; it was beautiful and tall, and in heathen manner was called the name, Diana. The Devil loved her. She performed wondrous crafts--the Devil assisted her.]¹⁴

The narrative accounts of prophecy underline the relationship between choice and revelatory knowledge (that is, as long as one interprets it soundly--an element I turn to below): Diana's utterances provide Brutus with a road-map of sorts to his select destiny, but it is his acquisition of this knowledge that propels him forward, knowledge that he

chooses to heed. In fact, a similar scenario is manifest in the prophecy of Brutus's parricide: though it is foretold to the future child's parents, they apparently choose not to heed it, at least not to the point that they avoid parenting a child.

As Wickham-Crowley notes (171), however, the connections made between the Devil and prophecy alter with the birth of Christ,¹⁵ an event that *Lazamon* expands from Wace's very brief mention:

He is ihaten Iesu Crist. þurh þene Halie Gost.
 alre worulde wunne. walden englenne.
 Fæder he is on heuenen. froure moncunnes.
 Sune he is on eorðen. of sele þon mæidene.
 and þene Halie Gost. haldeð mid him-seoluen.
 þene gast he wel daleð. to þan þe him beoð leoue.
 alswa he dude Peture. þe wes a wræche fiscære.
 þe makede hine an mancunne. hehst of alre manne.
 (4524-31)

[He is called Jesus Christ through the Holy Ghost, all the world's joy, Ruler of angels. He is the Father in Heaven, comfort of mankind. He is the Son on Earth of that noble maiden, and the Holy Ghost is held within Him; that spirit He imparts to those that are dear to Him, as He did Peter, who was a lowly fisherman, making him the highest of all men in mankind.]

Prompted by the rumors of Christ's birth--the "seolcuðe leod-runen" (4549)--King Kimbelin, under counsel of wise men, seeks the insight of the prophet Teilesin: "feorliche þing fuleden him" (4535)--"amazing things surrounded him." *Lazamon* points out that Teilesin is regarded by the Britons as a soothsayer whose accuracy can be vouched for: "he seide

heom seolcuð in-noh. & al heo hit funden soð" (4538)--"he said enough amazing things, and they all found it to be true." Teilesin informs Kimbelin that Christ's birth fulfills the ancient prophecies and brings salvation to humanity, a point underlined, Wickham-Crowley notes, by Teilesin's conflation of the birth with the harrowing of Hell (173). She makes the additional point: "Importantly, for the first time prophecy is linked not with demons but with Christianity; a Welsh poet and prophet becomes the link" (173). This link sets an important precedent for the coming of Merlin, for what Lazamon says of Teilesin becomes the repeated phrase by which Merlin's sooth-sayings are authorized by the narrator: "Ðeos word seide Teilesin. & alle heo weoren soðe" (4570)--"these words spoke Teilesin: they were all true."

But before turning to an examination of Merlin's *soðe word*, it is important to point out two additional aspects to prophecy as it is represented in the new Christian era, the second of which will factor particularly in my questioning of Wickham-Crowley's emphasis on the possibility of Christian interpretative unity, especially as it manifests itself in the role of Merlin and his Arthurian pronouncements. 1) As with pagan prophecy, the Christian prophetic message is advice not necessarily heeded. The Christianized Britons, though instructed by bishop Dunian in

the revelations of the Church, "forȝeten to swiðe. / þat heom tæhte þe hehȝe mon" (5106-7)--"forgot too quickly what the holy man taught them." Revealed knowledge only extends as far as the choice to embrace it. 2) Mundane historical events, outside the control of human destiny and choice, do not seem to conform to a clear Christian pattern, at least not one readily perceived by humans operating in historical time: Fortune's Wheel seems to dominate the path of history, and it is difficult to find a Gildian model of reward and retribution in the narrative. This is demonstrated in the events surrounding the first (fully) Christian king, Luces. As Le Saux notes, *Lazamon* expands upon the spread of Christianity in this section. One could argue that these expansions, which include added references to Church law (5093-94) and added details concerning the cleansing of the pagan temples that are to be converted for Christian use (5077-81), would seem to impose a larger salvation model on events. Yet these expansions precede the deflated outcome of Luces' rule. Though marked by *Lazamon* as the noblest king to rule Britain since Brutus, he dies without an heir, leaving the newly Christian royal line broken. Strife and civil war follow the first Christian king.

These events, of course, are mainly dictated by the historical record from which *Lazamon* draws, Geoffrey's *Historia*. But inherited or not, they allude to an important

point that will be further evidenced in the Arthurian section. As I argue below, it is not only a matter of individual interpretation, of choosing one course of action based on revealed knowledge (or, for that matter, choosing to ignore it), that arbitrates whether one will "destroy or create the fulfillment of prophecy," as Wickham-Crowley argues. As events unfold under Arthur's rule, the "truths" concerning him that both Merlin and *Lazamon* attest to are sundered by narrative events. The ideal hopes embodied in the prophecies concerning Arthur are challenged by the messy events of mundane history, and the possibility of a transcendent and unifying historical perspective is distracted by human misinterpretation and blunder.

Expanding upon Hanning's designation of Geoffrey's Merlin as an "artist-historian," Jeff Rider finds that the Seer "reveals history, he shapes it, and yet he is its creature, merely tracing its preexisting shape" (2). He is "by nature a marginal, unofficial, fugitive, ambiguous figure" (3):

Yet his existence and powers are absolutely fundamental for the course of history....The kings whose succession is the subject of the history are his masters, yet they depend on his vision and help. Merlin is implicitly in competition with the kings....History, their story, could easily become Merlin's story....Bound by history yet shaping it, Merlin represents the free play of language and historical imagination within historical writing, a force potentially independent of the line of kings....[H]istory and narrative thus have,

potentially, two poles: Merlin, who reveals and shapes events, and the succession of kings who act them out.
(3-4)

Lazamon and Wace, Rider argues, react in opposite ways to this scenario. Wace minimizes Merlin's importance in the narrative as revealer and shaper; Lazamon, on the other hand, increases it in a manner that accentuates Merlin's independence.¹⁶ Rider is correct to highlight this, for Lazamon, in making Merlin more independent--and perhaps more elusive to the characters who seek his advice--accentuates the importance of their interpretative actions in regard to Merlin's statements. Once again, it is how one reads the events doled out by chance and human actions--or the astuteness with which one interprets the readings of others on these matters--that dictates one's successes or failures.

This interpretative aspect is highlighted from the first with Merlin. Vortigern, in the dragon episode previously discussed, bluntly asks of him: "Sæie me 3if þi wil is. whæt bitacneð al þis" (7991)--"please tell me what all this signifies." He also seeks advice on how to win back his political power. Merlin, however, chides the king for asking the "wrong" question and for being unwise and "vnwiter" (foolish):

King þu ært unwise. & vnwiter a ræde.
 Ðu fræinest of þan draken. þe þene dune makeden.
 & whæt tacne[ð] heore fiht. & heore feond-liche gripen.
 Heo tacneð kinges. þa sunde to cumene.

& heore fiht & heore uare. & heore uæi uolc.
 Ah 3if þu weore swa wise mon. & swa witter a þoncke.
 þat þv fræinedest me. of feole þine sorzen.
 of þire mucle kare. þa þe is to cumene.
 ich þe wolde suggen. of sorze þine. (7996-8004)

[King, you are unwise, and foolish in advice. You ask about the dragons that were making all that din, and what their fight signifies, and their fiendish grappling. They signify kings who are next to come, and their fights and their conduct and their fated folk. But if you were as wise a man and as prudent in thought that you asked me of your many sorrows, of your many concerns that are to come, I would tell you of your sorrow.]

On the surface, Vortigern's question concerning the dragons seems plausible and reasonable, not foolish--are not the dragons the logical place to begin in one's questioning? But Merlin is not chiding him for seeking in the wrong direction; it is the context in which Vortigern asks the question--namely, his desire to regain power--that is wrong-headed and unwise. The potential created for misinterpretation that occurs when lust for power drives the questions has been amply demonstrated by the *runen* theme. Such struggles are *gomen* of the *Wurse*, and in the end all players succumb to its destroying traps. In order properly to assess the knowledge revealed by prophecy, one cannot be clouded by the personal delusions and desires that feed such *gomen*; to do so makes prophecy indistinguishable from runic ploy (a theme that Merlin addresses later in the narrative [8848-56], to which I turn below).

Merlin, not swayed by the desires of the seeker, pronounces truths that fall harshly on Vortigern's ears: "ich þe wulle suggen. ah æwere hit wule (þe) reouwen" (8008)--"I will tell you, but ever will you be regretful." He reveals for Vortigern the coming vengeance of Aurilien and Uther, and then pronounces, in Galfridian metaphor, the first prophecy of the coming of Arthur in discourse that highlights the future king's role as supreme avenger and conqueror:

Vther scal habben æne sune. of Cornwaille he scal
cumen.]
 þat beoð a wilde bar. iburst(1)ed mid stele.
 Ðe bar scal for-brænnen. hæh3e þa burh3es.
 he scal alle þa swiken. swenien mid ei3e.
 he scal al þi riche cun. mid witen aquellen.
 he bið swiðe oht mon. & aðele an þonke.
 heonenæ into Rome. rixleð þeos ilke.
 scal he alle his feond. fallen to grunde.
 Soð ich habbe þe isæid. ah nis þe na þe softre.
(8031-39)

[Uther will have a son, of Cornwall he will come, who shall be a wild boar, bristled with steel. That boar shall burn the highest cities, he will destroy all the traitors with fury, he will all your rich kin kill with punishment. He will be a very valiant man, and noble in mind. From here into Rome, this same man will rule; he will fell to the ground all his enemies. I have told you truth, but to you it is none the softer.]

Lesley Coote, in an analysis of the speech of English political prophecies from Geoffrey through the fifteenth century (1997), finds that it is "characterized by the violence of its language" (19). She remarks:

In prophetic discourse the power conferred by successful warfare is always emphasized. This power is the aim and justification of that warfare. Prophetic discourse, therefore, is about an abstract idea of power and domination, or *imperium*, to which military victory, and the personal qualities which bring that victory, are only the means....In prophetic language the emphasis is always on *moving* and *doing*.

(21, emphasis hers)

These conclusions are amply demonstrated in the above prophecy, where the "Cornish boar" Arthur, described as deadly, valiant, and noble in mind, engages in the slaughter of traitors, the burning of cities, and--consummating the *imperium* theme in the most absolute terms--the conquest of the Occident. Thus from his introduction into the narrative, Arthur is set up as an embodiment of future greatness, and as the paramount vehicle ("moving" and "doing") for the prophetic fulfillment of British power.

In the *Brut's* subsequent Merlin episodes, however, Lazamon's narrative expansions seem to dispel any notion that the "truths" presented by prophetic discourse, Arthurian or otherwise, are necessarily less opaque than the "truths" obtained in *runen*, and that they require less exegetical scrutiny and effort by the poem's characters--if anything, they seem to require more diligence. Unlike Wace or Geoffrey, Lazamon points out that to gain access to Merlin's *soð* is not a casual affair, but requires broad efforts by the kingdom.¹⁷

In the first example of this situation, the bishop Tremorion advises King Aurilien to seek Merlin's wisdom (8476-85); no simple matter, for he must be found somewhere in the *wælden*, the "wilds"; the king must scope out the entire land, and "sende his sonde. 3eond al his kine-londe" (8488). Ultimately, after sending envoys in all four directions, Merlin is found by the spring, *Alæban*, located in *Wælsce londe* (8496-99). Thus, the search for Merlin's good advice, which is, in effect, the search for properly interpreted meaning, is a task that requires a geographical thoroughness, the same type that has been presented in the Prologue as the initial strategy behind the poem itself. For *Lazamon* to tell the history of the *Engle*, he too has "liðen. wide 3ond þas leode" (14). This enables him to extract the *soper word* from the texts that he has figuratively extracted from the *leode*: the land, its people, and their customs. To physically locate Merlin serves as a metaphor for the locating of meaning through proper interpretation; both attempts require scrutiny and thoroughness.

But the work of truth-seeking is not completed once the "text" of Merlin has been located and retrieved, as evidenced by the *Vortigern* episode. Once Aurilien has Merlin at Court, and asks him to reveal how the world's future will unfold (a broad request!), Merlin replies:

O Aurilie þe king. þu frænest me a sellic þing.

loke þat þu na mare. swulc þing ne iscire.
 For mi gæst is bælc iwis. þa a mire breoste is.
 and 3ef ich a-mong monnen. 3elp wolde makien.
 mid glad-scipe mid gomene. mid god-fulle worden.
 mi gast hine iwarðeð. & wirð stille.
 & binimeð me min wit. & mine wise word for-dut.
 þenne weore ich dumbe. of æuer-æiche dome.
 Ah bilef swulche þinges. quæd Mærlin to þan kingen.
 (8548-56)

["O King Aurilie, you ask me a strange thing! Look that you never more ask me such a thing, for my spirit is baleful that is in my breast, and if I among men were to make boasts, with glad-ship, with games, with good-filled words, my spirit would be wroth, and become still, taking from me my wit, and my wise words foreclosed; then would I be dumb of every judgment. But relinquish such things," said Merlin to the king.]

To attempt to reveal prophetic utterances while in the vein of *gomene* and boasting would foreclose the possibility of access to truth--the wroth spirit would close the book, interpretation would be rendered impossible by a silencing of the text. What, then, is the prescribed state for the revelation of such utterances?

...whan-swa cumeð neode. to auer-æi þeode.
 & mon me mid milde-scipe. wulle me bisechen.
 & ich mid mine iwille. mote wunien stille.
 þenne mæi ich suggesten. hu hit seoððen scal iwurðen.
 (8557-60)

[...whenever there comes need to any nation, and men with mildness will seek me, if from my own will I may be silent, then may I say how things shall come to be.]

He who seeks in genuine mildness and humility instills the same in the person sought, and such symbiosis opens the paths of clear prophetic utterances between communicants, allowing for the ideal speech act.

Two other narrative attempts to "locate" Merlin occur, each under Uther's rule; one is unsuccessful, the other only indirectly so. Newly crowned, Uther, like his brother, has his emissaries travel far and wide in search of the elusive prophet, who has vanished without leaving a clue as to where he may be sought (9069-71). Uther has promised riches and rewards to the seekers, but "nuste he nauere whidere" (9070)--"he had no idea whatsoever"--where to find him. Later in the narrative, when Uther hopes to gain the obsession of his lusts, Ygerne, he once again uses material wealth to locate the elusive Merlin, this time bribing a hermit to retrieve him. Once located, Merlin reveals his knowledge of this search, the motivations behind it, and the bribes granted to the hermit who seeks him. Significantly, while he acquiesces to Uther's plea for help in gaining Ygerne, the second prophecy of Arthur is not spoken directly to the king, but, instead, is spoken in the forest to the hermit. Far from the Court and deep within the woods, the runic dimensions of Merlin's speech seem apparent, as he discloses "speche...ful derne" (9420)--"speech...very secret"--about Arthur with Eucharistic imagery that unites with the *imperium* discourse of power:

Longe beoð æuere. dæd ne bið he næuere.
 þe wile þe þis world stant. ilæsten scal is worð-munt.
 and scal inne Rome. walden þa þæines.
 Al him scal abuze. þat wuned inne Bruttene.
 of him scullen gleomen. godliche singen.
 of his breosten scullen æten. aðele scopes.

scullen of his blode. beornes beon drunke.
of his eþene scullen fleon. furene gleden.
ælc finger an his hond. scarp stelene brond.
scullen stan walles. biuoren him to-fallen.
beornes scullen rusien. resoen heore mærcen.
Ðus he scal wel longe. liðen 3eond londen.
leoden biwinnen. & his lazen sette. (9406-18)

[As long as "ever" is, he will never be dead; as long as the world stands, will his reputation last, and he will in Rome rule the nobles. All who dwell in Britain will bow to him; of his glories poets will sing well; of his breast shall eat noble bards; warriors will be intoxicated with his blood; from his eyes will fly fire rays, each finger on his hand a sharp steel sword; stone walls will fall before him; warriors will quake, their banners collapse: Thus he shall go across lands for very long, peoples conquer and laws establish.]

Revealed in a fashion reminiscent of the whispered counsel of *runen*, this prophecy is apparently not meant for the ears of those in power. Merlin does indeed go to Uther's aid, but the king is not granted an audience (and, again, Merlin declines the offer of riches [9444-46]). It seems that Merlin has distanced himself from the king in revelatory matters, though he plays a part in bringing about the consummation of that *ful derne* prophecy, the coming of Arthur. One can speculate that Uther, like Vortigern, is driven by desires not conducive to prophetic revelation (nor, for that matter, are they good for the affairs of state). Whatever the cause, Merlin, who "is found [by kings] only when he wants to be" (Rider 6), vanishes from the narrative once he has aided in Arthur's conception. What remains in his absence are his words, and the supposed

fulfillment of them in the persona of Arthur (so the narrator proclaims). But Merlin is no longer present to expand or comment upon them, nor to advise his prophetic king; the task is left to the narrator, who must shoulder the mantle of interpretative authority and separate historical truth from falsehood.

In Arthur, *Lazamon* presents the fulfillment of Merlin's prophecies, for the king, unstoppable in his conquests, exhibits all of the traits of the great avenger and imperial conqueror. Indeed, the Boar of Cornwall's actions fit the qualities that Lesley Coote finds in the heroes of a majority of English political-prophetic texts:

The vast majority of texts have a hero, who always...represents the king....Prophecy [in these texts] is not interested in giving accurate physical descriptions of heroes, like how tall they are or the colour of their hair. It is only interested in the qualities they possess which enable them to fulfill the role implied in the discourse; that is, to be successful peacekeepers at home and warriors abroad. (23).

It is in the context of Arthur's peacekeeping at home that *Lazamon* provides his most detailed commentary upon the truth of his legend and the means by which it is interpreted and misinterpreted. After twelve years of peace in the kingdom, Arthur assembles representatives from all of his principalities for a great Yuletide feast (11338-52). The diversity of the assembly fosters petty rivalries among the

guests, as each aspires to appear haughtier than the other (11356-57). In the presence of Arthur, a food fight begins in the great hall, escalating into a deadly riot; the king must hold high his drawn sword in order to establish peace, an act that is accompanied by the doling out of brutal punishments to the perpetrators and their families (11387-409). Immediately following this scene, a craftsman who claims vassalage to Arthur suddenly appears with a solution. That he comes with a good pedigree for advice-giving is evident in his background: "moni lond ich habbe þurh-gan" (11426)--"I have traveled through many a land." This man of "wunder feole craftes" (11427) has been tempered by the geographical breadth that has come to indicate the search for wisdom, as demonstrated in previous passages. His advice? The building of the Round Table, which symbolizes in spatial terms the harmony sought in perfect domestic peace.

The idealistic Round Table legend provides *Lazamon* with the impetus to interject his views upon the authority of historical sources, and the difficulties of disinterested interpretation:

Ðis wes þat ilke bord. þat Bruttes of 3elpeð.
 and suged feole cunne lesinge. bi Arðure þan kinge.
 Swa deð auer-alc mon. þe oðer luuien con.
 3if he is him to leof. þenne wule he lizen.
 and suggen on him wurð-scipe. mare þenne he beon wurðe.
 ne beo he no swa luðer mon. þat his freond him wel ne
 on.]
 Eft 3if on uolke feond-scipe arereð.
 an æuer-æi time. bitweone twon monnen.

me con bi þan læðe. lasinge suggen.
 þeh he weore þe bezste mon. þe æuere æt at borde.
 þe mon þe him weore lað. him cuðe. last finden.
 Ne al soh ne al les. þat leod-scopes singeð.
 ah þis is þat soððe. bi Arðure þan kinge.
 Nes næuer ar swulc king. swa duhti þurh alle þing.
 for þat soðe stod a þan writen. hu hit is iwurðen.
 ord from þan ænden. of Ar[ð]ure þan kinge.
 no mare no lasse. buten else his lazen weoren.
 Ah Bruttess hine lueden swiðe. & ofte him on lizeð.
 and suggeð feole þinges. bi Arðure þan kinge.
 þat næuere nes i-wurðen. a þissere weorlde-richen.
 inoh he mai suggen. þe soð wule uremmen.
 seolcuðe þinges. bi Arðure kinge. (11454-75)

[This was that very table of which the Britons boast, and say many kinds of lies about Arthur the king. So does every man who loves another: if he is dear to him, then will he lie, and say praise to him--more than he is worth; no matter how bad a man he is, his friend will find him worthy. But if among folk animosity rears, at any given time between two men, lies will be said of the loathed man. Though he were the best man to ever eat at table, the man who holds him loathsome will find him faulty. It is not all true, it is not all false that poets sing, but this is the one truth about Arthur the king: there has never been a king so doughty in all things. For that truth stood in the writings, how it really was--beginning to end--of Arthur the king, no more and no less, just as his customs were. But the Britons loved him dearly and often lie about him, and say a great many things about Arthur the king that never happened in this worldly kingdom. He who proclaims the truth may say enough about the amazing feats of Arthur the king.]

The truth must be extracted from a mixture of accuracies and inaccuracies, for what the poets sing of Arthur contains both. The Britons, who love Arthur, tell many *lesinge* about him, for those who are fond of an individual speak highly of him, no matter his actions. Conversely, to hate a person is to vilify him, no matter how good his actions. How, then, to gauge the truth? Concerning

Arthur, Laȝamon seems explicitly clear: the "soðe" is in "þan writen. hu hit is iwurðen"; one need not make things up, for to say the truth of Arthur's actions is to speak enough of "selcuðe ðinges." But Laȝamon is too sophisticated a reader of history to let this stand on its face, and he shows with great subtlety the quandaries presented by "truths" in textual sources. He does so by setting up a parallel between the desire within the narrative episode to impose order (symbolized by the Round Table) upon chaos (the Yuletide riot) and the desire to impose order upon narrative meaning. At the beginning of this episode, Laȝamon notes to the reader: "Her mon mai arede. of Arðure þan king" (11337)--"here may one read (i.e., learn) about Arthur the king." This brief allusion foregrounds the textual nature of the origins of the following episode, and highlights that Laȝamon is working from a source, or sources. In so doing, the narrator's intermediary function in presenting the "truth" of Arthur is set in the foreground, and his statements concerning the nature of the subjective feelings of any given interpreter (those who hate, those who love) take on added resonance. Perhaps the *soðe* is in the *writen*; but how to extract it--indeed, how to identify it--remains unclear.

It is with the eventual actions taken by Arthur that the divergence between an idealized notion of truth-finding

(the fantasy of an "ordered" text) and the highly problematic--chaotic--nature of narrative events becomes most starkly clear. Here *Lazamon* appears to attempt interpretative order most directly, despite his seeming awareness of, and sensitivity to, the untidiness imposed by the narrative events. Indeed, these events soon make clear that Arthur, confronted with the Wheel's turn, stumbles into the same pitfalls of misinterpretation that have been underscored thus far, both through the *runen* theme and the episodes involving Merlin and his utterances. Despite the proclamations of Arthur's greatness, he seems susceptible to the same entanglements as previous kings--Arthur proves to be a poor reader of prophecy and revelation, and he accepts *bad ræd*.

This theme is first communicated by two episodes in which Arthur experiences dream-visions. These visions occur at the beginning and toward the end of Arthur's most overt imperial challenge: his pursuit of the conquest of Rome, which requires him temporarily to abdicate the throne. On the first sea-leg of this campaign, Arthur has a *feorlic* (fearsome) dream in which a dragon combats and defeats a bear. This vision leaves him greatly frightened (12753). Arthur appeals to God to grant that it may be a fortuitous vision: "let þu mi sweuen. to selþen iturnen" (12763)--"Let

you turn my dream to fortune"--and his advisors then set to the task of interpretation:

Biscopes þis iherden. & boc-ilærede men.
 þis iheorden eorles. þis iherden beornes.
 ælc bi his witte. wisdom sæiden.
 þis sweuen aræhten.
 Ne durste þer na cniht. to ufele ræchhen na wiht.
 leoste he sculden leosen. his leomen þat weoren him
 deore.]
 (12788-93)

[Bishops heard this, and book-learned men; earls heard this, barons heard this. Each by his wit spoke wisdom, this dream interpreted. No knight dared to interpret it as evil, lest he should lose the limbs that were dear to him.]

They, unlike Merlin, do not interpret in a disinterested fashion, for they are too fearful of punishment (which, implicitly, could be castration, since *leomen* may designate "genitalia"). This being so, they proclaim the dream a good omen. Arthur does appeal to God, not for guidance on how to interpret, but to fulfill his hopes that the dream portends good fortune--he chooses not to become an active reader; instead, he defers that authority.

The second dream occurs on the cusp of Arthur's final march into Rome. After winning a decisive victory in which the Roman emperor has been slain (13423-947), Arthur settles temporarily in Burgundy, where he announces his plans to head to Rome in the summer and claim the imperial throne. A messenger arrives, and Arthur welcomes him gladly, assuming that he brings good tidings (13974). The two speak at

length, but the messenger withholds the dreadful news he has for Arthur--namely, that Moddred, with Queen Wenhauer's complicity, has usurped the British throne. Arthur, retiring after his conversation with the messenger, experiences a horrific dream that depresses him greatly ("me imætte a sweuen. þer-uore ich ful sa(ri) æm" [13983]). Straddled atop his great hall with Wawain to his front, Arthur sees Moddred and Wenhauer hacking away at the roof posts. The timber destroyed, they both tumble from the rooftop, and Arthur breaks his right arm; Wawain, less fortunate, breaks both of his, and is rendered useless. Arthur strikes Moddred down with his good left arm and tosses Wenhauer into a black pit. But events do not end there, for a golden lion seizes Arthur and drops him into the turbulent sea, where waves lead him to a fish. Eventually, with the fish's assistance, he makes it to shore, soaking wet, flushed, hot, and quivering. At this point, Arthur awakens (13982-14020). His recollection of the dream complete, Arthur expresses his wish that Wenhauer was there with him (14021).

The messenger, upon hearing the details of the dream, offers a response that reveals the gap between what is hoped for and what actually is: "ne sculde me nauere sweuen. mid sorþen are(c)chen" (14023)--"dreams should never be read as signifying sorrows." And knowing full well that the dream signifies doom, the messenger states: "swa nulle hit ure

Drihte" (14026)--"so may God not allow it." Once again, actively engaged interpretation is passed over, and God is deferred to as a panacea for ill omens. But reality, the troublesome events of a mundane world fueled by power grabs, floods in. Despite (even in the face of such a dream) Arthur's proclamation of faith in Moddred's fealty, the messenger must ultimately reveal the crass political truth.

In light of these events, Arthur turns back to Britain, and his plans to march upon Rome must be deferred. But as the reader knows, these plans are never realized as actual narrative events; the return to Britain proves Arthur's downfall. This reversal in narrative direction runs counter to the prophetic claims for Arthur's conquest of Rome, for Merlin has revealed that the king "scal inne Rome" rule (9408), where the walls will quake and fall before him. Of course, it is possible for such actions to be read figuratively without their veracity being compromised, but the degree of required figurative interpretation also measures the degree to which the prophecies are bereft of literal certitude. The crevice between the actual conquest of Rome and the thwarted potential to do so is wide indeed, for clearly, Arthur does not rule in Rome, and that city's walls do not tumble.

How does *Lazamon*, who has accounted for Merlin's authority throughout, contend with this bifurcation between

narrative events and the prophetic sooth sayings about Arthur's actions? In his most overt and direct interpretation of prophetic speech, *Lazamon* provides readings of the Rome prophecy that extend beyond mere proclamations of Merlin's veracity.

The first instance occurs during the events of the Britons' final battle with the Roman troops. Arthur and the Britons, after being ambushed by the Romans, successfully turn the tide of battle and as they do so, the Britons grow in awe and affection for the King, while the Romans begin to feel great dread (13432-525). *Lazamon* reads this seminal point in the battle in the following manner:

þa wæs mid soðe ifunde. þat Mærlin side whilen.
 þar sculden for Ar[ð]ure. Rome ifullen afure.
 and þa wal of stanen. quakien and fallen.
 þas ilke tacni[n]ge sculde beon. of Lucas þan kaiserem.
 & of þan senature. þa mid him come of Rome.
 and of þan seoluen wisen. þæ þer gunnen resen.
 þat Merlin i furn-dagen seide. al heo hit funden þere.
 swa heo duden ære. and seoððen wel iwhare.
 ær Arður iboren weore. Merlin al hit bodede.
 (13530-38)

[Then was found truthful what Merlin had said before: that because of Arthur Rome should be full of fear, and the walls of stone quake and fall. This same token should be of Lucas the emperor, and of his senators who came with him from Rome, who in that same manner began to be razed there. What Merlin in fore-days had said, they found it all there, as they did before and since did everywhere: Before Arthur was born, Merlin predicted it all.]

The Romans' fear is a metonym for the fall of Rome, and confirms Merlin's truthfulness. The second metonym, however,

is more future-predictive: Luces' fear, and that of his senators, figures the coming razing of the city ("gunnen resen"), leaving its literal fulfillment open. But in *Lazamon's* second reading of the Roman prophecy, this expectation is replaced by yet another figurative account of Rome's fall, this time as an event that has already come to pass in the narrative. This account, preceding Arthur's victory over the Romans, is found directly before the events of Arthur's second dream, and the news of Moddred's wickedness:

Ða wes hit itimed þere. þat Merlin saide while.
 þat Rom-walles sculden. aȝein Ar[ð]ure to-uallen.
 þat was agan þære. bi þan kaisere.
 þa ueol þer-inne fehte. mid fifti þusund monne.
 ruren þer to grunde. riche Rom-leoden.
 Ða Arður wende to soðe. to aȝen al Rome. (13964-69)

[Then did it pass there what Merlin had said before: that the walls of Rome should fall before Arthur. This had already occurred by the emperor who had fallen in the battle with fifty thousand men--felled then were the mighty Roman people. Then Arthur truly believed he would possess all of Rome.]

What Merlin has proclaimed has been fulfilled: the walls of Rome "fell" when the emperor fell. With Luces gone, Arthur "wende to soðe"--"truly believed"--that he *would* possess Rome. To believe that prophecy has been fulfilled amounts, in this instance, to its fulfillment. *Lazamon*, though accentuating the point of Arthur's singular belief, nonetheless authorizes this belief as a fulfillment of Merlin's words: "hit itimed þer. þat Merlin saide while."

This highlighting of Arthur's belief in prophetic truth, especially in light of the narrative events that will follow, reveals the profound role played by subjective interpretation when confronting historical "truths." In the end, idealized prophetic history, like the *figurative* fulfillment of Arthur's conquest of Rome, stands in contrast to the human activities and fateful occurrences in the narrative (such as Arthur's actual inability to fulfill that prophecy). Lesley Coote, echoing Emerson's and Lerner's comments above, finds such idealization within prophetic discourse to be one of its most prominent components:

[P]rophetic discourse is not ineluctably predictive. The 'future truth' recorded by prophetic writers differs from simple prediction in that the events recorded have not been immutably fixed by an outside agency like God or Fate. They record what *should* happen, but *might* not. Prophetic discourse carries an element of responsibility. If certain conditions are not fulfilled, the hoped-for future will not happen. The timing and the favours are God's to grant, so this cannot be *fixed* truth. The writer *hopes* that it will be so....Prophetic discourse...does not really predict the future at all; it presents a point of view on what is happening *now*. (21-22, emphasis hers)

A reading of historical events such as *Lazamon* gives, concerning Merlin's prophecies of Arthur's conquest of Rome, is a "present" hope, a desire for transcendent historical meaning. The wish that the source of such prophetic utterances may be within God's favor accounts for the Christianized dimensions that *Lazamon* provides to the designated authority on these matters in the narrative--

namely, Merlin. But this realm of idealization does not provide a means of interpretative unity in the narrative; instead, it stands as an option (perhaps idealized) among many, yet another path to which one may turn. Prophecies, like *runen*, operate in a realm of interpretative possibilities that does not extricate the reader from the pitfalls of misreading, though, unlike *runen*, they may be invested with more hope that "ideal" history will overcome mundane history. The ability of the prophetic message to communicate something approaching the "truth" is, like other forms of insight, beholden to the contextual structure in which it is received.

This bifurcation between the ideal and the mundane, between mortal events like a king's defeat and the subjective hope in a glorious salvation, reaches its apogee in *Lazamon's* close to the Arthurian section, which he has expanded from *Wace* and *Geoffrey*. *Geoffrey*, who relates that the wounded Arthur is taken to Avalon to be healed, does not mention the possibility of his return to Britain. *Wace* reports that the British may harbor beliefs on this matter, but one cannot give an account of its truth with certainty (13279-90). *Lazamon*, as one might expect, is less circumspect on this matter:

Bruttes ileueð 3ete. þat he bon on liue.
and wunnien in Aualun. mid fairest alre aluen.
and lokieð euere Bruttes 3ete. whan Arður cumen liðe.

Nis nauer þe mon iboren. of nauer nane burde icoren.
 þe cunne of þan soðe. of Arðure sugen mare.
 Bute while wes an witege. Mærlin ihate.
 he bodede mid worde. his quiðes weoren soðe.
 þat an Arður sculde gete. cum Anglen to fulste.

(14290-97)

[Britons still believe that he is alive and dwells in Avalon amidst the fairest of all elves; and the Britons still look to when Arthur will come again. Never was the man born of noble lady who can say more of the truth of Arthur; but there once was a prophet called Merlin who foretold with words--his sayings were true--that an Arthur should yet come, to help the English.]

Here, not only is the truth of Merlin's prophecy emphasized--"his quiðes weoren soðe"--but so is the clarity of its very (truthful) meaning: an Arthur will return to help the English ("Anglen to fulste").¹⁸ This is far from Wace's reading, in which doubt and lack of validation surround the possibility of the king's return. But by proclaiming that an Arthur will return to help the English, *Lazamon* is reinforcing the schism that has arisen between historical events and the desire to fold them in the ideal cloth of prophetic fulfillment and possibility. Arthur, in the end, embodies two realms. He is an *Arður* of idealized prophecy; he is also the specifically fallible and sometimes poor reader of events and revealed "truths," the stumbling human whose mortal demise is postponed by yet another prophetic idealization, a shared subjective faith in his imminent return. Prophecy is a privileged reading of

history, but it is one that must ultimately contend with competing voices in the narrative.

Given the narrative bifurcation of idealized prophetic hopes and historical events, it is significant that the *Brut* returns to Merlin and his prophecies at its conclusion. Indeed, the events following Arthur's departure from the narrative, which culminate in the defeat of British power and the final dominion of the land by the English, have often been explored by critics seeking a larger, thematic meaning in the *Brut*. Thus, I turn to an investigation of these episodes in my final chapter.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

¹In addition to Lerner, Taylor also provides an informative discussion of the various prophetic modes in the Middle Ages (25-47), such as those drawn from the biblical types evident in the *Books of Daniel* and *Isaiah*, the "minor prophets" of *Jeremiah*, and the apocalyptic visions of St. John the Divine. He also discusses the classical heritage of oracular divination that was influential in the Middle Ages, such as the *Oracula Sibyllina*, which was a collection of prophecies by both Jewish and Christian writers, spanning the second century B.C. and continuing to 268 A.D: "The prophecies spoke of the Jews' hope in the coming Messiah....[T]he early Christians ranked the Sibyl with the greatest of Hebrew prophets" (30); these texts were frequently quoted by the Church Fathers and remained popular in Lazonon's time. Geoffrey refers to sayings attributed to the Sibyl (*Historia* IX, 17, XII, 18), but Tatlock finds that they "are impossible...to connect with any extant Sibylline saying" (*Legendary History* 408). For additional discussion of medieval prophecy, see R. W. Southern (159-80).

²Taylor cites the examples of the Questing Beast found in Arthurian romances such as Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, and bestiaries, which demonstrate how various animals reflect moral states (5).

³See Hanning's examination (91-120). Also see Wickham-Crowley's discussion of the problematic nature of tracing the *Historia Brittonum's* influence on Geoffrey's *Historia* (189-93).

⁴Here Geoffrey interrupts the tower episode to explain his insertion of the *Prophetiae*, stating that they come requested by Alexander, bishop of Lincoln. Though other copies of the *Prophetiae* must have been extant--they are quoted by Orderic Vitalis in 1135--they exist in manuscripts outside of the *Historia* only as fragments. See Rigg (44-5).

⁵Foretold, though they have already occurred in "actual" historical time. Here is an instance of prophecy as a means of interpreting what is, in fact, historical and not futuristic--that is, while these events are to unfold in the narrative's future, they already pertain to the writer's

sense of either the present or the past, and the prophecy shapes them in a particular light.

⁶In the *Historia*, he is "Merlin Ambrosius," while in another of Geoffrey's works, *Vita Merlini*, he is "Merlin Caledonius," though this Merlin recalls the events of the *Historia*. This led to the theory of the "two Merlins" posited by Gerald of Wales, who, in the *Expugnatio Hibernica* (*The Conquest of Ireland*), cites them for separate prophecies. See Rigg (93-96).

⁷My purpose here is not to re-interrogate the possible Welsh sources to the *Brut*--this has already been performed exhaustively by Le Saux. I direct the reader to chapter six of her study (*Lazamon's Brut*, 118-54). My focus, as I have stated in the Introduction, is not so much upon whence *Lazamon* derives his Merlin as upon how he configures him within the *Brut*.

⁸For Le Saux's specific examinations of possible parallels between the *Brut* and *Armes Prydein*, see Le Saux (134-38). For background on the Welsh triads, see Rachel Bromwich's introduction to her edition of *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads* (xi-cxxi).

⁹Le Saux (140), quoting from Lewis Thorpe, ed. and trans. (246).

¹⁰In his review of Le Saux's study, Donald L. Hoffman has found her claim of a possible Welsh informant to be imaginative, if tenuous (91-4). But Wickham-Crowley makes the astute point: "[G]iven *Lazamon's* location and the historical conditions, how he could avoid Welsh tradition needs proof, not the opposite view" (134, emphasis hers).

¹¹*Vita Merlini*, written about 1150 (and Geoffrey's last work), is a two-part narrative: Part one depicts Merlin in the tradition of the wild man of the woods; the latter part contains prophecies and an appearance by Taliesin. At the end of the narrative, Merlin abandons his prophetic gifts for a life of ascetic contemplation. Le Saux points out several similarities between the *Vita* and the *Brut*, such as Rowenne's personal hand in the poisoning of Vortimer and Merlin's residing in the woods (see *Lazamon's Brut*, 110-17, for her full findings).

¹²The question of Merlin's "Christian" persona vs. his "non-Christian" one, and the controversies it raised with medieval commentators, is concisely summed up by Ziolkowski:

Geoffrey's *Prophetiae Merlini* posed acute problems to medieval Christians because they were so different from biblical prophecies--and because Merlin himself was so different from the biblical prophets who were memorialized in the exegesis, art, and drama of the Middle Ages. Very soon after the *Vita* came into circulation, medieval schoolmen set out to confront these questions. By the end of the twelfth century they had already produced five systematic commentaries. Between 1174 and 1179 appeared the *Explanationes in prophetiam Merlini* (sometimes attributed to Alan of Lille). Among other concerns, the text considers whether or not Merlin was Christian and whether or not he truly had the gift of prophecy. The author of the treatise inclines to believe that Merlin was a Christian and a bona fide prophet; but even if Merlin was not a Christian, the author points out that Job, the Sibyls, Balaam, Cassandra, and any others who were not Jewish were filled with the prophetic spirit by the Lord. (159)

I note below that pagan prophecies in the *Brut* before the coming of Christianity are specifically *not* attributable to the "spirit of the Lord," but to that of the Devil.

¹³Wickham-Crowley's description, with its emphasis upon individual choice against a providential backdrop, sounds very similar to that proposed by St. Augustine in *Civitas Dei* (as I discussed in the Introduction).

¹⁴It is not the pagan element *per se* that would compromise the veracity of a given prophecy, as the example of the Sybil demonstrates; here, however, the prophecies are not just pagan, but assisted by the Devil.

¹⁵Wickham-Crowley notes that the one instance of prophetic divination made after Merlin's appearance may be implicitly pagan: Pelluz, divining for the rapist and rebel Edwin (15220-23), is Spanish; this "might raise doubts [about his faith] given the mix of Moslem and Jewish culture there in (for Lagamon) a time of crusades" (175).

¹⁶See Jean Blacker-Knight (1988), who views Wace's minimizing of Merlin in the *Roman* as part of a larger effort toward depoliticization of the poem:

[B]y stripping Merlin of his political predictions, Wace has removed a primary element in Geoffrey's characterization of the prophet-magician....From [Wace's] characterization, it was a short step to the portrayal of Merlin strictly as a magician (72).

¹⁷Rider discusses this point in detail (5-6). Also see Wickham-Crowley (185), who comments that having Merlin dwell specifically in the wild woods evokes the figure of the saintly Welsh hermit, whom, she speculates, *Lazamon* may have encountered in the Marches.

¹⁸According to the tradition as it is recounted by Wace, Arthur will return to help the Britons. *Lazamon* changes this reference to *Anglen*--a change, of course, with important ramifications for one's reading of the relationship between the Britons, the English, Arthur, and the island that they all claim as their own. In chapter four I will consider these competing claims in relation to a larger thematic justification of the "final" English dominion over the Britons.

CHAPTER IV:

londe in honde: Dominion, Exile, and Return

If an overarching, authoritative meaning is to be found in the *Brut*, I argue in the preceding chapter that it does not reside in prophetic representations imbued with the Christian salvation model, which is based on the revelation of God's omnipresence in cosmic history, culminating in the Final Judgment. I do not imply that such a model was held illusory by *Lazamon*--as a priest, he very probably did not doubt its ultimate veracity--but one idealized alternative reading to mundane history cannot alone contain the variety of voices found in the *Brut's* narrative episodes. Prophecy in the *Brut*, which Wickham-Crowley rightly identifies as imbued with Christian overtones, functions not as a barometer of future truth so much as an expression of present hope, of a desire for a clearer order to history. But instead of being shaped by a transcendent salvation model, *Lazamon's* narrative events seems to have inherited the organizing principle that Hanning finds in Geoffrey's *Historia*:

The "meaning" of British history for Geoffrey...is simply that Britain, like other nations, rises, flourishes, and falls....Geoffrey's contribution to the imaginative historiography of the early Middle Ages may be summed up as a removal from history of the idea of eschatological fulfillment....In the *Historia*, the regulation of history by repetitive patterns of

personal behavior and national progress has replaced the Christian system of movement toward a final happiness or reward. (171)

Lynn Nelson (1966), however, in contrast to Hanning, finds that the "millennial element" dominates the ending of Geoffrey's *Historia*: the Celts await "the time appointed by God when they should again gain control of Britain" (172), under the leadership of a returning messianic Arthur, who will lead them from oppression. Does this final narrative situation point to a meaning in the *Historia* that extends beyond the mere rise and fall of successive rulers, toward an ultimate future redemption for a "chosen" British people? If so, does *Lazamon* inherit such a meaning in his version of the *Brut*'s final episodes? Many critics have indeed sought for conclusive thematic meaning in the narrative's final telling of the transference of power from the Britons to the English, which *Lazamon* alters from Geoffrey and Wace. In this chapter I examine such revised episodes as possible indicators of a larger historical purpose in the *Brut*. I consider whether the English colonization of Britain--the monumental change from "Brutaine" to "Englo-lond"--stands as an instructive "final" example of the repeated narrative pattern of dominion, exile, and return, thus providing both a larger thematic meaning to the poem and narrative closure.

In her consideration of the possible audiences of the *Brut*, Rosamund Allen astutely points to the land of Britain itself as a prominent point of reference for the reader:

The most concrete, most nearly 'real' construct in this text is not the priest-author, not the 'I' within the text, nor the audience...but the hero, *bis lond*. Lazamon presents this concept of place, in the concretised form of the common ground (literally) on which the text operates: civilisations, ruling races, names of places all change, but the perspective of 'hereness, under-our-feetness' is the point of reference of meaning in the text....The very elasticity of the project of 'this land' precludes a closed text, because the land operates in many ways...

("Implied Audience," 126)

While the narrative venues created by these operations of land are indeed diverse,¹ they ultimately seem to fall under one dominant action: the quest for power, which has dominion of the land as its final goal. From Brutus to Arthur to, ultimately, the English settlers of the narrative's conclusion, taking the Isle into one's hands--and keeping one's grip on it--serves as the ultimate reward of power; to be without land is to be without an identity, for the *Brut*'s continuous use of toponyms attests to the inseparable relationship between people, naming, and geographical hegemony.² In fact, the very impetus for the narrative's beginning actions is exile from a homeland and then dominion over a new one: Eneas is driven from one land into another, where he is given "Muche lond" (70) and the hand of an aging king's daughter (whom he must fight for).

His great-grandson, Brutus, continues the pattern: he is an exiled parricide who must fight giants for land if his prophecy of founding a great nation is to be fulfilled; only then may he have dominion over the country that serves as the geographical centerpiece to the *Brut*: "Nu wes al þis lond. i-ahned a Brutus hond" (967). From the beginning, to keep Britain's *lond in hond* also means defending it from those who would usurp it; Humber, for example, is the first in a long line of invaders who "cum liðen to londe" (1072). In a sense, such figures represent nascent story-lines, narratives that seek to usurp the central focus in this story of land from the British, for if geographical hegemony is the end-goal of the *Brut*'s narrative plot-lines, then to control the Isle is to dominate the narrative and the history it relates. Iulius Scezar (Julius Caesar) serves as a most notable example of land-and-plot invasion, for he demonstrates that the pattern of land possession is not particular to Britain. Indeed, for Scezar land dominion is a story without an ending, for he desires all that he sets eyes upon:

Al þa londes he bi-won. þe he mid eþene lokede on.
 he þohte to bi-winnen. mid strengðen & mid ginnen.
 al middel-eardes lond. and halde þat worlde in his
 hond.]
 (3590-93)

[He won all the lands that he looked on with eyes. He thought to win, with strength and guile, all middle-earth's land, and hold the world in his hand.]³

While the extent of Scezar's desires for geographical dominion (the entire world!) represents the most extreme of examples, he is but one of many figures who remain unsatisfied with the land(s) "in hand." Indeed, he is following the example of rulers who find that the central prize in the *Brut*, Britain itself, does not satiate the desire for possession. The brothers Belin and Brennes are initially at each other's throats for complete control of the island, since joint-rule over the land has proved less satisfactory than civil war, even though "eiper oöer. luuede also is broper" (2150)--"each loved the other as his brother." Following a tearful reconciliation at their mother's impassioned behest, Belin soon proposes to his brother that they turn their gaze for power across the Channel: "Fare we bliue. / in tou-warde France. & and mid fehte hit biwinnen" (2564-65); the desire to conquer land is not quelled, it is simply transferred. This invasion culminates in the dominion of Rome and commences a parallel between the two powers that holds throughout the narrative, represented most forcefully in Arthur's attempt at Roman conquest, for both kingdoms seem equally invested in the struggle to dominate the other. In fact, like the brothers Belin and Brennes, Rome and Britain--"brothers," in the sense that they both emanate from the same "parentage"

(Eneas)--oscillate continuously between fraternal embrace and fraternal rivalry.⁴

Of course, maintaining a hold on the land from those without is not the only threat to power: not losing one's grip to those from *within* proves equally daunting in the *Brut*. In fact, internal strife for land possession commences almost as soon as Brutus doles out his kingdom. This pattern of power grabbing among internal factions is repeated in the Leir episode, but the use of secretive machinations for land possession is most vividly exemplified by the Vortigern section, as I have previously argued. Here, for the first time, outside and inside forces coalesce, as the struggle within allows for the subtle invasion of those from without. When the alien Saxons are drawn into domestic espionage, they learn the ways of runic manipulation quickly and become the consummate insiders, opening a path for outside infiltration.

But the process by which those in dominion are exiled from power comes not only in the form of overt military power, or internal, secretive machinations. Rome's most successful invasion of Britain arrives not in the form of military might, but of didactic speech ("lær-spel" [5069]): the message of Christ's ways, as presented to Luces by the Roman bishops Dunian and Fagan. Interestingly, this message leads to the familiar pattern of military action and

coercion, as Luces engages in a cleansing campaign to purge pagan influence by gutting temples and slaughtering those who refuse baptism (5071).⁵ This Roman "invasion" completed, the bishops depart, leaving "in pisse londe. þat folc a Godes heonde" (5099).

While this repeated pattern of "land holding" marks the end goal for most of the narrative's actions, such holdings also represent narrative beginnings, for often geographical conquest represents a new origin story, a new toponym, and a new fostering of identity, language, and land-terms that the reader of the *Brut* recognizes as inseparably intertwined by *Lazamon* by means of his use of the word *leod*. Monica Otter discusses this general pattern of land appropriation as the *gaainable tere topos* (59), a phrase she borrows from Denis Pirus's *Vie Seint Edmund le Rie* (c. late 1200's). The term, whose technical meaning she identifies as "arable land," also communicates the idea of geographical conquest, as evidenced by the word "gaagner," meaning "to win, acquire." As applied to Geoffrey of Monmouth and those vernacular authors directly influenced by his *Historia* (the text in which she finds the *gaainable tere* theme "first fully developed" [69]), Otter explains this topos such:

The overall effect of all the episodes is to create a "storied" landscape, a kind of spatial deployment of collective memory: the landscape becomes a substratum for the whole history, which is created by the characters who live on it--in fact, it consists of

them--and at the same time underlies, supports, and brings forth their further activities. (70)

If these repeated episodes mark "storied landscapes" that, I argue, intertwine both narrative conclusions and beginnings--in the sense that as land is ultimately seized a new identity and story is born while another ends--then the potential meanings in the *Brut's* final example of this pattern is telling. It is in such narrative episodes that *Godes heonde* seems decisively present in Britain. This time, however, it does not reach for the Britons, but for the Saxons, and then for the "Angle" immigrants who arrive in Britain after it has been conquered by the African invader, Gurmund, who has bequeathed the land to the Saxons. This factor make the *Brut's* final example of dominion over the land unique. The pagan Gurmund does not select to hold permanently the land he has seized, but instead "donates" it to the Saxons with whom he has allied; Gurmund is content to relinquish the *lond in hond* and to move on. Indeed, he presents an anomalous figure in the exile-dominion-return theme. In fact, he is initially granted land in his native Africa by his father, but he despises the idea ("for-hozede" [14420]), and he proclaims that he will only rule in a land that he has won through combat: "oðer nauermare. nolde he habbe nane" (14425)--"never any other way; he would have none of it." The depiction of the conversion of the Germanic

pagans--many of whom come in the wake of Gurmund--points to further thematic resonance. Has *Lazamon* portrayed events in a manner meant to demonstrate the justice of the final English dominion over the Britons? Is he pointing to a just and divine retribution for British failures, and a proper reward for English successes (not the least of which is religious conversion)?

As I discussed in chapter one, critics, in part contending with these questions, have been perplexed by the discrepancy between the linguistic medium of the poem (decidedly English) and its narrative content (the British protagonists vs. the Germanic antagonists). Hence, the view of the *Brut* as an "ethnographic howler" or a work marked by a deep "ambivalence" in the eyes of Donoghue and others. Outside of linguistic considerations (such as the poem's English archaism vs. its international eclecticism), an attempt has been made to resolve the medium/content dilemma by suggesting that *Lazamon* makes a thematic distinction between the Saxons and the Angles. Ian Kirby (1964) finds that while the Saxons are depicted as wicked and treacherous, the Angles, who appear only in the narrative's final episodes, are drawn with approbation by *Lazamon*. In fact, they represent the rightful heirs to the British power. Kirby's reading appears justified when one considers the unique nature of the Gurmund episode, for he serves as a

vicarious conqueror for these "approved" Germanic people. They ultimately win the land, but not through the established patterns of overt conquest or political intrigue; instead, they merely benefit from the actions of an "outside agent" (notably from a distant land) who conveniently steps off the narrative stage to allow for the entrance of others.

Le Saux's study of certain key expansions in the *Brut* may justify Kirby's conclusion that *Lazamon* draws a distinction between the earlier Saxons and the post-Gurmund Germanic tribes. As she points out (*Lazamon's Brut*, 162), *Lazamon* expands the missionary episodes of Austin (St. Augustine of Canterbury), underlining his role as "central agent" in the conversion of the Saxons and Angles. After traveling "wide 3eond Englene lond" (14818), and baptizing "Englisce men" and "Sexisce men" alike, he "sette an Godes honde. al þat wes on londe" (14821-2). In addition, the British clergy defy the authority of the Roman Church by refusing to submit to Austin, and they resent his efforts to convert the Saxons, whom they view as unjustly holding their land. In fact, the British clergy vow to hate Austin and never to yield to him: "nauere to ure liue. no scullen we him wurðen liðe" (14864)--"never in our lives will we come to like him." Thus, their portrait seems to stand in unflattering relief to the evangelical aims of the Roman

Church via Austin. This "stress on the spiritual dimension of Augustine" (163) leads Le Saux to conclude:

The part of the *Brut* dealing with Augustine therefore betrays a tendency toward a systematic reappraisal of the saint, by emphasizing his responsibility in the christianizing of the pagan Saxons....In other words...the episode bears the obvious mark of the hagiographical genre. (164)

Lazamon also adds the hagiographical dimensions of the Angle king, Oswald. While Geoffrey and Wace simply report that Oswald is killed by the armies of Cadwalan and Penda, Lazamon has Oswald murdered by treachery and deception when Penda convinces him to ride unarmed to a reconciliation meeting. Once he is slain--or martyred--by Penda, Lazamon refers to him as "Seint Oswald" (15688), a designation not used by Geoffrey or Wace. Le Saux concludes the following from this narrative alteration:

It completes the reversal of sympathies effected in the Augustine episode; the Christian Britons fighting against the pagan Saxons have turned into saint-killing persecutors of the righteous Angles. Though both parties are now Christian, the linking of the Britons with the treacherous Penda puts them in the same moral position as the Roman emperor allied to the heathens, in the Arthurian episode. (166)

As I discussed in chapter one, James Noble finds similar elements in the *Brut*, and thus he concurs with Kirby's reading and states that Lazamon distinguishes "between the would-be Saxon usurpers who are ultimately banished from Britain during Arthur's reign and...the

Germanic immigrants who...are invited...in the wake of Gurmund's invasion" (181). But, as I also discussed in chapter one, Neil Wright finds that a thematically-important distinction between the Angles and Saxons does not ultimately hold in the *Brut*, for *Lazamon's* alterations work to reinforce the commonality not the differences between the two groups. He suggests that the antecedent for the distinction between Angles and Saxons can be found in the *Historia*, where Wright finds the different terms, far from representing a desire to draw any distinction between the two groups, can be explained by examining Geoffrey's sources. Up through the Arthurian section of his history, Geoffrey uses the name *Saxones*, as do his two main sources: *Gildas' De Excidio* and the *Historia Brittonum*. After this point, he appears to have turned to Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* as his source, in which the term *Angli* is favored. So Wright concludes: "The sudden appearance of the term *Angli* near the end of Geoffrey's narrative is thus directly attributable to the linguistic usage of his sources" (162), and not to some thematic point.⁶

The debate surrounding the use of the terms *Angli* and *Saxones* is but one area that fuels discussion about possible meanings in *Lazamon's* treatment of the British vs. the English in relation to the narrative's conclusion. The other, as Wright notes (162), involves an issue that *Lazamon*

(along with Wace) inherits from the *Historia*--namely, the question of locating the precise point in history when the Britons lose "Britain" and the English gain "England."⁷ Geoffrey has English dominion occur in the late seventh century, while Bede, one of Geoffrey's primary sources and the usually accepted authority on this matter by Anglo-Latin historians, dates the dominion two centuries earlier with the initial arrival of Hengest and Horsa. Noting precisely when the island's name changes from Britain to England had come to serve as a key marker of English dominion, and, as William Leckie notes, Geoffrey's version of Insular history, which speaks of British history extending into centuries normally viewed as "Anglo-Saxon," presented "an overt challenge to prevailing notions regarding the passage of dominion":

Geoffrey extended the period which the Britons constituted the dominant force in Insular affairs well into what was normally reckoned as belonging to Anglo-Saxon history....[W]riters in the twelfth century were brought face to face with a disquieting reality. The conventional periodization did not rest on a secure foundation. So long as only the pre-Galfridian data on the Britons were available, Anglo-Saxon tradition seemed unshakeable. Geoffrey's challenge, however, revealed hitherto unsuspected gaps and weaknesses. (19)⁸

The First Variant Version of the *Historia*, a shortened redaction of the Vulgate, is but one history that seeks to clarify the point of English dominion.⁹ In this version, the donation of Gurmund marks the point of English dominion,

for then the appellation "Britain" is decisively replaced by "England." The First Variant reads: "Hinc Angli Saxones uocati sunt qui Leogriam possederunt et ab eis Anglia terra postmodum dicta est" ["So the Saxons who held Leogria were called Angles and henceforth the land was named England"].¹⁰ Thus, after the donation, the Saxons are simply referred to as Angles, and Britain becomes England: "a somewhat crude modification which is not atypical of the First Variant's approach" at reconciling the dominion issue (Wright 163).

Wace elects to follow the First Variant's account of the donation of Gurmund (13635-58), but finds this modification unsatisfactory and adds details to this passage in order to give a more precise explanation of the Britain-to-England name-change:

Pur un lignage dunt cil [the Saxons] furent
 Ki la terre primes reçurent
 Se firent Engleis apeler
 Pur lur orine remembrer,
 E Englelande unt apelee
 La terre ki lur ert dunee.
 Tant dit Engleterre en franceis
 Cum dit Engleland en engleis;
 Terre a Engleis, ço dit li nuns,
 Ço en est l'espositions. (13643-52)

[Through one lineage whence they [the Saxons] came, those who first received the land called themselves English to remember their origin, and they called the land that they were given England. It is called Engleterre in French and Engleland in English. Land of the English: that is what it means, that is its definition.]

They name the land England, Wace explains, because it recalls their place of emigration; thus is the naming of the island "England" given a rationale that is lacking in the simple change of name noted in the First Variant. Laȝamon appears to have followed Wace in his version of this passage, for his reasoning is identical:

Bisiden Allemaine. is a lond. Angles ihaten.
 þer weoren iborne. þa ilke þe weorn icorne.
 þa Gurmund an hond. bitahte al þis kinelond.
 also he heom a forward hædde. 3if he hit biwunne.
 Al his biheste. he heom bilaste.
 Of Englen heo comen. and þer-of heo nomen nomen.
 and letten heom cleopien ful iwis. þat folc þat wes
Englis.]
 & þis lond heo cleopeden Engle-lond. for hit wes al on
heore honde.]
 Seo[ð]ðe ærest Bruttes. bæh3en to þissen londe.
 Brutaine hit wes ihaten. of Brutten nom taken.
 a þat þis folc com. þa þisne nome. him bino[m].
(14668-78)

[Beside Alemaine is a land called Angles. There were born the same that were chosen, to whom Gurmund handed over all this kingdom, as he had promised them, if he won it. All he promised to them he fulfilled. They came from Engles and thereof took that name, and thus they had themselves called, those folk who were English; and they called this land Engle-land, for it was all in their hand. Since the Britons first came to this land, Britain it was called, taking its name from the Britons, until this folk came, who this name took from them.]

While the reasons for the name-change are the same as Wace's, Laȝamon intensifies the importance of language in his version by playing on the word *nomen* (which means both "to name" and "to seize, or take") by stating: "þer-of heo nomen nomen." This pairing underlines the relationship

between geographical dominion and linguistic hegemony. This relationship is again reinforced several lines later, when the English actions of seizing and naming are laid out as explicit acts against the Britons: "heo binomen heore namen. al for Bruttene sceome. / and nomen al þis lond. and setten hit al an heore hond" (14681-82)--"they took their names--to the shame of the Britons--and seized all this land and set it in all their hands." To name ("nomen") is synonymous with physical control over the land named ("binomen"); conversely, losing the land is both a material and linguistic rending, a loss of power marked by the inability to name.

If the change in the island's name marks the key point of transference of power, then the complete toponymic overlay of English under King Athelstan brings this process to finality. The function that *Lazamon* assigns to Athelstan diverges from *Wace's*, and thus deserves note. As *Leckie* comments, *Wace* inherited a problematic situation in regard to Athelstan's role in English dominion:

For anyone who adhered to the Galfridian framework, some mention of Athelstan's significance was well-nigh unavoidable. *Wace* faced the added complication of having two divergent and equally unsatisfactory views in front of him. He drew on both the *Vulgate* and the *First Variant* in the latter portions of the account, and each of these versions posed a special problem where Athelstan was concerned. In the *Vulgate* *Geoffrey's* contention that Anglo-Saxon pre-eminence must be dated from the institution of unified rule in

the tenth century was not consonant with Wace's own views on the passage of dominion [i.e., Gurmund's donation]. The First Variant only compounded the difficulties by making Cadwaladr and Athelstan contemporaries. (112-13)

While in the Vulgate Athelstan comes to represent the "first true Anglo-Saxon king" (114) whose tenth-century rule comes as a net result of eventual territorial unification of the various Germanic entities, the First Variant, having identified Gurmund's donation as the key event for English dominion, "seriously distorts the chronology" (108) by making Athelstan a contemporary of Cadwalader. Wace deals with this problem in two ways. He places the crowning of Athelstan in its "proper" century (14,757-62), and, unlike the Vulgate (and in keeping with his view that English dominion generally commences with Gurmund's donation) he depicts the eventual rule of Athelstan not as "a radical departure in the Anglo-Saxon style of government" (115) in which English homogeneity is finally achieved, but as the culmination of "the process by which one Insular culture eventually yielded to another"--that is, English cultural unity begins to evolve much earlier than in the Vulgate.

In the *Brut*, matters are again different, as Leckie notes:

Wace's description of the spread of Anglo-Saxon culture in the wake of the landings now follows, rather than precedes, the background material on Athelstan. In the *Roman de Brut* the reign of the tenth-century sovereign marks the point in Insular history when English customs and English usage expanded to their fullest territorial

extent....Like Wace, Layamon sees the influx of settlers as giving fresh impetus to the spread of Anglo-Saxon Culture. Athelstan, however, has become Cadwaladr's contemporary and no longer mark the endpoint in the development. In striking contrast to the *Roman de Brut*, Athelstan now rules at the start of this period of expansion. (118)

This would seem to be a step backward from Wace to the less-developed version of the First Variant. But an examination of Athelstan's actions in the *Brut* reveals a deeper narrative meaning to Layamon's placement and treatment of the first English king to rule the whole isle. Below, Layamon depicts the manner in which Athelstan sets his rule:

hu Aðelstan her com liðen. ut of Sex-londen.
 and hu he al Angle-lond. sette on his a3ere hond.
 and hu he sette moting. & hu he sette husting.
 and hu he sette sciren. & makede frið of deoren.
 & hu he sette halimot. & hu he sette hundred.
 and þa nomen of þan tunen. on Sexisce runen.
 & 3ilden he gon rere. muclæ & swiðe mære.
 & þa chirchen he gon dihten. after Sexisce irihten.
 and Sexis he gan kennen. þa nomen of þan monnen.
 and al me him talde. þe tiden of þisse londe.
 (15969-78)

[...how Athelstan came traveling here out of Saxon-land, and he all Angle-land set in his own hands, and how he set law courts, and how he set hustings, and how he set shires, and made woods for animals, and how he set manors, and how he set hundreds, and the names of the towns in Saxon runes, and guilds he was rearing, great and very glorious, and the churches he was founding after Saxon design, and in Saxon he was reckoning the names of the people, and he told him all the tidings of this land.]

As Brutus did before him (967-74), Athelstan, who takes the whole of the land "on his a3ere honde," establishes laws

and names towns, thus creating "Angle-lond." In so doing, Athelstan is presiding over yet another narrative beginning, one built upon the premise of the "storied landscape." Here, however, the reader encounters directly a narrative event that *Lazamon* has only related contextually in his account of the shifting names of London: Athelstan sets the names of the towns "on Sexisce runen." The linguistic shift that occurs under Athelstan's direction marks a narrative beginning equal in power to Brutus' epochal foundation of Britain, for language is the preeminent tool in the *Brut* for historical (hence narrative) hegemony, and here its reach extends decisively over the land, replacing with finality the British tongue.

Significantly, this monumental linguistic shift in the narrative--English's successful toppling of "Brutunisc," which now lies buried as an artifact in the toponymic layers of history only revealed by *Lazamon's* narrative archeology¹¹--deploys the *runen* theme. By pointedly relating that the setting of the town names occurs in runes, *Lazamon* is investing this event with the all of the complexities and nuances of historical interpretation that *runen* have come to communicate in the *Brut*. Athelstan indeed *settes runen*, for, just as *Lazamon's* linguistic medium, which may in fact seek to emulate the tongue of Athelstan, is itself a type of rune that requires the reader to exert interpretative skills, so

is this particular event an historical rune that entails a complex network of meaning. Language, historical event, and geographical power coalesce in this conclusive exertion of the pattern of dominion, exile, and return, and the idea of the *Brut* as a body of historical artifacts--as *runan*--and as a document that attempts to tell of things buried, becomes reinforced.¹²

Despite the seemingly conclusive nature of these events, the pattern is by no means completed by this transference of dominion. One need only re-read Lajamon's toponymic history of London to prevent the idea of a particular historical-narrative finality from setting in, for London's changing linguistic fate underlines the repetitive nature of geographical dominion and historical flux. In addition, the final actions of Cadwalader and the Britons complicate the notion that historical stasis has been reached. Cadwalader, bemoaning the "saxonification" of his land and planning to re-conquer Britain, is stymied by a dream-prophecy in which "wunder ane fair mon" (16007)--"a wondrously fair man"--instructs him to travel to Rome instead, where he will be cleansed of his misdeeds (the vision does not spell them out). The British have lost claim to the Isle and the English are to own England. The Britons

are never again to be its possessors--that is, as the vision states:

ær cume þe time. þe iqueðen wes while.
 þat Merlin þe witege. bodede mid worde.
 ðenne sculle Bruttes sone. buzen to Rome.
 and drazen ut þine banes alle. of þene marme-stane.
 and mid blissen heom uerien. uorð mid heom-seoluen.
 in seoluere and in golde. in-to Brutlonde.
 ðenne sculle Bruttes anan. balde iwurðen.
 al þat heo bi-ginneð to done. iwurðeð after heore
 wille.]
 þenne scullen i Bruttene. blissen wurðen riue.
 wastmes and wederes sele. after heore i-wille.
 (16020-29)

[Until that time comes that was stated before, which Merlin the prophet pronounces with words. Then the Britons will soon go to Rome and draw out all of your bones from their marble stone, and with bliss carry them forth among themselves, in silver and in gold, into Britain. Then anon will the Britons become emboldened; all that they begin to do will happen after their will. Then in Britain will bliss become rife--fruits and wonderful weather, after their wishes.]¹³

Cadwalader turns to his kinsman, King Alain, who assembles the "bocares wise" (16037)--the "wise in book-learning"--to consider this matter, which they do in a *run(e)*. Unlike Arthur's advisors, Alain's seem uninhibited at dispensing counsel, and they surmise that Cadwalader should indeed proceed to Rome, "al swa Godd him hafde itakned to don" (16040)--"as God has signaled to him to do." Interestingly, the narrative's final runic meeting produces interpretative consensus, for the wise men consider a prophecy that, unlike earlier dreams, comes as clear and direct discourse, as opposed to the Galfridian animal

symbolism of Arthur's dreams. Its dictates are clearly stated, they are sanctioned by Merlin, and its meaning appears to communicate revelation with little difficulty to those who seek it.

When Cadwalader follows his dream-prophecy and travels to Rome, he serves as a synecdoche for the British returning, in a figurative sense, to their original point of exile. In returning to Rome, Cadwalader returns to the narrative's opening. The pattern is set to begin again, as the British wait for prophetic fulfillment to initiate, under Arthur's rule, their return to England (which, as the vision suggests, will apparently once again be called "Britain"); thus, they will retrace the path of Brutus, and return to a land that holds all the splendor and *sele* wonderment that it held for his gaze. Again, *Lajamon* returns to the truth of Merlin's prophecy to ensure the reader of the veracity of this British (Welsh? English?) claim of a future utopia. But as with the early prophecies, this final one is also hardly uncomplicated, despite the seemingly lucid discourse in which it is presented. During this indeterminate period of exile, the British are promised the Welsh lands as a way station until that prophetic time arrives--that is, *as long as they can defend it* ("pa wile 3e mazen hit werie" [16058]). Power, it seems, and power particularly in the form of land possession, is the final

arbiter in matters of prophetic fulfillment. Who wields it, who obtains it, who loses it--these matters dictate whether prophecies may come to fruition, and for whom. To receive those benefits promised by *Godes tacne*, one apparently requires more than faith alone. Thus are narrative beginnings and endings left to the uncertainties of historical flux, and thus does human fate fall short of the wished-for certainties embedded in prophecy.

 NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

¹Allen notes the variety of ways in which land operates, such as

bait to the power-hungry like Vortigern and Hengest, as refuge for exiles such as Brutus and the Britons, Pantolaus and the Irish, and as challenge to those like Aurelius and Arthur who try to restore law and order after pagan incursions. ("Implied Audience," 126)

²That control of land presents the possibility of a stable identity is also reinforced by *Lazamon's* symbolic depiction of land's antithesis: seas and rivers, as Marie-Françoise Alamichel shows ("Space in the *Brut*," Le Saux, ed., 182-183). She finds that when *Lazamon* depicts sea travel, he "always associates the adjective *wid* to the noun *sæ* and shows that men do not have the situation under control....The sea refers to a mysterious world, that of the Unknown, the Invisible, the world of Evil" (184). Land, of course, can be as unruly and "mysterious" as the sea, but this may account for the repeated desire to provide order to the land in the form of roads, divisions, and charters. In fact, the giants of Albion do not represent a society because of their very lack of organizing principles: "The giants, in contrast to the 'civilized' Trojans, engage neither in agriculture nor in a sedentary life and, therefore, do not count as a 'people'" (Tiller 137).

³*Lazamon* reduces the extent of Caesar's world conquest to one-third of what Wace reports (3856-98). Instead, *Lazamon* elects to praise Caesar for his government services, such as the establishment of the Julian calendar and the setting of Roman law. *Lazamon* must find such accomplishments very praiseworthy, for he calls Caesar "þe wisseste mon. of al þe worulde-riche" (3598), and also adds: "Wale þat eæwere ei sucche mon. into helle sculde gan" (3601)--"Woe that such a man should go to hell."

⁴*Lazamon* often describes periods of historical discord and anarchy by resorting to fraternal references. For example, in the civil breakdown that follows the slaughter of child-murdering Judon (2009-12), *Lazamon* reports that "elc mon ræuede oðer. þeah hit weren his broðer" (2015)--"each man ravaged the other, though he was his brother." On the rare narrative occasion when brothers do act with fraternal love, *Lazamon* treats the idea as a most notable

event: King Argale is initially driven off the throne for his misrule, but his brother and successor, Elidur, restores him, leading Laȝamon to comment:

What iherden auere suggen. a sæȝen oðera spelle.
 þat æuere æni bro[ð]er. dude þus for oðer.
 þat Elidur þe king. dude for Argale. (3321-23)

[Who ever heard tell in word or in story that any other brother did thus for another what Elidur did for Argale.]

⁵These specific actions are not in Wace. Allen speculates that Laȝamon may have taken his information from *Efric's De Falsis Diis* (Lawman: Brut 428).

⁶While Wright critiques Kirby's distinction between the Angles and Saxons, he agrees with him on one matter:

It is true that near the end of the poem Laȝamon does become more sympathetic to the English...Especially in the period after Arthur's death, the Britons fall into a vicious cycle of sin and civil war which slowly loses them God's favour, the kingdom, and to some degree the reader's sympathy. Conversely, the stock of the English is rising. In particular, they have now embraced Christianity, thanks to Augustine's mission. (169)

⁷See William R. Leckie, Jr. (1981), who devotes an entire book to this issue; in particular, Leckie looks at the reception of Geoffrey's *Historia* regarding the structure and time-frame that he proposes for English dominion (see below for details).

⁸As Leckie discusses (38-41), as a result of using Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the primary bases, pre-Galfridian historians of Insular history virtually excluded the Britons from serious consideration.

⁹See Leckie (25-28) for a background survey of the First Variant.

¹⁰Wright (163) is quoting from his forthcoming edition of the First Variant; the translation is his own.

¹¹Tiller, working from the premise that, for Laȝamon, translation into English is a political act of recouping history for his English audience, notes that Athelstan's

name-placing results in "alienation of the Britons not only from their land but also from their history: new place-names...obscure the participation of precursor cultures in foundational acts and hence give to the conquerors the illusion of self-authorship" (210). On the other hand, the *Brut* supplies ample evidence to demonstrate the political benefits available to members of a linguistic minority. It is the very *marginal* status of Hengest's Saxon tongue that provides him with the opportunity to usurp power from the linguistic majority.

¹²The reader will note that the connection between the *runen* theme and the eventual linguistic domination of English over British is established in micro-form in the Vortigern section, where the *runen* theme is most varied in its applications. When Rowenne successfully introduces the saying "was hail" at banquet, Lazamon comments that this expression was thus "ærest sæide. in *Englene londe*" (7140, emphasis mine). By pointedly referring to the land as England and not Britain, Lazamon is showing how Athelstan's eventual setting of English runes, which is the comprehensive event marking the transition from "Britain" to "England," can be traced back to this first paramount infusion of English into the British Court.

¹³Lazamon expands and alters this event from Wace (14780-815) in two ways: 1) The vision appears when Cadwalader is praying to God for guidance on the matter of whether to attempt reconquest of Britain, but he falls asleep during prayer (in Wace, he pursues the same prayer, but does not nod off); 2) Lazamon, as is the case in many of his narrative expansions, supplies the direct speech of the "fair man."

CONCLUSION:

The Ambivalence of History

Beset by the difficulties of interpreting historical events, and despite attempts to cull authoritative lessons from the *exempla* of history, in his closing lines *Lazamon* defers authority to the only hands he perceives as available to wield it--an authority, ironically, that no human subject can successfully decode, whose "runes" resist full decipherment, and whose future dictates no one can successfully prognosticate:

Đa 3et ne com þæs ilke dæi. beo heonne-uorð also hit
mæi.]
 iwurðe þet iwurðe. i-wurðe Godes wille. (16095-96)

[As yet has not come such a day, let the future be as it may. What will come, will come, God's will will come.]

By underlining in my examination of the *Brut* what I find to be the narrative multivalence of the poem, I am in a sense affirming Daniel Donohgue's thesis--namely, that *Lazamon's* poem is an inherently ambivalent historical project (though I find even his reading too controlling in its typological emphasis; my reading more closely approximates Leslie Johnson's). I contend that the notion of ambivalence is hardly an anachronistic imposition upon the poem. In fact, such a notion reflects the polyvocality

discussed by Otter; the complex and competing aims of twelfth-century Anglo-Norman historiography as described by Hanning; and the rhetorical freedom and ideological flexibility cited by Partner. I would also add Ruth Morse's insights into how historical writings manipulate rhetorical models in their attempt to arrive at an exemplary representation of historical truth.

At the same time, however, I stress that variety and anarchy are not synonymous. Eclectic though medieval historiography may be, I maintain that all historical writers strive for historical truth (albeit through a variety of strategies, and with various notions of what historical "truth" may be). In so doing, they reveal the larger common goal of finding meanings in the past. So too with *Laȝamon*. As my study shows, the eclecticism reflected in the way he crafts his poem stems from his ranging desire to find meanings in the past that may serve to illuminate collectively the present. *Laȝamon* is unable to provide an overarching typological model to his project because, in his vast and ranging travels, he casts such an extremely large--and at times unwieldy--net. This is also the reason why his work is so monumental: it fails to be monolithic and didactic as only great works can fail, through the enormous complexity of its many voices and the vast range of its author's imagination. To ignore these facets of *Laȝamon's*

Brut is to remain blind to its greatness, and to see instead a poem undermined by ambivalence, as opposed to one deeply enriched by the interplay of the imaginative voices that reside in the past.

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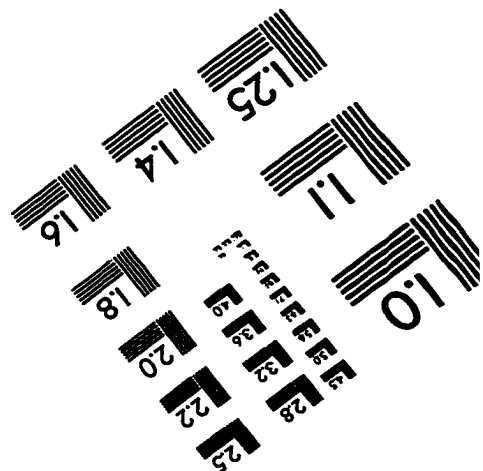
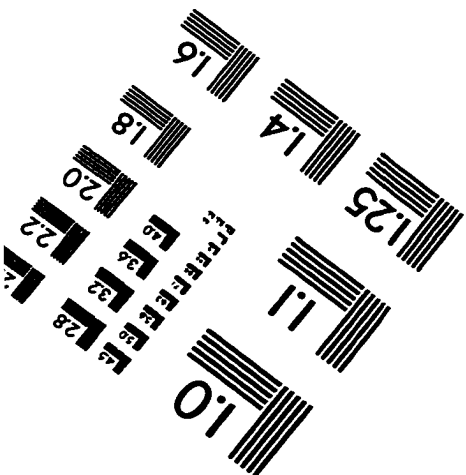
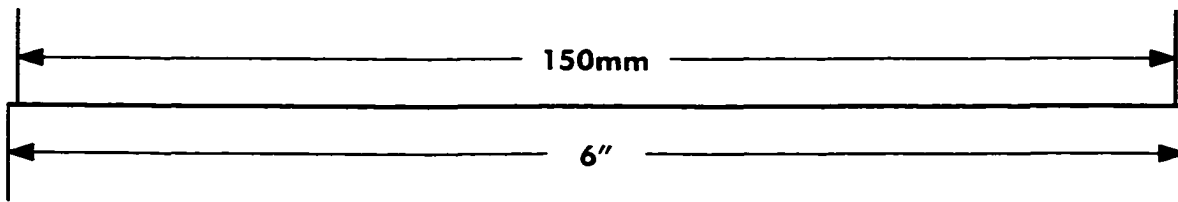
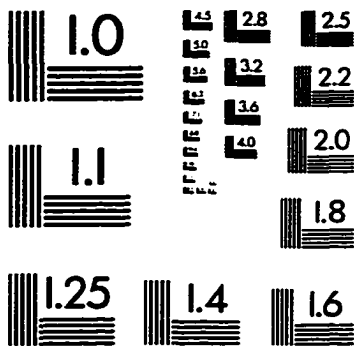
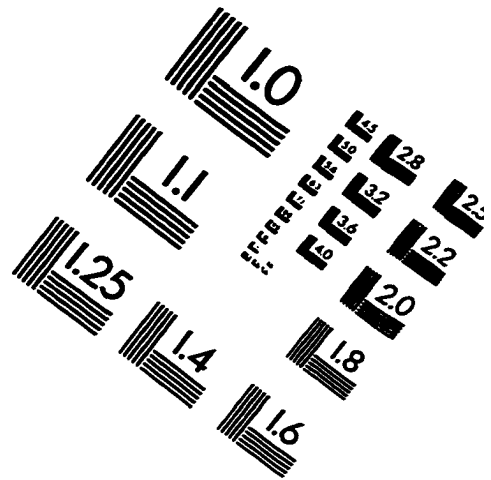
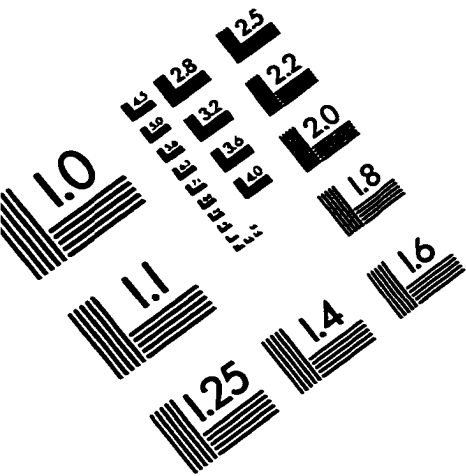
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