Dissertations   Graduate College

6-2019

Playing Merlin: Authorship from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Neomedievalisms

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PLAYING MERLIN: AUTHORSHIP FROM GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH TO
NEOMEDIEVALISMS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to each of the scholars quoted and cited herein and to those that fell to the cutting floor; every one of you have contributed to my growth as an intellect. Thank you to every teacher and professor for sharing their knowledge and love. I have been presumptuous enough to call many of them friends and colleagues. I thank all of them profusely, especially, but not limited to: Martin Shichtman and Laurie Finke, my heroes; Kevin J. Harty, boon-granter; Jean Blacker, a generous scholar; Molly Lynde-Recchia, the kindest French professor; Anne Berthelot, for inviting me to speak; Amy Kaufman, you always cared; Mary Baine Campbell, whose Chaucer class ignited my love of medieval literature and who first recommended me to graduate school; William Flesch because good teachers borrow, but great teachers steal; Kathleen Coyne Kelly, for giving me my first teaching assignment and for holding court after class; Michael Randall, to whom I once said I disliked medieval literature—I suppose I was wrong; D. Thomas Hanks, whom I met at my first conference, Camelot 2000, and who said to me after I remarked upon the collegiality of senior scholars towards junior ones, "Compared to that which we study, we are all very young." I knew then that I had found the right people; Patricia Del Vecchio, for Honors Literature class: this all started there; Scott Troyan, a true friend; and Robert Blanch, the best Congress dancer.

And thank you to everyone who ever encouraged me to continue to pursue my dream.

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Western Michigan University, 2019

The twenty-first century is the age of new media for old stories. Just as film, television, and print have adapted medieval literature into movies like *Excalibur* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, video games have produced new versions of Arthurian tales whose mysterious origins blur the distinction between history and myth. Many academics are concerned with the authenticity of the various representations of the Middle Ages and the "historical" Arthur and Merlin and label any postmedieval adaptation as an "anachronistic" medievalism. However, electronic texts have provided a different focus: studying the multiplicity of rewritings of those names through the many different texts, genres, and media. The discourse of the innumerable different versions for the last millennium can be deemed as "playing" with the texts, according to Jean-François Lyotard's game theory. Not only should this thread of study be acknowledged but encouraged. The reinvention of an older story into a new form is the essence of medieval literary authorship: borrowing from one's sources to innovate a fresh version of the established story. Just as modern writers of every genre have adapted the most famous medieval characters, medieval writers played with their sources to produce their own myths.

Interestingly, the writers of each new version of the Arthurian legend have chosen Merlin as their avatar: he functions in each text as historian, author, and prophet. Merlin embodies the

author's struggle between myth and history, the relationship among the past, present, and future, and the process of reinventing old stories for the modern moment's needs. Just as a player uses digital representation to interact with a game, popular and academic Arthurian authors have always been playing as Merlin. Beginning with Geoffrey of Monmouth's three works, *The Historia Regum Britanniae*, *Prophetiae Merlini*, and the *Vita Merlini*, and continuing through medieval texts, like the *Roman de Brut,* the *Prose Merlin*, and the *Morte Darthur*, this study demonstrates that there was never an authentic Merlin, but rather a series of representations of fables that masquerade as history. The final chapter explores medievalism(s) of print, film, and game to demonstrate that the way in which those technologies reinvent Merlin and Arthur's kingdom are similar to their medieval authors' negotiations of authority and innovation.

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The Middle Ages and subsequent medievalisms have entered the twenty-first century,

and it has been a conflicted relationship from the start. Our world has seen the European Middle

Ages appropriated for white supremacist ideology and ISIS and Al-Qaeda propaganda videos,

both types of fundamentalism based in medieval interpretations of purity.[1] On the other hand,

this century started out with a reconnection to the medieval through medievalism with the

popular *Harry Potter* books and movies, and *The Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* films. Millions of

people have logged countless hours into the most popular video games like *Skyrim* and *World of

Warcraft*. And then there is the matter of how "real" the series *Game of Thrones* pretends to be

in relation to the Middles Ages.[2] Popular culture ridicules it, uses it to move people to war,

emulates it, recreates it, denigrates it, and participates in "the medieval," which in the

contemporary meaning has become any production signaling the era. There is a multiplicity of

Middle Ages that abound from credit card commercials to the *Sharknado* franchise.[3]

Of course, our relationship to this period of time is complicated. Few can agree on

precise dates, and it matters which country we are discussing. Furthermore, the "Middle Ages"

as a term was not used until after the period was over.[4] So, our definitions are already corrupted

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[1] Andrew B. Elliott, "A Vile Love Affair: Right-Wing Nationalism and the Middle Ages," *The Public Medievalist*, February 14, 2017, https://www.publicmedievalist.com/vile-love-affair/. Amy S. Kaufman, "Dark Revivals: Medievalism and ISIS," *The Public Medievalist*, October 16, 2014, https://www.publicmedievalist.com/dark-revivals-medievalism-isis/ and "Purity," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 199-206.

[2] Stephanie Pappas, "How Real Is the 'Game of Thrones' Medieval World?" *Live Science* April 3, 2014, https://www.livescience.com/44599-medieval-reality-game-of-thrones.html. See also Michael Livingston, "Getting Medieval on George R. R. Martin," July 16, 2015, https://www.tor.com/2015/07/16/getting-medieval-on-george-r-r-martin.

[3] See Kevin J. Harty, "The Last Sharknado," *Medievally Speaking*, August 22, 2018, https://medievallyspeaking.blogspot.com/2018/08/the-last-sharknado.html.

by the subjectivity of positing it between antiquity and modernity. Indeed, those living in the Middle Ages thought of themselves as *moderni* in relationship to antiquity just as much as anyone alive today. The people in the Middle Ages had no more idea of naming their period "middle" than the Greeks and Romans considered themselves "ancient." The era is defined in terms of juxtaposition and differentiation from the ancients and the so-called modernity of the last five hundred years. But labels are not necessarily prohibitions to the fulfillment of the elusive academic goal: discovering the "real" Middles Ages. It has not been a discovery so much as an invention of it, as can be seen through much of the retrospective studies of nineteenth-through-twenty-first-century reception, commentary upon, and utilization of the protean conceptual space and time, known as the medieval.[5] In other words, perspectives on the past, whether personal and professional, are necessarily colored by the present time, ideas, and the reception and modification of all of the past. Each viewpoint is filtered through, in reaction against, or in contribution to the discourse with the previous generations of students and professors, as well as creative works of all media available in the Middle Ages and in postmedieval depictions of the era.

These negotiations with the past are not unique to this or any century. Medieval writers manipulated history to reflect the circumstances and interests of their own time. There are few literary practices that *can* be called more "medieval" than stretching the bond between the received story and producing an adaptation in a newer form that has been itself transformed (or

[4] David Matthews, "Middle," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 142.

[5] Richard Utz, "Academic Medievalism and Nationalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalism*, ed. Louise D'Arcens (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press: 2016), 119-134. This is only one of his many works on this topic. For other perspectives on academic medievalisms, see also *Medievalism and the Modernist Temper*, ed. Howard Bloch and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996). And of course, Norman F Cantor, *Inventing the Middle Ages* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1993).

obliterated) by a modern perspective. Medieval writers did not invent the appropriation of authority for new purposes, but rather received it and adapted it to their own purposes. Indeed, reinventing history or stories to ponder their contemporary ideas in order to affect the future is continuous throughout written record. It was upheld as the ideal of rhetorical strategies in the Middle Ages: use the *auctoritas* of sources while changing them. Alistair Minnis cites St. Bonaventure's famous definition of the medieval idea of the author as "[s]omeone who writes both his own materials and those of others, but his own as the principal materials…must be called an author," as opposed to a compiler, commentator, or a scribe.[6] While their focus is on scholastic writing, the analogy may hold for both history and secular literature. The corpus of Arthuriana is one of the most famous sites for this propensity for re-envisioning the past for the purposes of the modern moment, whenever that may be. Indeed, as Elizabeth Sklar and Donald Hoffman point out, "[t]he Matter of Arthur may be seen as an empty receptacle, waiting to be filled with whatever substance may speak to the individual or cultural moment."[7] Just as medieval authors utilized the authority of history, modern popular culture uses the Middle Ages, Arthur, and medieval and medievalist—and now even medievalismist—authorities for the multitude of adaptations. In the twenty-first century, every medievalism is affected by others, as well the supposed originals, coexisting in a tension between the past and the present that has meaning for future readers. Today's medievalism shall become the source of authority in its own right: generations will receive it, adapt that material, and innovate the story yet again to appeal to a contemporary audience.

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[6] See Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 2010), 94.

[7] *King Arthur in Popular Culture*, ed. Donald Hoffman and Elizabeth S. Sklar (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 6.

From Geoffrey of Monmouth to present depictions of Arthuriana, the authors of these versions were aware of the tensions among past, present, and future adaptations and innovations. Within many of these texts—literary, academic, filmic, or digital—the authors have even embedded the self-conscious contemplation of the tension and reconciliation of the three points in time. Beginning with Monmouth through the twenty-first century, many texts portray Merlin as uniquely positioned in time, understanding all three simultaneously, unlike any other character. He is simultaneously employed by the author to discuss issues of history and authorship, medieval and modern. He is a prophet in many texts; he is historian and historiographer; and he is portrayed as authoring the very texts that his audiences read. The explanations for his ability to traverse time include demonic influence, divine intervention, and living his life backward. But no matter the portrayal, he is always used to adapt literary and historical pasts into a recognizably present form that produces future interpretations and adaptations of its own. In other words, Merlin is the avatar into whom the author invests his or her own understanding of time, adaptation as authorship, and the authenticity of the representation of the past. This analogy is especially true of those who have creatively and academically contemplated the Middle Ages, Merlin and Arthur, and medievalisms. Because understanding the process of remaking the Middle Ages begins with analyzing the contemporary perceptions, it is necessary first to examine the several lenses through which the past is perceived. This self-reflection will demonstrate that modern recapitulations of the cycles of adaptation are comparable to the process of writing in the Middle Ages. From there, the process itself will be analyzed, leading to the motives of the medieval and modern authors' use of the medieval, Merlin, and medievalisms.

Contemplating the Middle Ages

To the extent it can, medieval studies has pursued an understanding of the realities of the Middle Ages. Incredible research in every field has brought academia ever closer to that goal. Medievalism has grown out of the divergence between accurate historicity and the occupation of the sign "Middle Ages" by creative anachronisms, a bifurcation that stems from the original usages of the word. Ironically, the first coinage of "Medievalism" began as a historical term, referring to the literature and culture of the Middle Ages in an attempt to extrapolate what it meant "to be medieval."[8] John Ruskin categorizes history in a letter from 1853 into three eras: "Classicalism, extending to the fall of the Roman empire; Mediævalism, extending from that fall to the close of the 15th century; and Modernism."[9] As the statement suggests, one of the first coinages of "medievalism" refers to it as the historical condition of being medieval. But Ruskin also defines medievalism in the opposite way, too. As Aiofe Leahy points out, "In 1853," the year in which Ruskin gives his impassioned defense of the Pre-Raphaelites, "the Victorian public knew so little about the so-called medieval period that it could function as a useful imaginative space for a critic or artist."[10] Despite concerns of historicity, the Pre-Raphaelites immediately appreciated the exploitative value of the temporal space known as the "Middle Ages"; the generation after Ruskin's coinage produced Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and Edward-Burne Jones' "Beguiling of Merlin," based on the former's depiction. Since then, "medievalism" has

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[8] John Ruskin, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* Delivered at Edinburgh in November 1853, *Project Gutenberg*, November 22, 2007. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/23593/23593-h/23593-h.htm.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Aiofe Leahy, "Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites in the 1850s," *PaGes*: *Arts Postgraduate Research in Progress* 6 (1999). http://www.ucd.ie/pages/99/articles/leahy.pdf.

meant either a product of creative manipulation or the contemporary perception of the actual historical period.

Both meanings have contended since medievalism became its own course of inquiry, one interconnected to the study of medieval literature, history, and culture. Indeed, medievalism is now a portion of the curriculum that informs contemporary views of the Middle Ages. Leslie Workman's definition of medievalism is more than just "the Middle Ages in the contemplation of contemporary studies," because he saw it as "the process of creating the Middle Ages."[11] Rather than being simply depicting the Middle Ages, medievalism has become a continuum of reproduction of an entire epoch in the modern mind, a phenomenon that has been the subject of much critical inquiry in the last several decades, producing conflicting ideas about *how* modern culture can, should, and does construct the medieval past.[12] Umberto Eco discusses medievalism as an interpretation of an aesthetic that was a unified view of the cosmos, philosophy, history, and literature. This approach was shelved for a more dominant medievalism, the "socio-historical approach to medieval aesthetics," an academic medievalism that attempts to situate the medieval within its time period.[13] This would seem to be the goal of medieval studies, not a perception, but even earnest academic pursuits involve ontological and hermeneutic complications. These

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[11] *Medievalism in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of Leslie J. Workman, ed.* Richard Utz and Tom Shippey (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 5.

[12] Richard Utz, "'Cleansing' the Discipline," in *Medievalism in the Modern World*, *ed.* Richard Utz and Tom Shippey (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 367, 371. He documents a feud in competing approach to medieval literature: Ernst Robert Curtius' written excoriation of Hans H. Glunz's *Literarästhetik* (1934). Contrary to all other reviewers, Curtius not only "did not have a single positive remark to say" about the readings of the Anglicist but faulted him on nearly every point of methodology as well. Glunz's work was subsequently relegated to the shelves until the advent of twentieth-century semioticians.

[13] Utz, "'Cleansing' the Discipline," 373.

situations led to expanding definitions of medievalism that have produced a manifold Middle Ages and a multiplicity of medievalisms. Eco characterizes medievalism as a "permanent rediscovery…a permanent return" to an age that cannot be "contemplate[d]…as an ideal model" from our subject positions in the (twentieth and) twenty first century.[14] Instead, we have "mended and patched [the Middle Ages]" up in order to conform to some social, political, religious, historical, or literary movement within a postmodern culture trying to "rediscover" the medieval world.[15] Furthermore, he warns us to ask, "which Middle Ages one is dreaming of."[16] Eco and Workman are pointing out the same phenomenon, though in vastly different ways. The portrayal of the *medium aevum* changes from era to era, from text to text, and, by extension, from person to person, be they poet, academic, or end consumer of an adaptation. Far from being limited to "Ten Little Middle Ages," there is an untapped multitude of Middle Ages that may very well be as numerous as there are people who know anything about the time period.

Superannuated medievalisms have given rise to a "new" batch that take an approach to the Middle Ages akin to New Historicism's studies of early modern Europe.[17] New Medievalism questions the principles of the "modern" itself and attempts to re-conceive the Middle Ages as an era that maintains its "integrity and intellectual and artistic vitality" in the face of "uncertainties, undecidability, mutability and finiteness in the world."[18] The monolith known as the "Middle

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[14] Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, trans. William Weaver (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1983), 67.

[15] Ibid., 68.

[16] Ibid., 68.

[17] For a cogent discussion of New Historicist approaches to medievalism, see Kathleen Biddick, *The Shock of Medievalism* (Durham NC: Duke UP, 1998).

[18] Stephen G. Nichols, "The New Medievalism: Tradition and Discontinuity in Medieval Culture," in *The New Medievalism*, ed. Marina S. Brownlee, Kevin Brownlee, and Stephen G. Nichols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 22.

Ages" was in reality many differentiable circumstances, actions, people, and ideas. The ability to recognize the idea that there are many Middle Ages has taken centuries to evolve so that academia may be "free to consider the nature of medieval discourse as a manifestation of a culture to be reconstructed afresh."[19] That is *not* to say that scholars should without discrimination produce a Middle Ages that is inconsistent with material evidence. It means that no matter how rigorously factual inquiry may be, there is always some epistemological intent with every word, image, or note spent contemplating the medieval past. Taking this thinking one step further, neomedievalism recognizes that the study of the target era was always engaged in reinventing itself and *its* past. That realization makes it possible to understand and to overcome contemporary hermeneutic positions in order to transcend limitations on our ability to comprehend that historical and social and artistic milieu. David Matthews examines all of these medievalisms and agrees with Stephanie Trigg's argument that for the last century, "modernist medievalism," including such movements as New Medievalism, used "quasi-scientific ideological analysis or critique the underlying assumptions…in the work of the most influential scholars."[20] The efforts to examine perceptive biases while evaluating any aspect of medieval studies are useful, but they are still operating under the false premise of "authenticity," an issue that revolves around history and historicity. Matthews claims, quoting Stephanie Trigg, that "many scholars practicing medievalism studies 'restrict themselves to empiricist, broadly descriptive work.'"[21] The problem is that academia has approached medievalisms in the same manner that it has approached the Middle Ages, in terms of history. The issue of authenticity and

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[19] Utz and Shippey, 2.

[20] David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History* (D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2015), 16.

[21] Ibid., 16.

the judgment thereof is the progenitor of all forms of medievalisms and the dividing line between them and medieval studies. However, it may be a false division in the arts, especially literature.

The self-analysis of medieval studies has revisited and revised ideas such as authenticity. Pam Clements compares the medievalism approach to "authenticity" as related to the field of "textual provenance," which is "[t]racing a text, along with its earlier versions, back to an authentic original to the creation of an authoritative text."[22] She does not say that this approach renders any more of an authentic "Middle Ages," but rather is concerned with the process of tracing the history of that representation and revision of something medieval or another medievalism. Indeed, we have multiple *processes* of recreating, re-depicting, and re-producing the Middle Ages, which, even in academic circles is predicated on contemporary perspectives and methodologies. The recent spate of studies and analyses of medievalisms has rendered a multiplicity of ways of understanding depictions that claim some connection to the Middle Ages. Following Clements's approach to authenticity, contemporary portrayals signify "medievalness" in several ways—like setting, character, or theme—that can refer to the medieval, the modern, or even post-modern values. Matthews organizes medievalisms into five categories: 1) the Middle Ages "as it was," a depiction that purports to treat the era "realistically"; 2) next are medievalisms that conjure the era "as it might have been," i.e. "those depicted through or as legend," such as the retellings of Arthuriana; and 3) medievalisms "as it never was…a quasi-, pre-, parallel or non-Middle Ages is depicted, using medieval motifs which create a medieval appearance," such as Tolkien's fantasies of Middle Earth.[23] These forms attempt to be authentic

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[22] Pam Clements, "Authenticity," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 19-26 (20).

[23] Matthews, *Medievalism*: *A Critical History*, 37-38. He says also, "Traditional medievalism" is as it might have been because "any kind of reference to a medieval practice, discourse or icon that takes for granted its self-evident truth," like "the endless straight retelling of Arthurian legend" (16-17).

to varying degrees, signifying "medievalness" in disparate ways and whose authority rests upon its relation to the Middle Ages and other medievalisms.[24] Neomedievalism recognizes that there is no difference among any contemporary depictions, even academic ones, because they are simulacra.

Lauryn S. Mayer defines the simulacrum as "something that subverts our ability to distinguish between what is real and what is represented," and "calls into question the hierarchy of reality over representation," which "creates a space for neomedievalism's deliberate play with the inevitably constructed nature of all recreations of the Middle Ages."[25] The interplay of many versions, medieval and post-medieval, of the era become a *tabula rasa* upon which any modern meaning can be inscribed. Matthews' final two categories of medievalism are classified as "Neomedievalism…a cultural production" that is "essentially of its own time."[26] These depictions are little more than trappings of the Middle Ages transposed onto contemporary bodies of allusions, motifs, and genres. Neomedievalism is more than just the portrayal of "medievalness" in a movie or video game. Rather, it is a method by which to contemplate the discourse of fact and perception within more modern media. With the advent of film texts, modern societies have had new waves of popular medievalisms or what Carol Robinson calls "individualized and unique systems of both audio and visual gestures (often akin to the idea of a language of a single person)" but are still "a rhetorical monologue" from the

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[24] Andrew Elliot, *Remaking the Middle Ages* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011). He uses the term throughout, borrowing from others.

[25] Lauren S. Mayer, "Simulacrum," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014): 223-30 (223).

[26] Mathews, *Medievalism*: *A Critical History*, 38.

director/writer/producer to the reading audience.[27] She suggests that popular literature and film are one writer's or director's vision of the Middle Ages, much like having one author for a text. On the other hand, neomedievalism is a direct interaction of "complex language systems" with a "rhetorical structure [that] turns out to be a dialogue."[28] Video games promote interaction with the storyline, and there are always many different writers of the plot, but also programmers and graphic artists who make each electronic text into a discursive project with many voices collaborating. This interplay between a multiple-authored work and consumer is integral to the transmission of myth and is typified well in video games. Robinson states that "[t]he newest successful miscommunication of the medieval in videogames has its origins in earlier media… a kind of neomedievalism, an almost socio-psychotic 'disease' of the post-modern, pseudo-adolescent, pseudo-intellectual, who sits in an armchair and practices a purposeful perversion of medieval codes, ethics and life."[29] There are as many Middle Ages and medievalisms as there are players of medievally themed games and viewers of "medieval" movies.

This may seem to be a perversion of the Middle Ages and medieval studies, but only if academia continues to operate under rigid delineations between authentic and *faux* medieval representations, and between popular and academic medievalisms. As Richard Utz asserts in his *Manifesto*, one's "admission ticket to studying and teaching medieval culture" may be "deeply affective and personal."[30] Furthermore, he suggests that "scholars may engage with medieval as well as postmedieval subjectivities not as a reductivist undertaking, but as an intellectually more

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[27] Carol Robinson, "Beyond That 'It's Just a Flesh Wound' Kind of Feeling: A Medieval Game Proposal," *Universitas* no. 2, 1 (2006). http://universitas.uni.edu/archive/spring06/default.htm, (PDF).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Richard Utz, *Medievalism: A Manifesto* (Kalamazoo: Arc Humanities Press, 2017), 3.

complete, comparatist, and sophisticated endeavor."[31] This proposal includes engaging with

every sort of medievalism, no matter the mode, whether it be a "Medieval Faire," video games,

films, or comic books. This approach to medievalisms is similar to that taken by "Medieval

Studies…one essential contributor to the cultural phenomenon of Medievalism," and, following

Kathleen Verduin's seemingly paradoxical statement, that "if 'medievalism'…denotes the whole

range of postmedieval engagement with the Middle Ages, then 'medieval studies' themselves

must be considered a facet of medievalism rather than the other way around."[32] In other words,

the separation between traditional academic approaches and popular medievalisms is an artificial

one constructed by contemporary cultural perspectives of what our branches of study are

supposed to be: empirical, pastist, exclusive circles of signification. Instead, academics should

engage every aspect of medievalisms, even those that are contemporary cultural phenomena

clothed in the garments of the Middles Ages. With neomedievalism, it is possible to study

medievalisms and medieval studies together to understand the entirety of the process of

signifying "medievalness." So how, in the literary area of medieval studies, are we to

synchronize or even simply employ what is known of the historical and literary Middle Ages, our

own received contemporary scholarly biases, and the misinterpretations of popular imagination?

We play with the Middle Ages and all these facets of study in a discursive game that informs

every aspect of medievalism and medievalist studies. "Play" is an apt metaphor for the twenty-

first century because discourse as a game is dependent upon a first-person perspective interacting

with the text and/or a larger community of textuality that, eventually, produce signification.

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[31] Ibid., 87.

[32] Ibid., 82.

Playing with the Middle Ages

Play is not just fun and games, as Johan Huizinga points out in *Homo Ludens*. Play is an element, even the beginning, of culture that is more often as serious as it is fun. In *Homo Ludens*, Huizinga outlines play as an element of culture that is a "voluntary activity" performed in a space that is "not 'ordinary' or 'real' life."[33] The separation of real life and play leads to a space in which the normal rhythms "of wants and appetites," and "indeed it interrupts the appetitive process" and thus is "an activity satisfying itself and ending there."[34] Play has an "expressive value, its spiritual and social associations, in short" are a "culture function" that operates within "certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding" defined by a "consciousness that is 'different' from 'ordinary life.'"[35] In other words, play is an expression of culture that supersedes the limits of the individual, bringing people together in a communal activity that has a beginning, middle, and an end. Play is an "expression of language" that signifies outside the normal limits of daily life. Video games conform to Huizinga's parameter of being different from "ordinary" life, since all electronic entertainment takes place via a self-contained, computer-generated world projected onto a television from a console or onto a computer from the hard drive or Internet. Regulated, self-contained cultural and identity negotiations were played through games in the Middle Ages, too. And the distance from real life, from the "ordinary," became culturally significant on more than one level. Jennifer Cooley argues that Alfonso X's *Convivencia*, which includes the *Libro de ajedrez, dados y tablas*—with

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[33] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (New York: Harper, 1970), 26. While many competing game theories have arisen since Huizinga's work, and have even outstripped the work in comprehensiveness, this study is still relevant, especially in the current study's interpretations of real and ordinary time.

[34] Ibid., 27.

[35] Ibid., 27, 47.

its many texts and images describing the games and the multiple individuals who could and would play with each other—helped align Jews, Christians, and Muslims along axes of identity that were not as controversial and divisive as religious and cultural identity.[36] Cooley writes that then, as now, a "global community with any sense (or illusion) of inclusiveness depends on the notion of social interaction as a series of games" and the "individual is integrated (disintegrated and reintegrated) to the degree that he or she becomes a global player willing to partake in myriad short-term allegiances and struggles."[37] Alfonso X integrated multiethnic factions by almost literally legislating that the fragments of his kingdom play games that allowed them to lay aside differences of religion for the pastimes at hand and learn how to negotiate identity in different ways.

Identity negotiation has become an integral part of digital lives and neomedievalism even shapes our understanding of the twenty-first century. Upon his death, Gary Gygax, the co-creator of the role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons*, was memorialized as the man who "constructed the social and intellectual structure of our world."[38] A statement like that might raise eyebrows until one simply remembers all of the representations of individuals in the digital world. Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook, and all forms of digital interaction have one thing in common: digital citizens need to represent themselves to everyone else through an email address, picture, name,

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[36] Jennifer Cooley, "Games for the Nation: A Postmodern Reading of Alfonso X's *Libro de ajedrez, dados y tabulas*," *Studies in Medievalism XIII: Postmodern Medievalisms*, ed. Richard Utz and Jesse G. Swan (Cambridge, UK: D.S Brewer, 2004), 143-58 (145). She applies Jean-François Lyotard's theories about the postmodern condition to the *Convivencia* because the period of peace and ideological dialogue was partially achieved through negotiating identity along unpolemicized ideo-axes like games. She writes that even then there is something similar to the "postmodern individual." "The postmodern individual perceives his or her relationship to others as a series of language games or momentary confrontations, in which the rules are negotiated, and a short-term triumph or loss is acted out."

[37] Ibid., 145-6.

[38] Adam Rogers, "Geek Love," *New York Times*, March 9, 2008. https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/09/opinion/09rogers.html.

or digital persona, known as an "avatar." This term is directly related to Gygax's

neomedievalism. In the 1970s, *Dungeons and Dragons* (*D&D*) was a new kind of game that

allowed players to create characters based on myth, legend, and a Middle Ages "that might have

been," as Matthews would say. Enmeshed in myth and folklore, players control characters that

usually unite together to face whatever perils, foes, and puzzles that must be surmounted to

complete the "quest." These quests and the larger narrative are co-authored in a series of

interactions. Daniel T. Kline calls this type, "participatory medievalism," which are neomedieval

simulacra in which "medieval role-players demonstrate a trans-temporal affinity to a Middle

Ages that is somehow like our own and to medieval people who are somehow like us – and yet

different."[39] Each player has an avatar, like a literary character, but one that a player controls. An

avatar can be a knight or a wizard, a human or an elf, or some combination of genetic species

and professional class. As in *D&D*, in which each player is interacting with an alternate version

of the Middle Ages through characters who influence the text, every digital action or reaction

twenty-first century people perform is also filtered through some avatar. The technological

foundation of our interaction in the present comes from a simulacrum of the medieval era. The

Middle Ages created the space and the structure for the twenty-first century to express itself

digitally. However, it is through this neomedievalism that academics can more clearly *know* the

Medium Aevum. Like other medievalisms, neomedievalism asks how to legitimate a

representation-through narratives of a remote time that have left multifaceted artistic,

documentary, religious, and political identities. The difference is that neomedievalism negotiates

identity in an increasingly global community through narratives that project onto the past. In

electronic games, the illusion of the Middle Ages is used to produce a representation of the

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[39] Daniel T. Kline, "Participatory medievalism, role-playing, gaming," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalisms* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 75-88 (87).

contemporary person through the avatar. This character, controlled by, but different than, the human user, can interact with the computer program or with other people through multiplayer and/or online play. The player engages in a discourse in which one parameter is "winning." In the context of Arthuriana, that might mean influencing the way an author's audience views and discusses the history and the legend.

Jean-François Lyotard observes that in language games there must be rules, for "if there are no rules, there is no game" and that each move is not self-legitimizing, but a "contract" and that "every utterance should be thought of as a 'move' in a game."[40] Participatory medievalisms are narratives already constructed within certain parameters; electronic games delimit the game, but perform this function with a unique language, a code. At the beginning of a participatory medievalism, there is a set of limits like a narrative: a player can only interact in a certain way with a game, depending on several factors: hardware, software, audio and visual capabilities, functionality regulations such as how to operate the game, and, finally, after the technical requirements, from what perspective the player actually plays the game. Furthermore, a premade storyline exists. After a player participates, then the text becomes rewritten in new ways. Video games more literally fulfill the interaction of language games than previous modes of narrative because the "reader," the player, is a co-producer of the text. Reading and watching a film are only received in a final form and the audience has no input into the narrative, even if there are many people who "authored" it. Lyotard's game theory provides for this interaction because "artistic language today is experimentation," which "will wind up producing its own readers, its own viewers, its own listeners," and it is "the message itself, by its form, that will elicit both the

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[40] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*: *A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1984), 10.

one who receives it and the one who sends it."[41] As *parole* is expressed through a player, he or she encounters negotiations of numerous ideologies. The more players, the more interactivity in discourse and the more decentered it becomes to the extent that there is no "metalanguage," the "theoretical discourse that is supposed to ground political and ethical decisions," through a tautological grand narrative.[42] Most games that operate above the phone application level have a narrative, like *Legion*: *The Legend of Excalibur* (2002), which reproduces the legend of King Arthur again. However, electronic RPGs with multiple subjects, called Massive Multiplayer Online (MMO) games, are "open," a game in which the storylines may be played in any order. As more players are added to a participatory medievalism, there is more than one subject interacting. The authors of the video games are not just enacting a monologue that the "reader" must either accept or reject. Rather, it is truly a discourse between the programmers of the games, the first authors, and the co-producing player. The player becomes an agent in the language games that are part of electronic entertainment. The players become co-producers of the text and play the game in order to change the text toward a goal: winning.

Theories of language acquisition begin with initiation into the linguistic system in order to be able to manipulate it. Every writer in any medium must first be a reader. The same holds true within any game. The player must first know the limitations, rules, manipulations, and goals of any game to participate successively. James Paul Gee calls this the "insider principle," a step in the development of knowledge within the "semiotic domain" of video games.[43] Gee

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[41] Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jean-Loup Thebaud, *Just Gaming*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: 1989), 10.

[42] Ibid., 28.

[43] James Paul Gee, *What Video Games Have to Teach Us* (New York: Palgrave, 2003): 194, 197. Gee's study is indispensable to the study of the value of electronic entertainment in the academic fields. He goes on to say further that "[g]ood video games allow players not just to be passive consumers but also active producers who can

systematically demonstrates that the player must learn to "experience" the virtual world, usually

"shared by groups of people" affording new gamers, learners, the "potential to join this social

group."[44] Once players join this social group they begin to signify within that domain, that is to

say, to understand and represent the appropriate action or verbiage within the group. Once the

player has mastered the semiology of the realm in which they are playing, he or she may,

depending on the game, begin to rewrite the program, that is interact with it in new and

unexpected ways. There are "rules" in place to which the player at least tacitly agrees, though on

programs that are "open-source" players can reprogram the game to create new additions to the

virtual world, as Stephane Natkin explains.[45] Every player learns the keyboard or controller

buttons that perform a certain function in the text. Each video game narrative places limits on the

player, but, unlike books and films, that narrative can be manipulated in more than one way. No

two players play the same game the same way all the time, though there are commonly

recognized ways of "winning" a game. However, electronic entertainment produces many ways

of reading, interpreting, and rewriting the text, which for Lyotard means that "grand narrative

has lost credibility."[46] Participatory medievalisms no longer run in linear narratives but allow for

individual choice in ways that mirror non-virtual language games. Not only is every person

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customize their own learning experience. The game designer is not an insider and the player an outsider…[r]ather, game designers and game players are both insiders and producers—if players so choose—and there need be no outsiders."

[44] Ibid., 27.

[45] Stephane Natkin, *Video Games and Interactive Media: A Glimpse at New Digital Entertainment* (London: AK Peters, Ltd., 2006), 76. Natkin adopts and modifies Gee's language to mean that the designer and gamer are cooperative entities. Furthermore, Natkin predicts a virtual explosion of narratives in the twenty-first century and that "this type of game will be revealed to the extent that it approaches conventional media and leaves the domain of video games in the current sense of the term." In other words, the fusion of electronic media will blur the distinction between movies, Internet, and gaming platforms.

[46] Lyotard, *Just Gaming*, 37.

represented by an avatar whom they control, but they may, in most new games, choose from a variety of ways in which to "win" or finish the game or accomplish some goal. Coincidentally, Arthur and Merlin are at the heart of digital choice because they are embedded in the code that gave free will to players and their avatars in the twenty-first century.

Programming Choice: Adapting Arthuriana to Participatory Medievalism

Patent number 5,604,855, awarded to Christopher C. Crawford, was an innovation in computer entertainment in 1994 when it was filed and important in the subsequent years, being cited or referenced by no fewer than eighteen proceeding patents. It was notable as the first code that could change the parameters of the game through the use of "substories." A "substory represents a 'fragment of a story', usually involving an action by a subject. Most substories can be reused multiple times with different ones [sic] of the characters being the subject and different ones of the characters being the direct object [sic] of the substory."[47] Prior to this innovation, a player could only play through to the pre-determined end goal of each "level," which is read linearly or not at all because the avatar dies. Super Mario© can only reach Bowser© by enduring the entire level. Crawford's code changed the way games are played because each win/loss discursive act interacts with many others and the choices quickly approach infinity. Furthermore, "Each substory has a set of possible reaction substories, which are a subset of the defined substories," making a game, if the authors wanted, infinitely adaptable to any choice. Interestingly, characters of Arthurian romances are the examples of the possible permutations of interactions; Crawford used the names of the Arthurian characters in order to run simulations of which character could do what to whom and have the program still work. Camelot characters are

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[47] Christopher C. Crawford, "Computer story generation system and method using network of re-usable substories." U.S. Patent 5,604,855 issued February 18, 1997. https://patents.google.com/patent/US5805784A/en.

responsible for introducing what amounts to digital free will and consequences into video gaming. This freedom is integral to choice, which is a necessary aspect of all participatory games. Multiplayer participatory medievalism adheres to Lyotard's need for infinite variations through fragmentary subplots that dispense entirely with the "grand narrative." Players traverse the narrative of video games in unique ways, leading to *parole*, an infinite set of language games that are an inexhaustible source of identity negotiations. While there is limited variation in a linear, one-player game, a Massive Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game (MMORPG) allows for a number of subjects within the *parole* of the game.

The programmers of a game give the player the ability to shape the medievalism in front of them and interact with those manipulating the medievalism at the same time. However, far from being just entertaining, a participatory medievalism "becomes work, and the players become workers."[48] The economics of worlds within a game are unique to each game, the "pursuit of greater point values, more powerful skills, better equipment…are disguised as various quests, neomedieval adventures."[49] Participatory medievalisms recapitulate the medieval romance quests: characters must complete an assigned task or fail and reflect on his or her own unworthiness, much like Lancelot not achieving the Grail. Because the players are co-producers, there is room for interpretive interaction that specifically affects the future of the narrative in an immediate negotiation. This means that the work yields real-time results that took months or years to produce when in other narrative media. The player interprets and adapts the neomedievalism to his or her unique circumstance. This "game of interpretation," as Kevin and

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[48] Clay Kinchen Smith, "The Name of the Game: Misuses of Neomedievalism in Computerized Role-Playing Games," in *Neomedievalism in the Media* ed. Carol Robinson and Pamela Clements (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2012), 219-50 (226).

[49] Ibid., 226.

Brent Moberly claim, is not restricted to creative work, but also includes the game "in which all medievalists engage as they attempt to make the medieval real for the audience."[50] Agreeing with Laura Kendrick, the Moberlys say, "we understand that as medievalists, '[w]e are encouraged to understand the medieval text by imagining what it meant to be medieval players (performers and audiences)…to play the role of a medieval interpreter, to pretend."[51] Play is essential to understanding our role in medieval studies, demonstrating Verduin's insistence that medieval studies is a branch of medievalism, rather than vice versa. This study takes neomedievalism one step further. Neomedievalism is comparable to medieval authorial practices because it embraces all manners of signifying "medievalness," from materialist codicological work to a book in a codex in a movie or a video game. Popular culture and medievalists negotiate their perspectives with the perceived notions of history and narrative, just as Monmouth did nine hundred years ago. He presented his authorities as proof of authenticity and used history to comment on his contemporary moment. He and many writers, directors, and game programmers since, have invested Merlin with their own contemporary views in the guise of history, narrative, and prophecy—past, present and future. Arthurian digital participatory medievalisms use Merlin to help explain how and why the language game signifies the three temporalities through a combination of historical reference, the interaction of history and narrative, and the manipulation of the past to serve the needs of the contemporary moment. The future of these characters, medieval studies, and medievalisms lies in Merlin's beginnings.

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[50] Kevin Moberly and Brent Moberly, "Play," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge, U.K.: D.S. Brewer, 2014) 73-80 (176).

[51] Quoted in "Play," 176. Laura Kendrick, "Games Medievalists Play: How to Make Earnest of Game and Still Enjoy It," *New Literary History* 40, no. 1 (2009): 43-61 (44).

Merlin: Past, Present, and Future

Peter Goodrich says that to "foretell the future" of Merlin "is to observe the past."[52] Since

Merlin entered literature, few other characters have been molded into so many forms and yet

been so consistent in portrayals of his relationship with and contemplation of time. As Goodrich

notes, each "[i]nnovation in the figure of Merlin tends to recapitulate" the "earliest features in

new and often unexpected ways."[53] Geoffrey of Monmouth's reworkings of Merlin into a

historian, author, and prophet produced the space in which each author could reinvent history

while discussing how he or she perform the act of writing. At first glance, the inventions and

reinvention of Arthur and Merlin seem similar. The difference between Merlin's and King

Arthur's adaptations throughout the centuries is that Merlin is the vehicle through which authors

change the stories, not just the subject of the change in characterization and the authorial agenda,

as Arthur is. In the corpus of Arthurian literature, film, and video games, many depictions of

Merlin show that he simultaneously negotiates all times, playing with the structure of the

narrative and forging history through his own actions, speaking, and writing. Video games not

only recapitulate themes, roles, and characters, but they also provide the language to demonstrate

how Merlin became Monmouth's—and many authors'—avatar. Following Gary Alan Fine's

reading of Huizinga, Daniel T. Kline outlines how the participatory medievalisms can be divided

into temporal frameworks: "The 'primary framework' consists of life outside the game, 'real

life'…the secondary framework is occupied by the player, who understands and manoeuvres

within the game's rules and restrictions" and "the tertiary framework is that of the character

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[52] Peter H Goodrich, "Merlin in the Twenty-First Century," in *New Directions in Arthurian Studies*, ed. Alan Lupack (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 149-162 (155).

[53] Ibid., 155.

whose role is being played and who occupies the game space, for the '*character* identity is separate from the *player* identity."[54] An author lives outside a narrative; he engages some aspect of the Arthurian tradition in order to transform it; and the authors have manipulated Merlin's identity in order to mirror their own. In other words, Monmouth played with history to reflect his own moment and agency, with a separate but precisely controlled agent character. History and legend are always a process of recreation through the present manipulating the past while competing with other narratives to become the perceived "facts" of the future. Recreating his past while using Merlin as an avatar to explain how he constructs time, Monmouth's three works are examples of how "medievalism" is produced *first* in the Middle Ages. Just as Merlin plays with all times, Geoffrey manipulates his past through the prophet, storyteller, and historian. Merlin traverses all three frameworks, just as the authors do. Medievalism is the most medieval literary practice still available to us and Merlin is the most obvious exemplar of how authors of the Middle Ages played with their past as much as twenty-first century citizens play with theirs.

The "real time" of stories, which include *historia* and *fabulae* for much of the present study, is the author's contemporary moment. The past is the secondary framework because it is the setting of play. This framework for Arthur and Merlin has usually been divided into historicity or his narrative roles.[55] Scholarly books on the "real" Merlin are few because it is nearly futile to try to discover the historical Merlin, though this does not stop some from trying.[56]

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[54] Kline, "Participatory Medievalism," 77.

[55] *Merlin*: *A Casebook*, ed. Peter Goodrich (Routledge, 2004) has many essays that are useful for exploration of various roles and historical considerations.

[56] To name a few: See Geoffrey Ashe, *Merlin: The Prophet and His History* (Gloucester: Sutton, Ltd., 2006); Norma Lorre Goodrich, *Merlin* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987); and more recently see Yves Vadé, *Pour un tombeau de Merlin*: *Du barde celte à la poésie moderne* (Paris: Librarie José Corti, 2008), in which he recognizes

However, Pam Clements's approach to authenticity, mentioned earlier, is most fruitful for Arthuriana because of the proliferation of adaptations and transmission history. Each representation of Arthuriana is dependent upon the previous material received, rewritten, and in turn made into a source, whether creative or academic. Medievalists have been negotiating "historical" reality and literary representation in medieval studies, discussing historiographical perspectives that influence the portrayal of history. Geoffrey of Monmouth played the same game with his past, setting the stage for a near millennium of discourse that consistently uses Merlin within literature to explore the relationship of history and myth, authorship itself, and how writing can affect the past, present, and future. Adaptations of Merlin have produced innumerable other competing adaptations that have as many meanings as authors who have rewritten the story or sought to understand the legends. The successful outcome in Arthuriana is adapting a source to become the new source for another version of Merlin or Arthur, usually for remuneration, but also to legitimate a particular viewpoint.

Here, historiography would be the inevitable conclusion to this study, but Monmouth does not merely write about writing history. Instead, through Merlin, Monmouth discusses how humans structure time and tales. The narrative is itself a structure of the past that shapes our reality. As Hayden White has claimed, "the authority of the historical narrative is the authority of reality itself; the historical account endows this reality with form and thereby makes it desirable by the imposition upon its processes of the formal coherency that only story possesses."[57] That is to say, the narrator determines the perception of history because it bestows upon history a *post*

the difficulty of extricating himself from the task of "discovering" Merlin by saying "Traiter de Merlin, c'est s'enforcer dans une forêt don t'on risqué de ne jamais sortir" 33.

[57] Hayden White, *The Content of Form*: *Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 20.

facto point. Furthermore, White writes, "the value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary."[58] Historical narratives give the past the illusion of having a point, often the moment at which history is written. The use of metahistory to understand any form of historical representation takes into account the biases of the author, which essentially takes into account historiography as a component of agency in writing history. The criticism of past medievalisms for the biases of representing the Middle Ages fade into the background because medieval historians performed the same functions, even if they were not always covering the "facts."

Although much of Monmouth's narrative can be shown to be fictional, concerns about factuality are irrelevant in the face of credulity lent to the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by its medieval readers because of its "coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure."[59] Monmouth's narrative crafts reality, a reality based upon authority, as White says, because "truth claims of the narrative and indeed the very right to narrate hinge upon a certain relationship to authority."[60] Geoffrey to harness the authorities of other texts to forge innovative works of literary history: *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Prophetiae Merlini*, and the *Vita Merlini*. While King Arthur is a nexus of thematic concerns and a protagonist in the struggles of the British kings, he is only a character in the *Historia*. Merlin is a character and a structural device that reflects Geoffrey's own interpretation and deployment of authorship. Merlin's character is emblematic of this interplay between narrative and history because there is no historical Merlin and the fictional one

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[58] Ibid., 24.

[59] Ibid., 19.

[60] Ibid.

becomes the replacement, a metonym for the "real" Merlin. The fictional and the historical

characters are intertwined, and the fiction informs history more than the converse. But unlike

Arthur, Merlin is also a writer: he structures history, recounts the narrative, and predicts the

future of the narrative and of history between the fifth and twelfth centuries for Geoffrey. He has

occupied the same roles throughout the Middle Ages into modern portrayals in books, films, and

video games. Eventually, the authenticity of Merlin *is* the multitude of depictions and the

discourse between each portrayal.

Taking White's cue, Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman, in *King Arthur and the Myth of*

History, develop an excellent argument for "facts" being mislabeled as such because they rely

upon competing discourses that lead to the dominance of one narrative or history over another. In

the writings in which Merlin materializes first, there is no distinction between fact and fiction

because "the two exist together, playing off one another, the facts always being shaped into

coherent and convincing narratives that reflect as much the interests of the writer and his

audience as allegiance to objectivity."[61] The only way in which "the 'historical truth' is

formulated" is "within a narrative logic that demands that the teller and audience conspire to

produce a coherent, completed text agreeable to, and, in various ways, responsive to the needs of

both."[62] In the case of Geoffrey's *HRB*, the reader and writer conspire to determine a history for

the British people by condensing competing narratives into one dominant "version." This one

writer used his sources in innovative ways in order to subjugate competing versions of stories of

Arthur and "Merlin" into a grand narrative. Geoffrey becomes the first recorded agent in the

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[61] Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, *King Arthur and the Myth of History* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 12.

[62] Ibid., 11-12.

Arthurian tradition to elaborate on the king's story and on Merlin's role in it. He has participated

in the strategies of reception and innovation that contribute to the medieval idea of writing: The

preceding author(s) and the reader/author—that is to say the writers who appropriate the

previous material for their own *agendae*—interact to form transhistorical, and often transcultural,

discourses. Monmouth becomes first a reader of the "histories" and then begins to write his own

based on what he has received and his own views on narrative and history and the times that both

contain.

Few medieval writers could ignore the pull between *auctoritas*, the authority gained from

the reception and transmission of previous authors' materials, and what Shichtman and Finke call

"*ingenium*," that modicum of originality that changes an old story into a new one.[63] As with

many Latin words, there could be many translations. *Ingenium* could mean "trick," "skill," or

"talent."[64] The tension between *auctoritas* and *ingenium* produces, as with many medieval texts,

adaptations that are partially, largely, or wholly new because the author has changed and adapted

the work of others. Monmouth has produced three works that rely on several forms of authority,

as well as several authorities, but whose ingenuity makes the previous text into a new literary

piece and even a whole tradition, for which he is now and has been the authority. Merlin is often

described as using "*ingenium*" when he is performing his grandest feats, such as moving the

Giants' Dance from Ireland to Britain, where it becomes Stonehenge. It is no coincidence that

Merlin uses his "talent" to construct the famous historical structure *and* the shape the narrative of

the *Historia* from within it using the same genius. Merlin is his author's avatar, representing

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[63] Ibid., 63.

[64] *Perseus*, an online Latin dictionary, both follow Charlton Lewis, *An Elementary Latin Dictionary* (New York: American Book Co., 1890). Accessed March 18, 2019. http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/.

Geoffrey's task within the text as it is being performed outside it. The construction of British

history, the Pendragons, and Arthur's story, is similarly juxtaposed with Merlin's skills.

Monmouth positions himself within the received traditions and uses Merlin to legitimate

narrativity as a basis for structuring history. Furthermore, he incorporates Merlin's prophecies to

predict two distinct, yet linked, phenomena: foreshadowing within the narrative of the *HRB*

Monmouth's own historical past in order to produce the illusion of authority that then becomes

the basis for the other depictions, producing an endless cycle of signification that builds upon,

reacts against, and reproduces the previous versions. This truth reaches into twenty-first century

kinds, even if they do not always seem "medieval enough." The process of adapting the received

materials in one act predicts the ways in which all medievalisms, especially neomedievalisms,

are a recapitulation of Monmouth's manipulation of his own past. Medievalism is medieval

practice, and each iteration utilizes the same marker within the alleged history to discuss its

medievalism: Merlin.

In chapter one, we can see that Geoffrey of Monmouth produced a grand narrative from

disparate, competing, and parallel traditions. This may not seem to be playing a game within a

discourse, but when one understands the adaptations of his sources, constructing one narrative

becomes a codification of the agency of an individual, a necessary element of play. Also, he

explicitly names his contemporaries of the histories of the English and the Welsh, with whom he

is competing for patronage, and thus demonstrates that his narrative on the British is only one of

many. From a discourse of the sources, he weaves a "history" that contains motifs ranging from

exile and return to conquest to competing siblings. Merlin is a part of the structure of the

Historia, because he helps shape the narrative through the motif of prophecy which begins,

maintains, and ends the history. The prophecies of the Sibyl, Merlin, and others foreshadow

events throughout the story and are referred to by the characters throughout as reasons and justifications for internal, narrative actions. This means that Geoffrey perhaps had the end, or at least later narrative events planned from the beginning of his longest work. Prophecies are an integral part of the authority in the *HRB* because they shape the narrative through foreshadowing and fulfillment. This involves the interplay of temporal perspectives that interact with each other in an epicycle of prediction and occurrence that gives the "history" a dual referent: the past and Geoffrey's present. Furthermore, the past is predicated on further past prophecies, pluperfect speech acts that give history a form, a shape, that has been imposed by Monmouth for his moment, ever with an eye towards his own future and the future of his greatest "historical" fabrications: King Arthur and Merlin.

In the second chapter, Merlin is adapted to a new, even more political agenda, but the prophecies' meanings are so opaque after Geoffrey's moment that it opens up space for interpretation and even hermeneutic systems. As in the *HRB*, Merlin's prophecies structure history, but in this case the *Prophetiae Merlini* correlates several different kinds of times. The *Prophetiae* bridges the gap between the British kings' history, the post-*Historia* history of Britain through Monmouth's present, and into the speculative future of Geoffrey's beloved islands. He uses the connections again to structure his agenda, but this time with much more flexible significations in the relationship to the mythical British and the Normans. Through a careful analysis of several medieval receptions, through glosses, marginalia, and different redactions for sometimes explicit agendae, we can better understand our own contemporary understandings of the *Prophetiae*. Not only do scholars analyze the received history of one short text, but also focus on the foundations of contemporary academic traditions that arise and potentially influence contemporary readings of this text and perceptions of them. From a

multiplicity of interpretations beginning in Monmouth's era to the revisions and re-interpretations of later medieval versions and readings of the *Prophetiae*, a multiplicity of voices that arise, all claiming to be Merlin or to have figured out "the true" meaning of the prophecies, which, unsurprisingly, fits the favorable narrative for their current rulers, including competing claims. It is also a mirror for how commentators, and thus scholars, fit their own interpretations into a malleable medieval text and how marginalia, redactions, and transmission lines become competing traditions of interpretation within a broader discourse on both Merlin and identity politics. In other words, the *Prophetiae* are a perfect experimental space to observe the discourse of interpretation based on a win/loss parameter of "truth" because its credibility was based in Merlin's existence and "verifiable" authorship of the *ex eventu* prophecies which, in turn, affirmed his authorship.

In chapter three, the *Vita Merlini* is the capstone to Monmouth's project: the unification of Britain in a turbulent era. The *Vita Merlini* reveals the interplay of Geoffrey's Merlin with the traditions of the Welsh Myrddin. In his final work, Monmouth fuses his own Ambrosius adaptation to the Welsh versions directly, creating a multifaceted version of the Merlin, who is at once Ambrosius and Silvestris because he is assembled through fragments into one character, an act that reveals the discourse of sources directly, rather than through the obfuscation of the *HRB*. In this version, Merlin is a precursor to the neomedievalist approach because Merlin has multiple personalities derived from several traditions, including Geoffrey's and several lost originals. This text demonstrates that the name "Merlin" can become anything because Monmouth is stitching together competing and conflicting versions of the prophet. This strain only appears briefly throughout the Middle Ages as the "laughing Merlin," more of a motif than a genre. However,

the significance of the *VM* is that Geoffrey adapted his own adaptation, further modifying his creation to become a new, hybrid character.

In chapter four, the post-Monmouth medieval versions of Merlin are explored. The *Brut* tradition, derived from the *HRB* undergoes many adaptations that result in transformations of Arthur and Merlin in language, genre, and motif. Throughout the many permutations of medieval Arthuriana, Merlin stands alone as the perfect model for the reflection upon ideas of how an author manipulates history to mimic his own time. Merlin knows the past, perceives the present, and sees the future, and he contemplates them always, especially since he is a product of all times, including the moment in which he is written by the author. He is consistently portrayed as historian, literary and historical producer, and prophet throughout the Middle Ages and into modernity. And no matter how much the text, materialistically, linguistically, and literarily, may change, Merlin is always linked with the relationships of past, present, and future by way of the interaction of the three understandings of time: historical placement, contemporary and narrative presents, and temporal prolepsis. Merlin becomes a signifier in which authors can discuss the issues of authorship, history (and historicity), and the transmission of the myth itself.

Wace begins the adaptations by bringing the story back to a vernacular while he also transforms the style and the genre. He is mimicking Monmouth's process, but adapting it into a new genre, *romans*, and a sensibility that accompanies the romance. Layamon's adaptation of Wace's text and others reflects political and linguistic choices that tell us more about him and his contemporary politics than the *Brut* can reveal about Merlin. Robert de Boron and the subsequent *Vulgate* and *Post-Vulgate* and *Prose Merlin* writers insert Christianity into the naissance and the purpose of Merlin, in one of the major revisions of Arthuriana in the Middle Ages. His association with the Grail story becomes a transhistorical motif concerning the

construction of Arthur, authorship, and time in the High Middle Ages. Malory serves as the bridge between medieval romances and medievalisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because of its unique material circumstance intersecting with the traditions of the past. Indeed, some classify it as the first Arthurian medievalism.

In chapter five, the present study engages the neomedievalisms first and traces each backward toward its medievalism provenance, not its medieval heritage. This strategy employs the provenance authenticity in reverse to demonstrate that participatory medievalisms, specifically video games, have their own history from which they invoke their *auctoritas*. These sources add to the discourse surrounding Merlin's adaptations in the last two centuries. Malory's version of Camelot becomes the touchstone for the last two hundred years of popular culture medievalisms. Whether capitalizing on the recognizable caché of Malory's version, or specifically challenging it for any other ideological concern, all of the Arthurian medievalisms are bound by having to define themselves against each other and propagate a version that either looks like some "original" or not, with some room for overlap. However, Arthuriana in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is not monolithic. Mary Stewart's Merlin is the novelized version of the character, with liberties, of the *Historia* version. *Merlin* the miniseries is akin in many ways to the *Prose Merlin*, in which he is the protagonist. Fuqua's *King Arthur* (2004) may draw on scholarship, but it also adapts the material in the same way as *The Mists of Avalon*: at the confluence of scholarly interest and popular culture. They are all complicated by claiming historical accuracy unavailable to other versions. Medievalism claims historicity, just as Geoffrey or Wace obsess over presenting the "true version" of Arthur and Merlin. Eventually, the names and other recognizable "markers" of the medieval deviate from any known source material in order to mask the agenda in a familiar form. These texts, like *Connecticut Yankee in*

King Arthur's Court and *The Adventures of Merlin*, the television series, are no less "valid" or

"authentic" than the other versions in the post-modern neomedievalism. Rather, they are simply

signifiers maneuvered into place in the language games that have been present since the myth

began, but in this case when Monmouth united many sources and created the first recognizable—

from our perspective—Arthur and Merlin. Furthermore, direct usage and challenge to the

characterization of that "recognizable" form in Twain's and Bradley's novels are political and

ideological protests equally, much like Monmouth's version, whether they draw on received

material and transform it or if they deviate completely, retaining only names. Films have one

vision, though we can see how many voices make the one film, allowing each version to become

its own model of how production becomes a discourse internal to the text itself. They also

provide a useful aesthetic bridge to post-modern concerns of representing the "real" Middle Ages

as productions of our own time with medieval garb. This leads us to the newest forms of

medievalism: electronic entertainment.

The digital texts here considered represent a small fraction of games bearing the

"Arthurian" banner. However, they most readily lend themselves to analysis since they are

extended narrative projects of the twenty-first century. Three digital texts will be considered

here: *Legion*: *The Legend of Excalibur* (Midwest 2002), *King Arthur* (EA 2004), the game

associated with the Jerry Bruckheimer movie of the same year, and *Dark Age of Camelot*

(*DAOC*). The first two games are produced for the *PlayStation 2©* console made by Sony. The

third is a computer-based game that allows for many more players than a game console alone.

Dark Age of Camelot (EA) is played in connection between the users' computers and remote

servers that connect all the gamers. The three representations of King Arthur and his kingdom

depend on varying interpretations of the Arthurian legend and upon varying depictions of the

time period in which the characters lived. As with the movie, *King Arthur* posits Arturus as a late-antiquity Roman centurion commanding a group of Sarmatian horsemen, a theory based on the work of C. Scott Littleton.[65] *Legion* is based on the "high medieval romance" side of the story, following in a Malory-by-way-of-old-studio-Hollywood tradition. The last of the three is actually placed in the time *after* King Arthur is already dead, when King Constantine rules. This is a placement much more in the *Historia* tradition first promulgated by Monmouth. However, of greater interest than which conventions the games recapitulate is how the process of forming the neomedievalism reflects the methodologies used by the medieval writers. Furthermore, neomedievalism is a way of analyzing how the writers' and our own scholarly interactions with the past occur.

Through an avatar, the player manipulates the texts, either alone or with other players simultaneously, into a new version of Arthur's world and time. A player enter the story, one built on the fragments of received elements of Arthuriana and the Middle Ages and interact with it to produce a discourse between ourselves and the text, one based on transforming our authorities, the story and the pre-programmed text, while using our ingenuity to achieve successfully the objectives in a quest. These are themselves speech acts that, when in a single-player environment, are structured as grand narratives but which allow room for infinite variations on how each player achieves the goals. However, a multiplicity of perspectives are added, with multiplayer games, one observes the breakdown of any overarching narrativity. The absence of the traditional heroes opens the space for the players to interpolate themselves and their perspectives into the legend. The players become the authors and the characters through the

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[65] C. Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000).

digital avatars, reinventing the story and the history of Camelot. This corresponds to the

discourse of language play that acknowledges all of the versions of Arthur and Merlin, past and

present, in a pastiche of fragments that reflect our own era. Neomedievalism embraces the

multiplicity of individual agents within a tradition, within the "Middle Ages," and demonstrates

that as we play with Merlin, twisting him into unrecognizable forms in our own imaginations, we

are simply replicating a process of Arthuriana that began with many oral tales, but is first

codified in literature with Geoffrey of Monmouth and his avatar, Merlin.

Chapter 1

Who Controls the Past: History, Narrativity, and Monmouth's Merlin

From the beginning of Merlin's written history, he has been many characters. Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote about a character with several traits in different texts, but still called him the same name. The Merlin of the *Historia*, the so-called "Merlinus Ambrosius" or "*Emrys*," is different than the character of the *Vita Merlini*, the "Merlinus Silvestris" or "Caledonian Merlin," and somewhere between these two characters is the one who speaks the *Prophetiae Merlini*. Monmouth conflates several sources and then individuates them in order to explore the several aspects of his invention. Merlin is portrayed as a king-maker, magical prodigy, prophet, warrior, historian, and author. The process of adapting Monmouth's sources to his agenda and then adding new aspects is as complicated, multivalenced, and expansive as almost any other work in the lengthy history of redactions of Merlin and Arthur. Moreover, Monmouth's writing became the basis of nearly every other version of the Arthurian material, the root of the textual provenance conception of "authenticity."[1] His *ingenium*—the individual's contribution to the received tradition in order to innovate a story or character—becomes the *auctoritas* for future adaptations. Writers after Monmouth adapt and add to his legends to produce many different texts and genres of literature, film, and video games based on the characters he transformed into Merlin and Arthur. Furthermore, Merlin is an integral part of Geoffrey's reshaping of the history of the British people to fit into the author's contemporary political vision, becoming the Bishop of Asaph's avatar in the stories bequeathed to future generations of readers and writers. The interplay of authority and invention revolves around his use of the fatherless boy. Beginning with

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[1] Pam Clements, "Authenticity," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014): 19-26.

the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey creates a character from many sources in order to explore many literary issues, among them the ideas of history, authorship, and prophecy. First to be considered is Geoffrey's moment and motives to provide better understanding of the narrative and its representations of those three types of speakers and Merlin's role in shaping both the real and fictional pasts for Monmouth's present.

To Geoffrey and his contemporaries, history is as much a series of factual personages and events as it is a malleable story shaped to the needs and desires of the contemporary moment. His methods are not new, but rather rooted in a common understanding of the intersection of times in his own moment. The epicycle of history—foreshadowing and fulfillment, a form of typology— is the basis for Christian perspectives because of the predicted Messiah, his fulfillment of Hebrew prophecies, and his eventual return in some future time that can be read eschatologically from the present forward and from the past into the future. Though mostly secularized, the *HRB* perpetuates this exegetical understanding of times. And each of these temporal relations interact and comment upon the veracity of the other; they confirm each other to lend history a narrative, completing the metahistorical maneuver. If the boundaries between historical occurrence, interpretation, and narrative were permeable in the Middle Ages, then speculation upon motive for adaptations of the past are permissible while remaining unclear. Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman claim that if medievalists "[s]cratch the surface of a historical fact" then they "will begin to untangle the network of alliances of people and of things that hold it together."[2] When history is written, who wrote it and for whom? Monmouth's dedications, introductions, and epilogues to the *Historia*, *Prophetiae*, and *Vita Merlini* offer

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[2] Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman, *King Arthur and the Myth of History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 15.

insight into his motives. Just as Geoffrey starts with the end in mind, this study begins with

Monmouth's coda to his last work, the *Vita Merlini*, in which Geoffrey apostrophizes: "Britons,

give your laurel wreath to Geoffrey of Monmouth. He is indeed your Geoffrey, for he once sang

of your battles and those of your princes, and he wrote a book which is now known as the Deeds

of the Britons—and they are celebrated throughout the world" (1525-9).[3] Monmouth has an

affinity for the Britons that may have begun before the writing of the *HRB* and that lasts

throughout his career, perhaps lending a structure for his life and intentions. Geoffrey's interest

in the Britons may derive from his heritage and attachment to Wales, upon whose borders the

town of Monmouth stands. He came from a Breton or Norman family that emigrated during the

time of William II (Rufus), but established roots in the region that lasted throughout his life and

his literary career.[4] Very little is known of him until his official life is established through

"charter evidence [that] suggests that he was a canon of the college of St. George's in Oxford. As

a chapel and secular college attached to a royal castle, St. George's was patronized by and

received its privileges from the king."[5] As such, Monmouth may have been particularly

interested in, and uniquely positioned to comment on, royal succession and political perception.

Along with his contemporaries—William of Malmesbury, Orderic Vitalis, and Henry

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[3] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, trans. Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973). Lines are cited parenthetically, and Latin will be noted unless brief or required for the reading. "...Britanni, / Laurea serta date Gaufrido de Monemuta. / Est etenim vester, nam quondam prelia vestra / vestrorumque ducum cecinit scripsitque labellum / quem nunc Gesta vocant Britonum celebrata per orbem."

[4] J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 422-23. Clarke, 26.

[5] Kellie Robertson, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Insular Historiography," *Arthuriana* 8, no.4 (1998): 42-47 (49), www.jstor.org/stable/27869398. Robertson goes on to note that "Secular colleges occupied an unusual position in the medieval church, since the deans of such colleges were appointed by letters patent and installed by lay officers (the deans, in turn, oversaw the appointment of the canons)." Geoffrey's generally secularizing view of history can thus be traced to his position as a secular canon.

Huntingdon—Geoffrey is employed in a plan to trace the history of Britain with an eye upon the end around which history is always based: the present.[6]

Depending on the dating of the texts, most of the corpus of Geoffrey's works is disseminated during the dynastic civil war known as the "Anarchy." He begins producing the *HRB* but is interrupted because he is bidden to finish the *Prophetiae* first, likely before the death of Henry I, whose demise triggers the decades-long struggle for the English throne. His dedications show some political leanings, but because all of the extant manuscripts of the *HRB* date after the end of the conflict, there is room to doubt the transmission of the original dedications of the *HRB*. Indeed, there is a seeming contradiction in the two main dedicatees of extant manuscripts, one of the primary indicators of how Geoffrey might position himself through his writing in the successional conflict. When Henry I, last surviving son of William the Conqueror, died in 1135, he did so without a legitimate male heir. His son, William Adelin, died in the White Ship incident in 1120, and efforts to have another heir with Adeliza of Louvain were fruitless. Henry had one legitimate daughter, Matilda, the widow of Henry V, Holy Roman Emperor, and wife of Geoffrey of Anjou, to whom he made all of his barons swear fealty. Yet upon his death "Stephen, son of the Conqueror's daughter Adela, seized the treasury and had himself crowned almost conspiratorially by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the presence of two

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[6] Henry Huntingdon, *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996). *Google Books*. https://books.google.com/books?id=O6U5BTD0-rYC. Disappointingly truncated. Ordericus Vitalis. *The ecclesiastical history of England and Normandy*, trans. Thomas Forester (New York: Bohn, 1853). *Google Books*. https://archive.org/stream/ecclesiasticalhi04orde/ecclesiasticalhi04orde_djvu.txt. William of Malmesbury *Chronicle of the King of England* (London: Bohn, 1866). *Google Books*. Accessed February 17, 2019. https://books.google.com/books?id=Hc46AAAAMAAJ. One of the perils of independent research is reliance upon public domain translations. Since these texts are not referenced, I am simply attempting to render a twofold service to an imaginary reader: what my reference would have been and the location of a copy if they are without a library.

[additional] bishops, a handful of barons, and the citizens of London on December 22, 1135."[7]

The ensuing civil war pitted Matilda against Stephen. The *Historia* circulates first sometime

during or before 1138, perhaps making the dedication an indication as to which side favored

Geoffrey and vice versa. The preponderance of manuscripts praise Robert, first Earl of

Gloucester, Henry I's illegitimate son, and one of Matilda's main supporters for the crown.

Robert's support for her would have been abundantly clear by 1138.[8] Assuming that the

manuscripts followed Geoffrey's own recorded dedications and are not post-facto emendations,

this would seem to denote that Geoffrey was favoring Matilda's side of this claim. There is no

reason to believe that later transcribers would align Geoffrey with the ultimately defeated side.

His praise is effusive, too, as he presents *HRB* as the "the product of illustrious Henry's son,"

Robert, whom Geoffrey describes as "a Henry reborn in our time" (3.19-20).[9] However, the

political and military winds shifted eventually to favor Stephen, who remained king despite

Matilda's best efforts. This is perhaps a reason for the eight editions with dedications to both

Robert and to Walueran, Earl of Worcester, Stephen's lieutenant in Normandy. Stephen of Blois

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[7] Frank Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042–1216* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 165. Edmund King, *King Stephen* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 47. *Google Books*. Accessed June 25, 2015. Maureen Fries, "The Arthurian Moment: History and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Brittanie*," *Arthuriana* 8.4 (1998): 88-99 (92). Accessed August 1, 2016. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869401.

[8] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 46.

[9] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. Michael Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2007). "...editio quem Henricus illustris rex Anglorum generauit...tibi nunc temporibus nostris ac si alterem Henricum adepta." This is a facing-page English and Latin translation. All translations are his unless otherwise indicated. I will cite by header and line number for cross-referencing and specificity. Reeve and Wright refer to Geoffrey's work as *De Gestis Britonum*. However, I will continue to refer to this work as the *Historia Regum Britanniae* for simplicity's sake because most other scholars have. See also: John J. Parry and Robert A. Caldwell, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," In *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 72-93 (80). Parry and Caldwell claim that the *HRB* was completed soon after Henry's death in 1135 and use the dedication to show Geoffrey's dedication to Matilda's right to the throne. Finke and Shichtman also point to Geoffrey's *Leir* story, in which Cordelia reigns over the British, as internal evidence of Geoffrey's favoritism.

even appears as the dedicatee in one manuscript. Perhaps Geoffrey dedicates this work to

enemies in an internecine war that will stretch for nearly two decades after the publication of the

Historia Regum Britanniae.[10] Perry and Caldwell assert that Monmouth "was...looking to

Stephen for preferment after Robert's death in 1147[11]." Finke and Shichtman assert, contrarily,

that the dedication to Walueran was made as a way for Geoffrey to appeal to both sides in the

patronage-client relationship.[12] If he appealed to both, he could be offering something for both

factions to consider. Perhaps he compares the struggles of the current and aspiring monarchs and

nobles to the conflicts of the heroes in the stories he promulgates. Perhaps he is demonstrating

how division destroys empires and unity becomes legend, as with Arthur.

Several critics claim that the purpose of the *Historia* is part of the Norman rulers'

legitimation of their rule. According to Ian Short, "The reign of Henry I is precisely the time

when the second-generation descendants of the Francophone incomers would have sought to

begin integrating themselves historically as well as socially into the indigenous Anglo-Saxon

culture of their adoptive homeland."[13] The historians working at this time are charged with

constructing a heritage, not based on direct royal descent, but based upon culture and conquest.

The history of the island is based on invasion and appropriation. With his near contemporaries

working on histories of the English people and on Norman ancestral myths, it would seem that

Geoffrey's work is part of the agenda of the "Norman ruling class," which "needed to be able to

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[10] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 47.

[11] Ibid., 48.

[12] Ibid., 49. "...it was not unusual for a client to seek out more than one patron or even incur obligations on both sides of a conflict between patrons."

[13] Ian Short, "Gaimar's Epilogue and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Liber Vetustissimus*," *Speculum* 69, no.2 (April 1994): 323-343 (323).

demonstrate a continuous and progressive history that culminated logically in its own rule."[14]

Geoffrey writes with the end point in mind, establishing a metahistorical logic. His history is

leading up to the Normans, even if it falls short of that moment, because it is only one of several

histories demonstrating that the Normans are the rightful successors to all other peoples to have

laid claim to Britain. William of Malmesbury also dedicates his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, mainly

focused on the Saxon rulers, to Robert of Gloucester, Monmouth's dedicatee.[15] Why would these

writers produce histories in Latin, a language that Robert and most of the nobility probably could

not read well? As Finke and Shichtman note, "Geoffrey's book functioned as an artifact, a

symbol of prestige and status."[16] The *HRB* is part of a venture to show that history demonstrates

the rights of the current rulers, based on several factors: conquest, exile, and return. Furthermore,

language and prophecy function on the literary level to further appropriate history and the future

in service of Monmouth's present.

The appeal of Geoffrey to either or both sides of the "Anarchy" is indicative of his

political maneuvering to win favor, influence, or position with the reigning monarch as well as

potential candidates thereof and their supporters. However, they all have one thing in common:

the audience is of the line of William the Conqueror, a Norman invader and occupier of the lands

held by Saxon-descended people who had conquered the ancient Britons. If these are the people

he aims to please, then why extol the Britons, to be their poet? The parallels between the early

Britons and the Normans "suggest that one function of the *Historia* was to legitimate and

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[14] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 73.

[15] Jean Blacker, *Faces of Time* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 3.

[16] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 73.

naturalize the Norman occupation of England by linking it to Britain's earliest prehistory."[17] Indeed, the Trojan aspect of the *HRB* further valorizes the Normans by linking them to the Romans and their ancient heritage and playing into Arthur's later struggles against Roman occupation and cultural integration. The British identity also integrates Celtic heritage, one shared with the people of Brittany, called Armorica in the *HRB*, a province that was under Norman sway for most of Geoffrey's life. Linking Armorica to Neustria, the ancient name for Normandy, produces one of the main themes of the *HRB*: exile and return to supremacy. The Angles are portrayed as the enemies of a united Britain, depicting the subjects of William the Conqueror's political subjugation as the force against which the Normans are seeking to unify the island of Britain, much like the ancient Britons. This parallelism establishes the basis for a transitive relationship between the Britons and Normans. If the Britons were worthy, though flawed, rulers of the islands, and the Saxons conquered them, then the Norman conquest is arrogating the authority in a succession of subjugations that returns the Breton and Norman "British" back to their rightful home. In that regard, the *HRB* could be seen as a dynastic return to a once-beloved land by a displaced people who are now claiming what once rightfully belonged to their ancestors. Several episodes in the *HRB,* including the return of the rightful king Ambrosius and his brother Uther Pendragon, Arthur's father, could be seen as legitimating Normandy's claims. Geoffrey uses several strategies and motifs to portray unity of the island in ideological, political, and historical terms, even as his patrons and their relatives look to consolidate power over the whole of Britain, a project largely interrupted by the Anarchy.

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[17] Fiona Tolhurst, "The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans: Geoffrey of Monmouth's British Epic and Reflections of Empress Matilda," *Arthuriana* 8, no.4 (1998): 69-87 (69). www.jstor.org/stable/27869400**.** See also, Francis Ingledew, "The Book of Troy and Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*," *Speculum* 69, no. 3 (1994): 664-704. She is persuaded by Tatlock in believing that "It is commonplace in scholarship on Geoffrey that Arthur's control of multiple territories, Continental and insular, attained by conquest, is homologous with Norman conquests and hegemony" (686).

Meanwhile, Geoffrey is also positioning his history within a discourse with Huntingdon's, Orderic's, and Malmesbury's, as he mentions at the end of the *HRB* (208.601-607). The histories of the island and its people overlap, conflict, and agree, but each of the historians in this generation had his perspective firmly fixed on the dominant discursive power: Norman patronage. The works combine into a full historical analysis with the metahistorical end clearly in view: a unifying history for a Britain under the Norman dynasty. History is, as made apparent from all of Geoffrey's dedications, and from other sources, commodified. With this perspective at the fore, Geoffrey adapts his *auctoritas* to his agenda, using his *ingenium* to fit the sources to his contemporary moment.

Refashioning History: Adapting the Past to the Present

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* demonstrates his considerable abilities at compiling, comparing, and conflating his sources, as well as adding new stories and characters to shape a history of the isles suitable for his patrons. Fiona Tolhurst says that "Geoffrey's *HRB* appears to have been part of a larger movement of Anglo-Norman patronage that sought to revive the study of the early history of the island of Britain after the time of Bede and Nennius."[18] Perhaps having a history against which to compare themselves helped establish the Normans within the history of the island, but perhaps there is more to the *Historia* than epideictic rhetoric. Geoffrey may be attempting to, as Maureen Fries puts it, blend "the sad history of his own times into the flexible shape he found in the medieval genre of *historia* to produce the first full length biography of the mythic monarch as the centerpiece of his pseudo-

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[18] Tolhurst, "The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans," 76.

chronicle about British kingship."[19] Though the idea of the genre *historia* being most focused on

the "truth" dates back to at least Cicero, Stephen Mark Carey notes, "Medieval historiography

afforded and even obliged historians to recount history with a certain amount of poetic license.

Although the historical subject was traditionally limited to well-documented and established

material, the tolerance of authorial invention creates a seeming incongruity: the truth of the

historia is not exclusively located in nor limited to the literal historical facts."[20] The genre of

history is not limited like the annals, nor is it necessarily moralistic like a sermon. Gildas (500-

570 CE) says that he uses eyewitness accounts to construct what happened to the Britons, but he

intersperses his narrative with heavy moralizing. Bede (672-735 CE) certainly uses dates and

verifiable historical markers but uses episodes to illustrate divine will and intervention.

Monmouth imitates and adapts Nennius's (b.?-809) *Historia Brittonum* in its meaning of history.

Here, "*historia*" includes the secondary meaning of the Latin, "a story," with a discernable

structure and moral, perhaps even tending toward *fabula*. The Norman lords have a vested

interest in ruling all of Britain and across the English Channel into Anjou, Normandy, and

Brittany. However, their rule is marked by civil war and betrayal that Monmouth finds

deplorable and warns against for the entirety of the *HRB*, *Prophetiae Merlini*, and the *Vita*

Merlini. He uses the history of the Britons as a warning to the island's current and future

monarchs, but also as a means to refashion history in the image of his contemporary

circumstances to influence the story's future, Geoffrey's present.

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[19] Maureen Fries, "The Arthurian Moment: History and Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Historia regum Britannie,'" *Arthuriana* 8, no. 4 (1998): 88-99 (88). www.jstor.org/stable/27869401.

[20] Stephen Mark Carey, "Medieval Literary Consciousness and Narrative Innovation in Wolfram Von Eschenbach's 'Parzival'" (PhD diss., Washington University of St. Louis, 2000), 24.

History as a teaching tool would offer the narrative a *post facto* rationale for Geoffrey's fictional history.[21] His sources are a mixture of fact and fiction to which Geoffrey adds and subtracts at will. He correlates several Latin sources for the non-Welsh and non-Arthurian material, but then begins invention within the Arthurian section with an imaginary artifact, Walter's book in the "British tongue." Real and imagined materials play synchronous roles when considering that the history that Monmouth is writing is framed within an already existing narrative. His genial opening leads immediately to evaluating the contents of his sources, revealing the setting of his literary and historiographic intent. Geoffrey hints at his motivation for writing this history by saying that while contemplating the histories, "I was surprised that, among the fine references to them in the fine works of Gildas and Bede, I had found nothing concerning the kings who lived here before Christ's incarnation, and nothing about Arthur" (1.1-5).[22] Geoffrey reveals several strategies for the narrative structure of his story. His "thoughts[…]turned to the history of the kings of Britain," [reuolvens in historiam regum Britanniae] ostensibly labeling his work as *historia* (1.1-2). The connotations of that term beget thoughts of real people performing deeds that are recorded faithfully for posterity but are more malleable than strictly historical. The narrative aspect of the *Historia* calls into question its own historicity because adding the level of narrative to history implies that an agenda is present. To enact his motives, Monmouth must create the *illusion* of history, which he performs in several

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[21] A.O.H. Jarman, "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy," in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. Peter Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2003): 111-36 (119). Jarman writes, "This tale was not the product of Geoffrey's own imagination but had been lifted bodily by him from the ninth-century collection of early British and Welsh saga material and semi-historical traditions known as the *Historia Brittonum*." It has usually attributed to Nennius, but Jarman follows Dumville in asserting that the identity of the ninth century chronicler cannot be determined.

[22] "cum mecum multa et de multis sepius animo reuolens in historiam regum Britanniae inciderem in mirum contuli quod infra mentionem quam de eis Gildas et Beda luculento tractatu fecerant nichil de regibus qui ante incarnationem Christi inhabitauerant, nichil etiam de Arturo."

ways. The first and most evident method of producing a connection between history and

narrative is by using the words "*Historia Regum Britanniae*." Though he does not name it as

such officially, he implies the usually accepted title within the first sentence, and his naming in

the post script of the *Vita Merlini*—"*Gesta Brittonum*"—does little to change the generic

context.[23] Also, the context from the outset is the "kings of Britain" and not just a "history of the

British people" as in several of his sources. This slight shift foreshadows the rise of Arthur,

Monmouth's invention embellished from the barest of references.[24] He begins almost

conversationally by mentioning that he was thinking about many things when he discovered

some "glaring errors," in two of his sources, Gildas and Bede. More importantly, he reveals his

narrative scope, setting up the viewpoint from which all the material can be viewed, the present

looking backwards and moving forward, returning to the present, as an essential element to

evaluating histories.[25] When he refers to the glaring omission of Arthur, the end is foreshadowed

in the beginning, giving it an exposition, conflict, climax, and denouement. Monmouth provides

his audience a context for a history both externally to the narrative and within the context of the

HRB. Furthermore, Monmouth knowingly presents his text in one light, while actually penning

wholesale adaptations of previous texts and fabricating the rest. This is not history, but rather the

confluence of metahistorical confabulation. However, the balance between *auctoritas* and

ingenium is not only allowed but expected in the Middle Ages, even with something termed a

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[23] Reeve, in the introduction to *History,* writes, "from [the manuscripts'] relationships it will emerge that Geoffrey must actually have called the work *De Gestis Britonum*" (viii). This means that Geoffrey saw Nennius's work, which distinctly mentions Arthur several times in chapters 50, 56, and 66. See below for further discussion of this relationship.

[24] Reeve cites Bede's *Historia Eccelesiastica* and Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae* besides the *Historia Brittonum* as sources. Ibid, lvii.

[25] Hayden White, *The Content of Form* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 20.

"history." Geoffrey's thoughts turn to how previous histories have omitted crucial material. He then laments how his supposed sources, while otherwise praiseworthy, contained "nothing concerning" British kings or a man called "*Arturo*." Simultaneously, Geoffrey reads backwards into his sources and interjects into the text an idea of where his history is headed, which topics he is considering, and how the two will coalesce. He anticipates the end in the beginning in a hint of the temporal gymnastics by which the Arthurian corpus and the author interact.

In this seemingly innocuous reference to other sources, there is a complex machination of transformation into what will become the basis for the next millennium of material on Arthur and Merlin. Geoffrey calls upon his authorities right away, framing his history within the combined tradition of chronicles, histories, and sermons. He also sets up his sources as straw men to which he can introduce the "new" material that "Walter Archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the rhetorical arts and in foreign histories" provides him, a "very old book in the British tongue, which is set out in excellent style," supposedly discussing the British Isles from the time of Aeneas' great grandson Brutus through to "Cadualdrus, son of Caduallo" (2.8-11).[26] Geoffrey has paired his two verifiable sources with one that is unverifiable. He is making a space for his work from the beginning, one that makes it difficult to determine exactly all of his sources. This indeterminability allows him to propound stories that are not in fact history in any way, at least as understood by contemporary standards. In this way, Monmouth positions his story in a tradition of reception and innovation based on a Latin tradition linked to Virgil's *Aeneid*. And the ancient Roman poet built upon Homer's *Odyssey* to craft the tale of how Trojan refugees became the founders of Rome. Like Virgil's epic, Geoffrey's discussion of the exodus to Britain is

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[26] "Walterus Oxenefordensis archidiaconus, uir in orata arte atque in exoticis hystoriies eruditus…ad Cadualadrum filium Caduallonis."

fictitious, but the adaptation legitimizes the remainder of the *Historia*. He is also maneuvering

within linguistic, religious, and political milieu in order to give Arthur and his audience a history

that will shape their present and future. While some of the texts are followed closely, there is a

great deal of invention and adaptation of sources to produce a work different in scope than the

originals. Neil Wright says that "[f]or the modern critic" it is "impossible to view Geoffrey of

Monmouth as a 'serious' historian, but on a purely literary level" because his work is "a masterly

synthesis of divisive sources."[27] Geoffrey is focused on how to use his materials to negotiate

identity politics in his own era by participating in the game of Latin insular history. From the

beginning of Arthur's and Merlin's stories, they are fictions legitimized by propaganda, which is

based on the memory of an ancient Greek poet who may or may not have been real. However,

Monmouth must portray his work as true, hence why he invokes the two verifiable sources. The

only problem is that he refers to the wrong source.

Geoffrey cites Gildas in his preface to the *Historia*, even though the basis of the Merlinus

and Vortigern material derives from Nennius. Geoffrey admonishes Gildas for leaving out the

most glorious episodes in British history: the ancient Trojan/Roman conquest, "the kings who

lived here before Christ," and the unification of the British under Arthur "and the many others

who succeeded" him (1.3-5). Gildas did not conceive of his work as a history, but rather as a

work with "concerns…as much literary as historical" because "Gildas believed that history could

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[27] Neil Wright "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gildas," *Arthurian Literature* 2 (1982): 1-40 (3). Wright's analysis of Gildas's influence on Geoffrey suggests that Geoffrey thought that Gildas had authored the *Historia Brittonum*. See also Fries, "The Arthurian Moment," "That the two earlier heroes were originally historical figures must have contributed to the obvious need to give Arthur an historical aura; and that by the twelfth century they had been so fictionalized as to have their actual existence eclipsed by their surrounding myths could only have enhanced the (probably deliberate) ambiguity which would surround Geoffrey's Arthur...The hero's remoteness in time and Celtic provenance obviated the need to glorify (even a half-) member of a race so recently (and still) inimical to the Normans, and who could not anyway have served as Arthur did as the centerpiece of a history all of which was designedly archaic" (97-8).

teach."[28] The *HRB* imitates this moralizing in several places, especially when the Britons are

engaged in civil war, but the story of Ambrosius, the boy prophet, and Vortigern is in Nennius.

Several scholars hold that Geoffrey may have thought that the *Historia Brittonum* was also by

Gildas*, which further complicates Monmouth's understanding of his own sources.[29] Michael

Reeve points out that "Gildas did not mention Arthur" but the *dux bellorum* is named in the

"*Historia Brittonum.*"[30] Geoffrey utilizes Nennius's Trojan material and the story of the

fatherless boy Ambrosius, thus indicating that he had adapted the *Historia Brittonum* but without

attribution to Nennius's account. Geoffrey may have wanted to be the first to expound on Arthur

or differentiate his work from Bede's and Gildas' and innovate and adapt his predecessors'

works. When the idea that Geoffrey confused Nennius with Gildas as the author of his source is

considered, one aspect does not make sense: even if he confused the two, he still incorporates

Nennius's material on the fatherless boy. If that is the case, he would have seen Arthur in the

Historia Brittonum. The similarities to Nennius's *Historia Brittonum* with regard to the ancient

Trojan/Roman and the Ambrosius/Merlinus sections are so precise that no historian or literary

critic in the last century has even questioned Geoffrey's source for this material as being Nennius

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[28] Wright, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gildas," 1.

[29] Gildas, *De Excidio Britanniae*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (London: Samuel Bentley, 1838), xii. https://books.google.com/books?isbn=1377142035. Wright also asserts that William of Malmesbury knew and attributed the *Historia Brittonum* to Gildas.

[30] Reeve, *History*, lviii. The only real mentions of Arthur that may be associated with Gildas's work is Caradoc's *Vita Sancti Gildae*, the appended praise of the elder author. Gildas, xl. Nennius mentions Arthur several times, expanding, perhaps, on his sources. He details the famous twelve battles in chapters fifty and fifty-six. In chapter sixty-six, we receive legends of Cabal, Arthur's dog, and Amr, son of Arthur, whom Arthur himself killed. Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, ed. William Gunn (London: Arch, 1819), 35. https://books.google.com/books?id=CbosAAAAMAAJ. The Latin text can be found in an appendix of Gunn's edition.

first and then other sources added onto it.[31] Then why omit his true source and then mention a

book that is unverifiable? It seems an unnecessary fabrication, except referring to Nennius would

have circumscribed his ability to inscribe his own story of Arthur. If that is true, then perhaps the

Arthurian matter came from Walter's unverifiable book. Perhaps the book is a metonym for the

oral tradition, the privileging of written stories told within Geoffrey's earshot during a youth

spent in Wales. If that piece of speculation were the source of his tales, it would not provide

enough *auctoritas* in a Latinate tradition. However, scholars agree that the more

"Celtic/Brythonic" material regarding Myrddin/Merlin is contained within the *Vita Merlini* than

in the *HRB*.[32] Whether Walter's book existed is not the issue because "the veracity of this claim

can never be established by reference to an actually existing book. But neither does the absence

of that book invalidate the claim."[33] The absence of proof is not the proof of absence, as with so

many non-extant books of the Middle Ages. The importance of that book is not its reality, it is its

auctoritas, an authority seemingly as credible as Geoffrey's Latin sources. As Parry and

Caldwell note, "Those who consider it unbecoming for him to lie about his source may believe

that he received from Walter just such a volume," even though they note that "the evidence is all

against it."[34] In other words, Geoffrey may be leaving the door open for it to appear as though his

material is new but has authority through Walter's book, a source in the original language of the

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[31] Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain*, 171. Lucy Allen Patton, "Notes on Merlin in the *Historia regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth," *Modern Philology* 41, no. 2 (1943): 92. Christopher Snyder, "Arthur and Kingship in the *Historia Brittonum*," in *Arthurian Studies lxiv*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 1.

[32] This subject is discussed in chapter three of this monograph. It was a difficult decision to not include it here, but the *HRB* positions itself within a Latin tradition, eschewing, for now, most of Myrddin's associative characteristics, with the potential exception of Merlin in the *Prophetiae*.

[33] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 14.

[34] Parry and Caldwell, "Geoffrey," 81.

people whom Geoffrey studies. This is certainly not an unheard-of maneuver in medieval literary tradition: the false provenance. It is such a characteristic of fiction and history that the tradition continues in post-medieval depictions of the Middle Ages, like Miguel de Cervantes' and Umberto Eco's novels, a convention embraced and mocked simultaneously. By acknowledging and finding fault with Gildas and Bede, both of whom he still uses extensively and then adding a third, unverifiable source, Geoffrey is creating a space in which to write and using his own invention that retains the illusion of authority. Geoffrey is first a reader in this preface, then he changes and manipulates how he establishes authority, leaving space for *ingenium* which he implements throughout the book. That space allows Geoffrey to produce his most fictional work while claiming authenticity.

Geoffrey establishes his own version of "authenticity" through provenance, even if it is not accurate. He begins to adapt his sources from the moment he discusses his "surprise" that "nothing" concerning the ancient kings and Arthur is mentioned because "their deeds were worthy of eternal praise and are proclaimed by many people as if they had been entertainingly and memorably written down" ["cum et gesta eorium digna aeterniate laudis constarent et a multis populis quasi inscripta iocunde et memoriter preadicentur"] (1.5-2.6). The phrase "cum et," that is "as if" they had been written down, is an odd subjunctive phrase to utilize. He finds nothing on his subject, but people talk about it *as if* it had been written down. Geoffrey foreshadows his own writing, preparing a fictional *auctoritas*, Walter's book, upon which to build his story. He primes his audience to receive his own work, so that they might think it "*memoriter*" and "*iocunde*," and so that they anticipate a story that meets those exact criteria. Geoffrey offers implicit formal critiques of all his sources and concomitant narratives by saying that he was "persuaded" to "translate the book into Latin in a rustic style, reliant on my own reed

pipe; had I larded my pages with bombastic terms, I would tire my reader" (2.15-16).[35] It is hard

to imagine Bede's concise stylings being touted as "larded with bombastic terms," but Geoffrey

is rejecting that strategy to follow "my narrative" rather than "linger over my words" (2.16-17).[36]

Geoffrey wants to exaggerate, but he is saying, ironically, that he will not use lofty, complex

wording that is already contradicted by his eloquent, expansive Latin phrasing in the prologue.

He tells us *how* he will write based on his "own reed pipe," asserting his *ingenium* in the land of

authorities upon whose shoulders he is aiming to stand. Even if Monmouth's style rejects

"ampullosis dictionibus" [bombastic terms], for words "in Latinum sermonem transferre curaui"

[translated into Latin in a rustic style], Geoffrey has rejected Gildas's style of the sermon in

favor of a purported *historia*. And on the other hand, Monmouth rejects Bede because Geoffrey

is writing history, not a chronicle, which is "simple, condensed, modest, annalistic" and history

is "expansive decorative, soberly charming, life-like."[37] It is clear that Geoffrey does embellish,

especially in his more fabulous sections, the King Leir and Arthur stories. He is telling us that

this is the unvarnished truth even though it is anything but that. And he is putting it into a simple

style, even though his prose varies from simple and straightforward to descriptive and complex.

There are significant ramifications to his discussion of language and style in the prologue: he's

playing a game with his audience that must claim authenticity while adapting fact to fit the

purpose of a *fabula*.

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[35] "…in Latinum sermonem transferre curai; nam si ampullosis dictionibus paginam illinissem, taedium legentibus ingererem...ipsos commorari oporteret."

[36] "…dum maguis in exponendis uerbis quam in historia intelligenda ipsos commorari oporteret."

[37] Tatlock, *The Legendary History*, 395.

This prologue is not simply denigrating his sources' or his contemporaries' styles, rather it is positioning the author within a rhetorical game of history and his contemporary literary milieu. Kellie Robertson points out that "Geoffrey claims to disdain rhetorical figures within the narrative, while he adopts the *topos* of *translatio* as a legitimate place from which to narrate his history."[38] Walter's book is not merely a space into which Geoffrey can pour his *ingenium*, it is a claiming of authority that no one else has. This innovative maneuver shows that "Geoffrey asserted that his work could claim an authority from its status as a translation rather than from its dependence on the tradition of classical eloquence."[39] Geoffrey is participating in the *translatio studii* method of arrogating authority to himself and his history. The move from "British" into Latin shows that Geoffrey is favoring the British language by claiming it *has* authority. Monmouth is deviating from Bede, Gildas, and Nennius, who only wrote in Latin and claim either "eyewitness accounts," like Gildas, or other Latin sources as their authority. According to Robertson, this reverses "the tide of *translatio studii* in which Bede and William participate" moving *auctoritas* "from vernacular into Latin instead of the other way around."[40] In a Latin-oriented literary world, Geoffrey must make the material suitable for consumption, but by having the source closer to the people about whom the history speaks, he makes it more "authentic." Geoffrey continues to arrogate authority to himself through fictitious means negotiated in linguistic spaces that he himself is inventing. The reinvention and adaptation of sources is directly linked to shaping the past as it relates to Geoffrey's present and future.

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[38] Robertson, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Translation of Insular Historiography," 43.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., 45.

Geoffrey's adaptations of sources begin his maneuvering within his present literary and cultural milieu. He begins with mentioning the sources, but his sources have adapted other sources in order create their works. The *Historia Brittonum* tracks the history of the British people back to the royalty of Troy and uses two different versions. In the first genealogy, Nennius says, "Dardanus was the father of Troius, who was the father of Priam and Anchises; Anchises was the father of Aeneas" who fathered Ascanius, father to Brutus.[41] Fiona Tolhurst notes that "by presenting the Britons (whom the Normans conquered) as equal or superior to the Romans, Geoffrey flatters the Normans and makes the Britons (and, by extension, the Normans) the greatest race in history."[42] If the Normans could conquer the Saxons and the Britons, as well as others, then they were, by extension, equal to the Romans and deserved to conquer Europe. The Trojan heritage also foreshadows and lends legitimacy to Arthur's future claims on the Roman Empire when he is affronted by Emperor Leo in book nine. Geoffrey's sources continue to make other associations with ancient peoples. Nennius says that "I have learned of another account of this Brutus" that claims him to be the descendant of one of Noah's sons, Japhet, who, after the flood went to Europe and whose genealogy interpolates four more progenitors between Ascanius and Brutus.[43] Nennius cannot decide on which heritage is correct, so he uses both: ancient Hebrews and Trojans. Presumably, the former one is added to lend even greater credibility to the descent of Brutus, and by extension, the British people, by linking them to Noah, a patriarch of the ancient Hebrews. Nennius utilizes the Romans, Trojans, and the Hebrews to lend a pedigree to the people about whom he writes. Geoffrey omits the Hebrew

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[41] Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, ed. William Gunn (London: Arch, 1819), 5.

[42] Fiona Tolhurst, "The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans," 73.

[43] Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, 11.

heritage of Brutus but makes the Britons comparable to the Hebrews "[t]hrough the ten of his sixteen synchronisms that note how events in Britain coincide with those in the Holy Land, Geoffrey identifies the British as the chosen people of God."[44] Geoffrey does not follow Nennius's lineage, but adds indirect associations to the Hebrews that Gildas and Nennius make much more explicit. Being associated, rather than descended from the Hebrews borrow from the aura of authority without the implications of being partly based in the Bible. Geoffrey is showing his secular agenda here by reworking his sources' explicit association to the Hebrews. However, he does adapt strategies used in religious contexts of the Judeo-Christian strain and of the Greco-Roman aspect of his mythology. Out of history comes prophecy, and vice versa. At its center is Merlin, who continues to be a blend of secular Roman lineage and British adaptation. And he is the key to the future and the past of Arthur, the Normans, and Geoffrey.

Predicting the Past: Prophecy and History in *HRB*

Even though they differ in style from the Merlin's narrative prophecies and the *Prophetiae*, it is notable that the entirety of the *Historia* is founded on a prophetic tradition. Geoffrey briefly recounts the *Aeneid* in a few sentences and then proceeds to his main topic: Brutus. Silvius, grandson to Aeneas, "indulging a secret passion…married a niece of Lavinia" (6.54-5).[45] He begat Brutus upon his cousin, but before his birth Silvius had his magicians foretell the sex of the child. It was determined that it would be a boy who "would kill his father and mother" (6.57-8).[46] The Oedipal connections in this passage are apparent, but instead of an

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[44] Tolhurst, "The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans," 70.

[45] "furtiuare ueneri indulgens, nupsit cuidam nepti Lauviniae."

[46] "esse peuro qui patrem et matrem interficeret."

Oracle, like the Delphic or Sibylline ones, the prophets are magicians, much like Vortigern's

later in the *HRB*. This also has echoes of and associations with the Egyptian "magicians" who

test Moses, though the Latin words are different: "*maleficos*" and "*sapiente*" are used in the

Latin Vulgate, but Geoffrey uses "*magis*."[47] The prophets rightly predict that Brutus will kill his

father and mother. His mother dies in childbirth, and Brutus kills Silvius in a hunting accident.

Brutus's exile from Italy proves to be propitious since he leads his own exodus of Trojan people

out of the clutches of evil Greek masters, including Pyrrhus, Achilles's son. Brutus becomes a

warrior-savior on behalf of the Trojan people, rescuing many of them by force, just as Aeneas

had done. Brutus's role as deliverer begins with the liberation by force from Pandrasus, a Greek

king, whom Brutus defeats. But Pandrasus happily marries his daughter to Brutus because

Pandrasus thinks that Brutus possesses "great prowess" as a powerful Trojan, with "inherent

nobility" [probitatis…nobilitas] and a great reputation (15.253-4). Brutus's Greek enemies sing

his praises after he conquers them, and one willingly marries his daughter to the conquering

hero. Brutus and his followers and descendants, and thus the Britons, are now related to the

Trojans, the Romans, and the ancient Greeks. That is quite an illustrious heritage for Geoffrey to

bestow upon his favored people. After Brutus has sailed for a long time, he comes to Loegetia,

an uninhabited island on which he finds "an abandoned city in which they discovered a temple of

Diana" and in it "was a statue of the goddess which answered questions posed to it" (16.281-2).[48]

When they make sacrifices and prayed to the goddess, she responds: "...beyond the kingdoms of

Gaul / lies an island of the ocean / where giants once lived" and "from your descendants will

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[47] Exodus 7:11. *Biblia Sacra Vulgata.* www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/biblia-sacra-vulgata.

[48] "Venerunt as quandam cuitatem desertam in qua templum Dianae reppererunt. In eodem imago deae responsa dabat si forte ab aliquo peteretur."

arise kings, who / will be masters of the whole world" (16.305, 307, 312).[49] Obviously, the

allusions are to the soon-to-be-eponymous Britons.

This episode draws indirectly upon the Greco-Roman sibylline tradition of prophecy, as

propagated by Virgil. However, even a brief comparison will show that the scene here is

dissimilar to the Sibyl's role in the *Aeneid*. The Sibyl's prophecies are written on leaves, as

ephemeral as they are. For Aeneas, the function of the Sibyl is more akin to gatekeeper than

prophetess. It is Anchises's "predictions" that are more like the ones delivered to Brutus at the

abandoned temple. Anchises tells Aeneas of his son's birth, saying Silvius, "the youth leaning on

the pointless spear, his lot is to fill the next place in light: he will be first to rise to upper day,

born from the admixture of Italian blood, Silvius, that great Alban name, your latest offspring,

whom in your old age at set of life, your spouse Lavinia will bear you in the woods...from him it

is that our race shall rule over Alba the Long."[50] Geoffrey's version of Virgil's mythic lineage

adds the fact that the two were related and that Silvius's offspring would be tragic, but he would

be the progenitor and ruler of a mighty nation. From the beginning of the "future" shown to

Aeneas, Virgil, whose patron was Augustus Caesar himself, moves toward the ultimate goal: his

own present. After repeating much of the mythic and real history of the Romans, Anchises bids

Aeneas: "Hither now turn your two rays of vision[...]here is Caesar: here the whole progeny of

Iulius, as it will pass one day" (146). The *Aeneid* masquerades as an "historical" document that

retroactively legitimates Augustus's claim upon the throne, which is based upon what Richard

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[49] "…trans Gallica regna insula in oceano est... est habitata gigantibus olim...Hic de prole tua reges nascentur, et ipsis tocius terrae subditus orbis erit."

[50] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. John Conington (New York: MacMillan & Company, 1917), 145, https://books.google.com/books?id=IxE-AAAAcAAJ.

Traschler calls "*vaticinium ex eventu*."[51] In other words, if the prophecy "predicts" the past, it then becomes a narrative guide to the history before the author's moment. This is Hayden White's metahistorical narrative taken to an even further extent: not only is the writing of history begun with an end in mind, but the end is constantly foreshadowed throughout narrative, beginning at the end and then putting the end in the beginning. Geoffrey produces predictions confirmed by the narrative, creating the illusion that they are aligned with the history itself, and, thus, true. The history legitimates the present, but the writer's present also validates the fabricated protagonist's history; Aeneas sees the writer's present as the end of a metahistorical journey in search of a past. Structurally, this is the *modus operandi* of prophecies throughout the *Historia*. Monmouth echoes the prophecies of Aeneas's founding of Rome in the *Aeneid* as being the inspiration for the hero's destiny. The end goal of the prophecy leads Aeneas and Brutus in their respective texts to make decisions that later affect how the outcome of events transpires. In other words, prophecies begin to affect the narrative present to produce a future that has already occurred in the author's historical moment, but in the narrative's future. This is the epicycle of past, present, and future that Geoffrey used to propagate his agendas with "evidence" of his claims. The end is always in the beginning when discussing history.

Geoffrey deploys the same strategic historical device of positing the end in the beginning by using prophecies to foreshadow the narrative, lending narrative an artificial form that self-propagates and fulfills. The last two verses of the prophecy to Brutus are reserved for his descendants who will return to the continent to be "masters of the whole world," which in Brutus's day would have been the Mediterranean conquests of what would someday be the

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[51] For a full explanation, see Richard Traschler, "*Vaticinium ex Eventu:* Ou Comment Prédire le Passé: Observations sur Les Prophecies de Merlin," *Francofonia* (2003): 91-108.

Roman Empire. This is ancient history for Geoffrey, but he utilizes this prophecy as the basis for the rest of the *Historia*. Some nine books later, as Arthur is contemplating whether to pay tribute to Rome, Arthur believes that perhaps Emperor Leo owes him tribute, since "Beli[nus] occupied Rome for a while" and Helena's son Constantine and Maximianus, are "close relatives of mine who were crowned king of Britain[...]and emperor of Rome" (159. 469, 472-4).[52] He is asserting his legal right based on the exploits of the British kings in Books III and V of the *Historia*. One of his knights, Hoelus, king of the Armorican Britons, not only agrees but interprets the prophecy to legitimate Arthur's claim. He says, "Nor should we forget the prophecies of the Sibyl, whose truthful verses proclaim that for a third time one born of British blood will rule the Roman state. Her prophecies have come true for two men already...You now stand before us the third" (160.491-3, 496).[53] Hoelus helps convince Arthur that he fulfills the founding prophecy of the British mythology. Hoelus is the reader and interpreter of past prophecies, construing the present in them, which is precisely Geoffrey's external logic for the entire project. The conquerors to whom he refers in the *HRB* are previous Britons, whose stories Geoffrey adapted from his sources. Nennius mentions a "Dolobellus, (the proconsul of the British king, who was called Belinus)" who rebuffed Julius Caesar. However, the "Beli" of whom Arthur and Hoelus speak is in the pre-Julian conquest era, according to the *Historia*.[54] Belinus and his brother Brennius had reconciled after a civil war that brought Britain and the "French"—who followed Brennius back across the channel—together. After this peace, they decided to conquer the continent. The

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[52] "…multis temporibus possederunt. Constantinus etiam Helenae filius nec non Maxiamianus, uterque michi cognatione propinquus, alter post alterum diademate Britanniae insignitus, thronum Romani imperii adeptus est."

[53] "…en uaticinia Sibilae, quae ueris uersibus testantur ex Britannico genere tercio nasciturum qui Romanum optinebit imperium. De duobus autem adimpleta sunt ipsis oracular…Nunc uero te tercium habemus…"

[54] Gunn, 12

Romans, then leaderless and weak, sued for peace, but betrayed the brothers and attacked them.

The brothers avenged themselves upon the Romans for their betrayal by routing their armies and

occupying Rome (43.195-211). This episode is a pure invention of Monmouth's that helps to

legitimate Brutus's founding prophecy that is in turn used to justify Arthur's own fictional

invasion of the continent and Rome. This heritage is based on Monmouth's adapting Nennius'

line of emperors into the lineage for Arthur.

Geoffrey adapts Nennius for his narrative structure, for his main protagonist, and for his

avatar, Merlin. Monmouth agrees that Severus, who built a wall to keep out the Picts in both the

Historia Brittonum and the *HRB*, was the third of the emperors after Julius Caesar to rule Britain

and Carausis the fourth. Geoffrey elaborates on his sources extensively. He names the "fifth was

Constantius the father of Constantine the Great."[55] In Nennius' version, Arthur is supposedly

related to the emperor responsible for converting the Romans to Christianity. He represents a

significant heritage for the British king. Not only does Arthur claim his legal status from him, but

Constantine's place in Christianity is just short of sainted. Geoffrey does not mention

"Constantine the Great," but a man of the same name comes from the Britons, defeats the

invaders and is later crowned king. Later, the *HRB* reads, "Constantinus adiuit Romam

subiugavitque" [Constantinus approached and subjugated Rome] (80.164). He fathers "Constans,

Aurelius Ambrosius, and Uther Pendragon" (93.141-2).[56] Nennius claims that the last emperor of

the Romans was a "Constantius" who "was treacherously murdered in the seventeenth year of his

reign," which would somewhat align with Geoffrey's Constantinus, who was killed by a Pictish

assassin's dagger. Monmouth has constructed a heritage for Arthur out of conflated stories and

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[55] Gunn, 14.

[56] "tres filios, quorum nomina fuerunt Constans, Aurelius Ambrosius, Vther Pendragon.

personages. While not specifically named as the "Great" one, Geoffrey's Constantine is at least phonemically related to the man responsible for bringing Christianity to a larger audience, the perfect pedigree for a British king who will be the messianic hero of an oppressed populous. The cruel irony of the prophecy structuring the entire book is that Hoel incorrectly interprets the prophecy, since Arthur never conquers the Romans because of the betrayal of Modred. Geoffrey never asserts another, unless Maximianus, who is born in Rome, is considered a candidate. Rather, he assumes the British throne. It is evident that Monmouth is not satisfied with that by the very fact that Hoel suggests Arthur is the third. The prophecy at Diana's temple is unfulfilled and remains so to this day according to the *HRB*'s ending, the significance of which is discussed later.

There are numerous implications of Geoffrey's adaptations of sources being fitted into prophecies that are simultaneously historical and literary. Geoffrey adds another dimension to his *historia* when it is itself interpreted by fictional characters present in the narrative. The structure of the *HRB* is dependent upon the rewriting of select sources, the invention of a prophecy that provides the basis for Monmouth's history. These generic maneuvers reposition his sources and history itself to assist with the pedigree of the Britons and Arthur, establishing that the internal narrative structure is predicated upon vaticination. The history's sources are all adapted toward the end of the book because of the cyclicality of history which continues through to the end of the *Historia*. The *HRB* borrows the authority of Roman and biblical mythology, using Nennius's adaptation of and Gildas's likening of the Britons to the Hebrews. The *auctoritates* from which Geoffrey draws are polyglot, bringing the traditions of the most famous cultures into alignment and even blending them into the Britons as the "chosen people." Many Hebrew, Christian, and Greco-Roman texts have characters who interpret prophecies. The epicyclical nature of history

and prophecy converge in the Judeo-Christian mythology in a manner similar to what the Greeks and Romans had done, but for the purpose of a salvation narrative. In both traditions, prophecy needed to be interpreted both internally to the narrative and externally to the text's audience. Implicit in this exchange is interpretation. The *HRB* shapes history through oracles and prophets, and it contains characters that interpret them. Monmouth's text features Merlinus Ambrosius, a character who predicts and interprets nearly simultaneously.

Where the Past and the Future Meet: Merlinus Ambrosius

Monmouth's sources and invention meet in Merlin, as do the past, the present, and the future within the narrative of the *HRB*. Prophecy has been shown to shape the *Historia* into a recognizable pattern through foreshadowing and fulfillment. Merlin becomes Geoffrey's site of and avatar in the tension between *auctoritas* and *ingenium*. Gildas and Bede use the name "Ambrosius" for a hero who saves the Britons from the Saxons. Nennius adapts the name to produce a fatherless boy named Ambrosius, who may or may not be linked to Aurelius Ambrosius, the British hero. The giving them the same name is a common practice to link the characters to famous namesakes. Perhaps it was a story that Nennius, descended from Britons and living in what is now Wales, heard growing up—a fairy tale, a myth—and found a way of inserting it into this story; perhaps there is a source that he is not revealing for this alteration; perhaps he is revealing his biases by granting the Britons a prophet as the Israelites had. Or, perhaps, he wanted a character to whom he could relate. "Ambrosius Embresgulectic" reads and then rewrites the situation in which he finds himself, acting as a reviser of interpretations and offering new ones. Ambrosius makes predictions then interprets them. He unifies time in its three parts: the past and the future can only be interpreted in the present. Ambrosius, the proto-Merlin, displays the germane characteristics of Merlin as author, historian, and prophet. His function is

to unify the action through his words, much in the way Geoffrey of Monmouth casts Merlin as an *auctor*. Ambrosius and Merlin first read, interpret, and speak in the narrative present, but involve the past and the future in their speech. This purpose is consistent throughout further iterations and adaptations of the character. Geoffrey of Monmouth adapts Ambrosius because he is the only character to perform all of the functions necessary to unify the *HRB* into a cohesive history, while maintaining the epicycle of prophecy legitimating history, which proves prophecy "correct." The story of Ambrosius and its link to the *HRB* episode in which Vortigern meets a boy from Carmarthen demonstrates that Geoffrey knew this story and that he had read Nennius, which is perhaps misleading because, as noted above, he never mentions the *Historia Brittonum* as a source.[57] Furthermore, while Monmouth uses Ambrosius as his source, adding to it for Merlinus Ambrosius, the character demonstrates the functions of the author. Perhaps Geoffrey obfuscates his source in his opening to appear more inventive than reliant on authority, especially in the most innovative portion of the *HRB*. Comparing and contrasting the Vortigern episode in the *HB* and the *HRB* reveals how relying on authority and invention produces speech and how Geoffrey uses Merlin as his avatar in the game of history.

Nennius writes that Vortigern has retreated to his castle that will not stand. The twelve advisors counsel him to find a "a child born without a father, put him to death, and sprinkle with his blood on the ground on which the citadel is to be built."[58] The messengers "came to a field in Aelecti, in the district of Glevesing" and found the boy by words that the others said. The

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[57] A.O.H Jarman. "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy," in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. Peter Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2003): 119. "This tale was not the product of Geoffrey's own imagination but had been lifted bodily by him from the ninth-century collection of early British and Welsh saga material and semi-historical traditions known as the *Historia Brittonum*." This passage is usually attributed to Nennius, but Jarman follows Dumville in asserting that the identity of the ninth-century chronicler cannot be determined.

[58] Gunn, 26.

following scene between Ambrosius and Vortigern is nowhere to be found in Gildas or Bede and appears to be an interpolation of Nennius's otherwise rough following of his sources, albeit in a different genre. Vortigern has the fatherless boy abducted and brought to his court in exile, but the boy immediately takes charge, asking "Why have your servants brought me hither?"[59] Thus, begins an inquisition of the king's counselors in which it is revealed that they know nothing about the cause of the tower's collapse. Ambrosius must instruct them not only on the reality of the situation, but also upon the meaning of the episode itself. Nennius's adaptation of his sources and the invention of this episode becomes the authority for Geoffrey's reiteration of the story with the character's name and many more alterations. In the *HRB*, the scenario is much the same: Vortigern's tower will not stand, his wise men advise him to find a fatherless boy, whom they find in "Kaer merdin."[60] The narrator tells us that the messengers found boys playing in this town. He also tells us that two of the boys are named "Merlin and Dinabutius" ["duos iuuenes, uorum erant nomina Merlinus atque Dinabutius"] (106.514-15). The latter boy insults Merlin by saying that "your identity is unknown since you have no father" ["nescitur quis sis, cum patrem non habeas"] (106.518). Geoffrey changes the name of the fatherless boy in the narration at first, but amends the name later in the episode, calling him Merlinus Ambrosius. Monmouth gives the name of his character in the narration, whereas Nennius has the boy announce his name for himself at the end of the marvels that he reveals. It is difficult to say why Geoffrey would have

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[59] Ibid., 27.

[60] The discussion of whether "Carmarthen" or "Kaer merdin" is etymologically linked either in memory of Myrddin (Merlin Silvestris) or if he derived his name from it seems to be unresolved. After years of debate, it appears as though there is no connection. For readings positively equating the names, see Tatlock, *Historia Regum Britanniae*, 175. Lucy Allen Paton, "Notes on Merlin in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth," *Modern Philology* 41, no. 2 (1943): 88-95 (90). Norma Lorre Goodrich, *Merlin* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1987), 22. Nikolai Tolstoy "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Merlin Legend" *Arthurian Literature* XXV: 1-42 (17). See also John K. Bollard, "Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition," in *The Romance of Merlin: An Anthology*, ed. Peter Goodrich, trans. Zacharias P. Thundy (New York: Garland, 1990), 13-54.

divulged the moniker immediately, rather than withhold it for suspense, as Nennius had

apparently done. The facile answer is that he must assert it to legitimate his newly formed

character in the place of a potentially recognizable "Ambrosius." The narration may also lend the

naming process more credibility, an omniscient narrator—irrespective of its alignment with

Geoffrey—is used to bestow authority to the change of nomenclature. Whereas "Ambrosius"

speaks for himself, Geoffrey has to account for his invention in terms that will align with

previous redactors. Another change slightly later in the book indicates this may be the case. Just

before Merlin calls for the workers to dig under the tower to drain the pool, the narrator

declaims, "Then Merlin, who was also called Ambrosius, said..." ["Tunc ait Merlinus, qui et

Ambrosius dicebatur"] (108.565).[61] Geoffrey introduces the name "Ambrosius," appropriated

from his source, and adds it as an explanation of the history of the character, in what amounts to

a reconciliatory maneuver to previous versions of the story—especially Nennius's. Geoffrey is

incorporating at least one of his source's nomenclature as a nod to the stories prior to his,

drawing on the authority and then shaping his own character in its place, a literary legerdemain.

The substitution of Ambrosius for Merlin is a metonymic replacement that allows Monmouth to

insert whatever meaning he likes. Merlin's very name is the site of the magic of medieval

writing: translating sources via invention. Geoffrey's augmentation of the story, his change of

"Merlinus Ambrosius" as a character, and his further effect on the story does not cease there.

As far as the parentage of the fatherless character, Nennius tells a shorter version of the

story. When Vortigern's messengers find the boy, they "diligently inquired of the mother and the

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[61] Ibid, 140-41. A.O.H. Jarman, "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy," in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. Peter Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 119: "Geoffrey's change is the conflation of "Ambrosius" and Merlinus (Myrddin), and Merlin originally found in Glywysing, that is Glamorgan, but in Geoffrey's narrative the discovery was made in the town called Carmarthen (*Caer Myrddin*, 'Merddin's Fort').

other boys, whether he had a father. Which his mother denied, saying, 'In what manner he was

conceived I know not, for I have never had intercourse with any man' and then she solemnly

affirmed that he had no mortal father."[62] The mother avers that she has not known "*in coitu*" any

man and affirms separately that "filius eius patrem non haberet carnalem" [No mortal father

begot this child]. This parallel to Jesus's conception is not coincidental. The wonders that

Ambrosius achieves are miraculous, but Nennius must keep the text within the bounds of what is

acceptable for a Christian monk. Still, Merlin's mother seems at least comparable to the Virgin

Mary. That leaves the further possibility that Nennius's Ambrosius is also a type of the Messiah.

As blasphemous as it may be to suggest, the sin is short-circuited by Ambrosius's own attestation

that his father is "a Roman consul."[63] The mother's story is a lie according to the words of an

omniscient boy. Moreover, this accounts for the name association with the British hero of the

same name as in Nennius's sources. The divine parallel breaks down, only to be replaced with a

mundane provenance for the fatherless boy. Geoffrey once again transforms the character in a

way that adds detail to his adaptation of the sources, while maintaining a trace of the previous

iteration.

Geoffrey's change to the scene is one that makes the child's non-origins more

comprehensive. Merlin's mother says, "Upon your soul and mine…I knew no man who begot

this child of me," but she adds that while she was in the convent in her cell "someone resembling

a handsome young man used to appear to me very often, holding me tight in his arms and kissing

me….He visited me in this way for a long time and often made love to me in the form of a man,

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[62] Gunn, 70. "...At illi ab aliis pueris et a matre de puero illo diligenter percunctati sunt si patrem haberet; Mater vero illius pueri negavit dicens; Nescio quomodo in utero meo conceptus est unum tamen scio qua virum in coitu nunquam cognovi; sicque iureiurando affirmavit quod filius eius patrem non haberet carnalem."

[63] Gunn, 72 "unus de consulibus Romanorum."

leaving me with child in my womb" (107.531-9).[64] The mother once again contradicts the narrator: the boy is supposed to have no father. She even contradicts herself. She "knew no man who begot the child" ["quia neminem agnoui qui ilum in me generauerit"], but there was "someone" [quidam] who "appeared in the form of a handsome youth" ["couit mecum in specie hominis saepius"] and he would kiss her and hold her until she became pregnant. The figure who appears to a woman to seduce, rape, and/or impregnate her is a common theme in European folklore and appears in many romances and lays throughout the High and Late Middle Ages, including Marie de France's "Yonec." One of Vortigern's magicians—and more importantly Geoffrey—offers the explanation. Maugantius says: "As Apuleius records in *De Dei Socratis* between the moon and the earth their live spirits whom we call incubi. They are part human, part angel, and take on human form at will and sleep with women" (107.545-50).[65] Geoffrey calls upon the *auctoritas* of an ancient Roman writer—also the author of the *Golden Ass*—whose *De Deo Socratis* is a minor work. However, he elucidates a complex cosmology in this tract that includes mention of "demons" [daemones] not "angels" [angelorum], as Geoffrey writes.[66] Apuleuis's conception of the creatures is not evil or demonic in any sense that would have been extant in Geoffrey's day. His verbiage may reflect the neutral or even benign influence that

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[64] "Vivit [sic] anima tue et uiuit anima mea, domine mi rex, quia neminem agnoui qui illum in me generauit. Vnum autem scio, quod cum essem inter consocias meas in thalamis nostris apparebat michi quisam in specie pulcherrimi iuuenis et saepissime amplectens me strictis brachiis deosculabatur...Cumque me diu in hunc modum frequentasset, coiuit mecum in specie hominis saepius atque graudim in aluo deseruit."

[65] See Tatlock, 171 for a summary. "Nam ut Apulegius de deo Socratis perhibet, inter lunam et terram habitant spiritus quos incubos daemones apellamus. Hii partim habent naturam hominum, partim uero angelorum, et cum uolunt assumunt sibi humanas figuras et cum mulieribus coeunt."

[66] *The Works of Apuleius*, ed. Mary Tighe (London: Bell and Daldy, 1853): 356-60. https://books.google.com/books?id=ngsjAQAAMAAJ. The passages referred to by the magician are likely on the pages listed, being devoted to the demons who live in the "middle spaces" and are "middle beings" between the heavens and earth. It must be noted that these demons are not the Christian versions because Apuleius is a Roman pagan. It is possible that these beings are intermediaries for the gods, akin to the Christian conception of angels as messengers or intermediaries for the Abrahamic God.

Apuleuis's creatures may have on mortals, but there is no mention in *De Deo Socratis* of any creature known as an *incubus* in Nennius's version. This is Geoffrey's addition or interpretation from other sources, hitherto unknown. Geoffrey makes the incubus an angel not a demon, for, perhaps, religious reasons: so that Merlin is not anathema from birth. Again, Geoffrey is modifying a source to fit his own agenda. He has Christianized Apuleuis's ideas by transforming the demons into angels, rather than Greco-Roman and Celtic mythologies and cosmologies, and he has added a category of demons recognizable to his audience. Once again, Geoffrey's *Historia* adapts the source in subtle ways that add significance that align with the direction of his thoughts. The most crucial adaptation of the *Historia Brittonum* comes in the moments after Ambrosius identifies Vortigern's problem.

The twelve *magi* have congregated, read the sign of the falling tower, and offered an interpretation without evidence presented in the text or any internal logic. Ambrosius immediately commands the men to sit and the king to listen. He tells them where to dig and what they will discover. At every turn, the fatherless boy begins to question the councilors, asking if they know what is under the tower, what is under the water, what is in the vases, the tents, and what the two fighting serpents mean. They do not know. The boy's final questions to them is revealing: "Quid significat hoc mirabile praesagium quod vidistis?"[67] ["What means this miraculous omen which you have seen?"] He asks them what significance they attach to this "wonder." When they cannot, Ambrosius interprets it for them, saying, he will

> unfold to you the meaning of this mystery. The pool is the emblem of this world, and the
> tent that of your kingdom: the two serpents are two dragons; the red serpent is your

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[67] Gunn, 71.

dragon, but the white serpent is the dragon of the people who occupy several provinces

and districts of Britain, even almost from sea to sea: at length, however, our people shall

rise and drive away the Saxon race from beyond the sea, whence they originally came.[68]

He explains to the congregated sages that the symbols are systemic, allegorical: the water is the

world, the tent is Vortigern's kingdom, and the dragons, the Britons (red) and the Saxons (white)

vying for the land. The Britons look defeated but will rise up again. In narrative time, this is

Ambrosius reading his recent past, the narrative of this book in the *HB*, the struggles of the

Britons thus far and then predicting their succession after expelling the Saxons. In his moment,

Nennius employs *ex eventu* prophecy—a prediction in the past of an event that has occurred in

the author's past—in the episode of the Britons fighting back against the Saxons. In the present

moment of the narrative, Ambrosius is the nexus for summary and foreshadowing. Geoffrey

must have found this episode tantalizing enough to imitate it and then expand on its devices

because he says in his preface to the *Prophetiae* that he would have waited to write them until

after completing the *Historia* until Alexander of Lincoln insisted otherwise. Geoffrey adapts this

story directly and then expands it to encompass much more than the struggle of the Britons and

the Saxons.

Like his predecessor, Ambrosius, Merlin takes charge in the *HRB*. He asks the magicians

if they know why the tower falls. Of course, they do not. Again, he calls for the excavation of the

tower's base in which they will find "two hollow rocks with two dragons asleep in them"

["uidebis in fundo duos concauos lapides et in illis duos dracones dormientes"] (108.573-4). The

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[68] Gunn 27-8. "en vobis misterium quod revelatum enucleando certius exponam; Stagnam figura huius mundi est; Tentorium regni tui videtur habere figuram; duo vermes duo dracones sunt; Vermis autem rufus draco tuus est albus vero vermis draco est gentis illius quae occupant gentes plurimas et regions in bryttannia et pene a mari usque ad mare tenebit; Sed tamen ad ultimum gens nostra consurget."

adaptation of the vases and tents—the containers in Nennius's version—into hollow rocks is not much of a change. However, skipping the inserted dedication, the description and interpretation of the dragons and their meaning is a major interpolation. Geoffrey adds detail to the dragon battle, inserting fire-breathing ["ignem anhelitu"] and the red dragon being driven "to the edge of the pool" ["ad extremitatem lacus fugebat"]. Such literary license is not uncommon, but an interesting detail nonetheless because it reaffirms the *fabula* tendencies of the *HRB*. Once again, Vortigern

commanded Merlin to tell him the meaning of their battle. [Merlin] burst into tears and was inspired to prophesy thus:

Alas for the red dragon, its end is near. Its caves will be taken by the white dragon, which symbolizes the Saxons whom you have summoned. The red represents the people of Britain, whom the white will oppress. [...]at last the oppressed will rise up and resist the foreigners' fury. The boar of Cornwall will lend his aid and trample the foreigners' necks beneath his feet. The islands of the ocean will fall under his sway and he will occupy the glades of France. The house of Rome will tremble before his rage, and his end shall be unknown. (112.34-42)[69]

The white dragon, again, is driven out by the red one, signifying the defeat of the Saxons. However, the most telling addition is the passage about the "Boar of Cornwall" who will not only drive off the Saxons, but he will conquer France and terrify the Romans before his

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[69] "...praecepit rex Ambrosio Merlino dicere quid proelium draconum portendebat. Mox ille, in fletum erumpens, spiritum hausit prophetiae et ait: 'vae rubeo draconi; nam exterminatio euis festinat. Cavernas ipsius occupabit albus draco, qui Saxones quos inuitasti significat. Rubeus vero gentem designat Britanniae, quae ab albo opprimetur...Praeualebit tandem oppressa et saeuiciae exterorum resistet. Aper etenim Cornubiae succursum praestabit et colla eorum sub pedibus suis cuncalbit. Insulae occeani potestati ipsius subdentur, et Gallicanos saltus possidebit. Tremebit Romulea domus saeuiciam ipsius, et exitus eius dubius erit."

"unknown end." This "prophecy" of the future of the narration is the story of Arthur that Geoffrey is in the process of compiling. Because the *Prophetiae* were released before the *HRB*, this tantalizing morsel anticipates the rest of the history that Geoffrey has already written. The device of prophecy within the narrative is crucial to the relationship of Geoffrey and his adaptation of the "fatherless child." Additionally, Merlin internally foreshadows the rest of the book in order to add to Geoffrey's authority, making Merlin the avatar for adaptations to history, the marker of discourse in all subsequent Arthurian material. To the twelfth-century audience, history fulfills the vaticinations and prophecy predicts history. Monmouth has established his process of rewriting the past through auto-hermeneutic predictions. Now that he comes to his ultimate creative achievement, he employs Merlin as the character who will prophesy the British messiah in a continuous epicycle that legitimates his invention internally. Just as self-fulfilling predictions structure the narrative, Monmouth is validating his story using external sources. Geoffrey is ostensibly "translating" a passage from the book in the "British tongue," but that is, as discussed, a transparent ruse. The fabled book allows the space for the invention of the author to stand upon shoulders of ancient giants, an act Geoffrey performs in his present historical moment. He has taken the past, read and interpreted it, and foreseen the reception of the audience, even shaping it through his adaptation of Ambrosius into Merlinus Ambrosius. This is also the action performed by Merlin in the passage related. He has read the signs, interpreted the dragons, and foreshadowed a future for the internal audience, Vortigern, just as Geoffrey has taken his sources and crafted a prophecy and history meant for his immediate audience. The *Prophetiae Merlini* are discussed in full in chapter two because they are crucial to the external reality of Geoffrey's milieu, external to the *HRB* narrative, though mimicking its literary epicyclical movement.

Merlin's Moment: The Epicycle of History and Narration

After the place in the *Historia* where many manuscripts insert the *Prophetiae*, Merlin is

asked to make one more prediction: Vortigern asks about his death.[70] The British king's demise

resembles that of his namesake in Nennius's version but bears some explanation of the

adaptation and its function internal and external to the narrative. Notably, Vortigern does not ask

Ambrosius about his demise in the older *Historia Brittonum*. It is left to the narrative to explain

in due course. However, Geoffrey sees an opening here to add the death of Vortigern to Merlin's

structuring prophecies. Nennius purported that Vortigern's tower burned, but that his fate was

unknown since no bodies could be found. Geoffrey, through Merlin, is much more specific. He

says, "Beware the fire of Constantinus's sons, if you can. Even now they are preparing their

ships, leaving the shores of Armorica and setting their sails for the crossing. They will land on

this island, attack the Saxons and conquer that wicked race; but first they will besiege your

tower" (118.7-10).[71] Merlin refers to Uther and Aurelius Ambrosius, who may be a version of

Nennius's *dux bellorum*, exiles since their eldest brother and father were killed by the treachery

of Vortigern. The brothers are the red dragon that will kill Vortigern and subdue the Saxons,

which of course they do. The reference to Arthur demonstrates that Geoffrey saw the brothers as

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[70] See Julia Crick, *Historia Regum Britannie*: *Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 1991). *Google Books*. Accessed June 27, 2015. https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0859912116. This study is essential for understanding the manuscript tradition of the *HRB* and how it relates to the *Prophetiae*. It includes the libraries where each extant copy recorded may be found, which is how I found out that the oldest known copy of the *HRB* is in Beinecke MS 598, in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. The *HRB* with *Prophetiae Merlini* is placed between Dares Phrygius, *De Excidio Troiae Historia*, in the Latin translation ascribed to Cornelius Nepos and *De Origine Normannorum*, a short history of Normandy up to Henry I. The staff of the Beinecke made it available upon request to me in 2015, for which I thank them. Beinecke MS 598 is now digitized here: https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3446455.

[71] "Ignem filiorum Constantini diffuge, si diffugere ualeris. Iam nues parant iam Armoricanum litus deserunt, iam uela per aequora pandunt. Petent Britanniam insulam, inuadent Saxonicam gentem, subiugabunt nefandum populum; sed te prius infra turim inclusum comburent."

forerunners of the ultimate Pendragon of his *Historia*. In any case, this prophecy structures the next several books of the *HRB*.

When Vortigern asks about his own death, Merlin actually makes five separate "prophecies" of the plot of the story that follows. The prophet says that Vortigern should "Beware the fire of Constantinus's sons" and that "[e]ven now [Aurelius and Uther] are preparing their ships, leaving the shores of Armorica and setting their sails for crossing."[72] Then he predicts the defeat of Hengest and the coronation of Aurelius Ambrosius. Then Aurelius "will pacify the people and rebuild the churches but will die by poison" ["Pacificabit nationes, restaurabit ecclesias, sed ueneno deficiet"] (118.18-19). After him, "Uther Pendragon will succeed him, but his days will also be cut short by poison" ["Succedet ei germanus suus Vther Pendragon,cuius dies anticipabuntur ueneno"] (118.19-20). And finally, Vortigern's "offspring will have a share in this treason, before the boar of Cornwall devours them" ["Aderunt tantae proditioni posteri tui, quos aper Cornubiae deuorabit"], referring to Arthur's rise from Cornwall, the place where Uther will impregnate Igerna to beget the child (118.20-1). These prophecies are internally structuring the *HRB*'s narrative. They predict portions of the plot that are in the narrative future, but which the author would have at least outlined ahead of time, if not already written. The motive for such "prophecy" is metahistorical in nature: the beginning predicts the end so that the end is authorized by the past prediction—narration, and thus this history, is a self-fulfilling prophecy. The story makes sense because the narrative has already been working toward a foreshadowed moment. This passage aligns Merlin with Geoffrey so closely that the character becomes the avatar for Geoffrey. Merlin's prophecies provide an internal authority for

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[72] "Ignem filiorum Constantini diffuge…Iam naues parant, iam Armoricanum litus deserunt, iam uela per aequora pandunt."

Geoffrey's innovation of the predicted Arthur. Vortigern's prophecies are Geoffrey maneuvering within the narrative to continue history's cyclical signification.

From the very beginning of the *HRB*, Geoffrey of Monmouth has stated his intent was to fill the lacunae left by previous authors. They omitted the kings before Christ and the only king Geoffrey names in his introduction is Arthur. Merlin is at this moment in the narrative moving his audience toward the author's climax. The predictions come true in chapter eight with the sailing of Aurelius and Uther and the same book ends with Uther's death. All of Merlin's plot predictions are fulfilled. Arthur's conception is an integral part of this book and is one of the most famous scenes throughout the next millennium of representations, making it an essential moment to study. Book nine deals entirely with the "Boar of Cornwall," Arthur's reign and subjugation of the Saxons and the northern tribes of Britain and Western Europe before dealing with conquering the Romans in Gaul. Merlin's second prophecy to Vortigern contains the subject matter of the next two books of the *HRB*. Geoffrey is laying out his ultimate purposes and making sure that his contemporary and future audiences understand the structure of the *Historia*. Merlin is speaking on behalf of Geoffrey by bringing the narrative future into the narrative present, conflating them to reinforce the authority of his author's content. The prophecies structure the rest of this episode and Merlin is the author's avatar in as much as the character is the foreshadowing force that structures the plot from within it, much as Geoffrey's pen does outside the text. Geoffrey is essentially writing metahistory. The model of this episode shows, in detail, how an author comingles past, present, and future, in order to produce a predictable, and therefore *plausible* plot that plays to his contemporary audience. Merlin is the figure through whom this confluence of times is demonstrated. Geoffrey uses him to manipulate his sources in order to make adaptations to the text. Monmouth is interacting with previous iterations and

making them his own story through the character Merlin. Moreover, Merlin drives the plot forward, not only through his words that predict events, but because he is the site of mixing the "historical" sources and Geoffrey's fictions, validating the fiction's "historical" plausibility. Geoffrey is unifying the texts' times, ensuring a believable authenticity, and providing a key by which to read prophecy and history, all using Merlin in the discourse between his sources and his invention.

Merlin's prophecies of Vortigern's death become present narrative and then history in rapid succession. Merlin says that Aurelius and Uther are preparing to sail while he speaks and that Vortigern should quickly run and hide. The narrator tells us that "As soon as the next day dawned" ["Nec mora, cum crastina dies illuxit"] the brothers land with their forces (118.22). Merlin becomes further aligned with the author at this moment because he is practically telling the story as it unfolds. In a few short lines, all of the immediate events that he predicts occur, making his prophecy the present narrative. The future of the narrative becomes now and subsequently flows into the past. To reinforce this point, Geoffrey has Aurelius repeat the account of the deaths of Constantine, his father, and Constans, the brother to himself and Uther, and how the Saxons and Picts took over the island. Just in case anyone forgot what had happened and why Aurelius is motivated for vengeance, and just in case the *Prophetiae* had been interleaved into the manuscript, Geoffrey summarizes the plot in the mouth of the "rightful" king, divinely ordained to exact vengeance upon the treacherous Vortigern. The past of the narrative is embedded within the present moment for the audience's convenience, just before the predictions are about to become narrative present with Vortigern's fiery death. The author is setting up the motivation of this "historical" figure to demonstrate the significance of his actions

and then fulfills the reiterated predictions with a storyline that then has a beginning, middle, and an end. This episode's prophetic layerings are only the beginning, however.

After Vortigern is killed, Aurelius Ambrosius crowned, and Hengist defeated—events predicted by Merlin—the king decides to build a memorial to the dead who fought on Salisbury Plain in the act of defeating the Saxons. None of Aurelius's artisans have confidence in their "skills/ingenuity" [*ingeniis*] to build something that the king would deem suitable. The Archbishop of Caerleon recommends "Vortigern's prophet Merlin," who is the most distinguished at "foretelling the future" and "in feats of engineering" ["Quippe non existimo alterum esse in regno tuo cui sit clarius ingenium siue in futuris dicendis siue in operationibus machinandis"] (128.218-19). The key words in this passage are "skills" [*ingeniis; ingenium*] and "engineering" [*operationibus machinandis*]. These are not the words that denote "spirits" of prophecy or indicate some divine help or demonic magic. Instead, these words point to concerns of readership and its relationship to authorship itself as an artisanal process. Merlin's readings of the signs of the dragons makes him first a reader who then authors "history" disguised as prophecy. This episode foregrounds how the text, as Kimberly Bell puts it, can provide the framework for integrating Merlin and the narrative voice so closely linked to author because Merlin "reflects both Geoffrey's narrator and his reading audience," which "makes Geoffrey's readers more aware of their participatory roles in the construction of his text."[73] Geoffrey is participating, through Merlin, in the construction of his text and the adaptation of sources. Author and character set the stage for every other author who adapts this myth first to be a reader and then to add his or her own perspective to the legend in order to reach a contemporary

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[73] Kimberly Bell, "Merlin as Historian in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*," *Arthuriana* 10, no.1 (2000): 14-26 (19).

audience that recognizes itself within the myth. If a postmedieval author had performed this same act, it would be dubbed a medievalism, even a participatory one. The scene with Vortigern's magi proves Geoffrey's insistence upon Merlin's ability to read signifiers "correctly." Immediately following, in the complete version of the *HRB*, is a set of obscurely detailed *Prophetiae*. That Merlin, the narrator, and Geoffrey leave them unglossed is an act of engagement with the imagined reader. Merlin and his author give the audience the "key" to the puzzle and then allow them to interpret. As will be shown in the next chapter, everyone who commented on or adapted the *Prophetiae* did exactly that: filled the space with their readings, which makes them writers, exactly like Monmouth's avatar, Merlin. Subsequent centuries of Arthurian mythologies are filled with authors who have taken the monuments of history and adapted them to their own circumstances.

As always, Geoffrey of Monmouth is not the first to use this method of history and fiction-making and the combinations thereof, but he is one of the best and the most influential because of Arthur's and Merlin's perpetual fame. Appropriation of historical culture for current politics by a skilled artisan describes well Aurelius's famed "war memorial," the Giants' Dance—currently called Stonehenge. History and the future will be united in this structure through Merlin's artistry in the present narrative moment. The artisans mention their lack of confidence in their own "*ingenium*" and that only Merlin could perform the miracle through his artifices. However, Aurelius has a different piece of business for Merlin before dealing with the memorial. Once they have the prophet with them, Aurelius asks how he himself will die. Unlike when Vortigern asked, Merlin rebuffs the question by saying that if he "prophesied for entertainment or without purpose" ["in derisionem siue uantitatem proferrem"] his spirit would abandon him. Merlin is not serving the role of *vates* on this trip (128.229). However, he

demonstrates how the past, present, and future are related and even dependent upon each other to narrate an adapted story. Monmouth manipulates his sources, adding fresh detail to enact his innovations. In the narrative moment, Merlin accomplishes the same feat, demonstrating another aspect of authorship. Previously, Merlin has masked actual history as prophecy and structured fiction through predictions. Merlin will now adapt a mythic history to a fiction of his own in order to remake the past to influence the future memories of the audience.

Merlin tells Aurelius that he will retrieve the stones of the "Giants' Ring, which are on Mount Killaraus in Ireland[...]stones which no man could erect save by skill and art combined" (128.234-6).[74] Merlin's plan is met with deserved skepticism: Aurelius laughs. The king represents the audience in this instance because almost everyone reading this account would know the size of these stones and understand the understatement. He tells the king of the history of the stones, which were "brought long ago from the farthest shores of Africa by giants, who erected them in Ireland when they lived there" (129.243-5).[75] This fantastic history reinforces the mythic identity of the current characters' past while maintaining a sense of history for the audience. The "original inhabitants" were giants according to histories of the British islands, including Geoffrey's. In the first book of the *HRB*, Brutus asks for his fate to be foretold, and is met with the prophecy of Diana. The oracle at Diana's temple was half right; the giants are *still* there when Brutus arrives, even necessitating the Trojan Corineus's defeat of Gogmagog to lay claim to the island in the name of the exiled Trojan leader. Geoffrey is utilizing the mythical history cited earlier by the author, who adapted his sources and their mythos, to construct a

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[74] "...mitte pro chorea gigantum quae est in Killarao monte Hiberniae...lapidum quam nemo huius aetatis construeret nisi ingenium artem subuectaret."

[75] "Gigantes olim asportauerunt eos ex ultimis finibus Affricae et posuerunt in Hibernia dum eam inhabitarent."

monument in the narrative present. Merlin has unified the beginning of the story with its narrative present, in anticipation of the real purpose of the book: to produce an expanded, legitimate version of Arthur. In the present moment, however, he is performing an act of authorship with the Giants' Dance.

Merlin discusses the mythical past of the British islands, linking them back to Africa, the place from which the giants came. The giants preceded the Trojans, who lived there before the Gauls, who were in turn subdued by the Romans, who were coming back to claim what was "rightfully" theirs since a Trojan founded both Rome and Britain, and the current king was thought to be of Roman descent. Merlin is reiterating the imperialistic narrative previously detailed, which is at the heart of the *HRB*: foreign conquest, resistance, and integration or rejection of unwanted tribes. It is hardly surprising, then, that Merlin suggests robbing the Irish of their sacred monument. He leads the invasion of Ireland "to supply them with brains and advice" ["...ut ipsius ingenio et consilio collegit tractentur"] (129.253). Uther Pendragon is the mighty warrior, but Merlin is the mastermind who will enact the appropriation of the giants' monument from the Irish, who live in the land of the former residents. After Uther speedily defeats the Irish, Merlin challenges Uther and his men to move the stones, to see "whether brains yield to brawn or vice versa" ["...utrum ingenium uirtuti an uirtus ingenio cedat"] (130.272). When they fail, Merlin "prepared contrivances of his own" and "he took down the stones with incredible ease and had them carried to the ships" (130.276-7).[76] Merlin's intelligence, skill, or ingenuity—as translations and meaning may vary—does what brute strength cannot. He performs the great feat "so proving the superiority of brains over brawn" ["ingeniumque uirtuti pareualare comprobauit"] (130.298). The hero of this episode is a man who can master the

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[76] "...machinationes confecit[...]quam credit potest lapides deposuit, depositos autem fecit deferri ad naves."

elements of an enormous undertaking through his mechanical and artisanal acumen. However, the real point is in the symbolic gesture. Stonehenge is appropriated for a reason other than its original intentions, rewriting history for the narrative moment and for Geoffrey's.

The history of Stonehenge is unclear, to say the least, and after more than a century of serious archaeological study, many conclusions, often contradictory or complementary, have been posited. It is widely accepted that the stones were erected some 4500-5000 years ago during the Neolithic Era. The avenue that runs through the monument places a large emphasis on the imaginary alignment between the sunsets on the summer and winter solstices. This alignment has led many to place an emphasis on these days, to suggest that the stones are a calendar, or that there is mystical significance to these stones and their arrangement. It is also certain that it was a burial place since many communal and individual barrows are arranged around the monument and in the surrounding environs. The true reason may be beyond our knowledge. However, according to the most recent work by the Stonehenge Riverside Project, headed by Dr. Michael Parker Pearson, beginning in the third millennium BCE, "When Stonehenge was built [it] would have been an act of unification."[77] The islands' peoples were experiencing a homogenization of everything from housing styles to pottery. He estimates that thousands of people would have been needed to transport the stones from "as far away as west Wales," possibly the Snowden mountains in the North. Nearly five thousand years ago, the island's inhabitants rallied to create a structure that is rivaled in design and ambition only by the wonders of the ancient world, and it was probably done without the benefit of many of the mechanical devices in the last several millennia. So, Geoffrey's mythos is correct inasmuch as it is a burial place, but his historical

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[77] "Research indicates Stonehenge was monument marking unification of Britain," June 22, 2012. Accessed last February 17, 2019. http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/stonehenge-monument-unification-britain-1.188608.

references are off by several thousand years. The purpose of the ring was not solely for a monument to the dead. Instead, it may have been the strident act of a unifying ruler or a celebration of commonalities by disparate Indo-European tribes to help mark feast days. One thing is certain: it was not the work of mythological African giants.[78]

Geoffrey has used an actual historical artifact whose true purposes and erectors were and are unknown. So, he has the space in which to rewrite the history of the barrows and the stones on Salisbury Plain. Acting as his author's avatar, Merlin's "actions metaphorically represent Geoffrey's borrowing of the legends and tales from other, older civilizations to form the foundation of his own history."[79] Absent archaeological information and scientific dating devices and methods, the Giants' Dance was an open site of historical and mythological interpretation, adaptation, and appropriation. In this instance, Merlin is taking the stones from a conquered people, the Irish, who inherited it from giants conquered by the ancient Trojans, ancestors of the current monarch. This monarch, Aurelius Ambrosius, uses the erection of the monument as a time to solidify his rule over the land. The narrator tells us that when all the clergy, nobility, and peasantry were assembled, on the "appointed day, Aurelius placed the crown upon his head in royal observance of the feast of Whitsun" ["die quae praedestinata fuerat imposuit Aurelius diadema capiti suo festumque Pentecostes regaliter celebruit"] (130.286-7). The key word in that is "*praedestinata*," lending credibility to Merlin's prophecies as being a fixed-future prediction with divine authority implied. Aurelius is the culmination of the appropriation of the island and

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[78] In an interesting development, a recent article claims that "The Neolithic inhabitants were descended from populations originating in Anatolia (modern Turkey) that moved to Iberia before heading north. They reached Britain in about 4,000BC." Selina Brace, Yoan Diekmann, "Ancient genomes indicate Population replacement in Early Neolithic Britain," *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 3 (2019): 765–771. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-019-0871-9. While this shows that perhaps myth retains some truth, since the true builders would have come by way of Africa, if this article is correct, but they probably were not giants.

[79] Bell, "Merlin as Historian," 21.

of history itself from its original inhabitants, the giants, its non-British residents, the Irish, and by

extension the Picts and Saxons, as "others" who have been marginalized in favor of a newly

constituted Britano/Roman lineage. The Latinization of the story itself is a linguistic

appropriation of the "little book" that supposedly informs the story in ways that Gildas and Bede

could not. Merlin has torn down the monument in order to (re)construct a legitimating history of

disparate peoples under one monarch. The transitive property of dominion seems to authorize the

Norman attempts to unify the island in Geoffrey's own moment. This episode acts as the moment

at which Merlin becomes the direct agent of the author in narrative construction. Merlin no

longer only predicts the signposts or interprets them. He has become more than a reader or a

sign. It is his *ingenium* that makes the narrative happen, which makes history possible from

Geoffrey's contemporary moment. Merlin becomes the agent of history and narrative

simultaneously, even the reflection of the author in the plot to conceive the ultimate hero, Arthur.

Merlin's predictions, related to Vortigern after the *Prophetiae* play out, with the next

structurally linked signpost being Aurelius's death. As Merlin foresaw, Vortigern's child,

Pascentius, has Aurelius poisoned. At the king's death, the famous dragon-sign occurs: "[t]here

appeared a comet of great size and brightness, with a single tail. Attached to the tail was a fiery

mass stretching out like a dragon, from whose mouth issued two rays, one of which seemed to

extend beyond the skies of France, the other towards the Irish sea and to end in seven smaller

rays" (132.352-4).[80] Merlin is called by Uther to interpret the sign, once again becoming the first

reader and then the writer guiding the audience's interpretation. The prophet interprets the signs

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[80] "…apparuit stella mirae magnitudinis et claritatis uno radio contenta. Ad radium uero erat globus igneus in similitudinem draconis extensus, et ex ore eius prodedebant duo radii, quorum unus longitudinem suam ultra Gallicana climata uidebatur extendere alter uero, versus Hibernicum mare uergens, in septem minores radios terminabatur."

to mean the death of Aurelius and Uther's rise: "It is you who are represented by the comet and

the fiery dragon beneath it. The ray that extends over France foretells that you will have a most

powerful son, whose might shall possess all the kingdoms beneath it" (133.368-71).[81] Once

again, Merlin is the reader and interpreter for his audience in the narrative and for the external

audience. The interpretation is another prediction that foreshadows the future of the book. This

episode shows a contingent reading in which Merlin's interpretation directly affects Uther's

actions and the outcome of the story itself.

Uther becomes the king after his brother's death and burial in the "Giants' Ring,"

entombed in the monument he had erected. The narrator tells us that "Remembering Merlin's

interpretation of the comet, he ordered that two dragons be cast in gold. From that time, he was

known as Uther Pendragon[...]because Merlin had used the dragon to prophesy his succession as

king" (135.393-5, 397-400).[82] If Merlin had not uttered the words, would Uther have thought to

have made dragons his standard? Merlin's prophecy has had an influence on how the action

turned out. Uther is conforming not only to Merlin's reading in this episode, but Merlin makes

new signs through Uther, who has the dragons commissioned. The vaticination becomes

materially constructed, tangible *and* symbolic. Merlin's words are being inscribed upon the

narrative and into the erstwhile "history" of the kings of Britain. Uther has fashioned symbols of

Merlin's interpretation of an omen invented by Geoffrey. Bell puts it more succinctly: "Merlin

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[81] "Te etenim sidus istud significat et igneus draco sub sidere. Radius autem qui uersus Gallicanam plagam porrigutur portendit tibi filium futurum et potentissimum, cuius potestas omnia regna quae protegit habebit."

[82] "Reminiscens autem expsitionis quam Merlinus de supradicto sidere fecerat, iussit fabricari duos dracones...Ab illo itaque tempore uocatus fuit Vther Penderagon...Merlinus eum per draconem in regem prophetauerunt."

transcends his role as a messenger of History to manipulate the very events that he foretells."[83]

This episode is the epicenter of the following romances of Arthur that use *HRB* and the

prophecies. It is the moment at which Uther comes to power and has the dragon chosen for his

sign. Remember that this is the very symbol that Merlin says will represent the usurper of the

White Dragon, the sign for the Saxon-Vortigern alliance. This recurring symbol unifies the

interplay among past, present, and future. The dragon is a symbol that Merlin has already

foretold will be the sign that he interprets to mean the house of Uther, which in turn produces the

very expression of it. Or, rather, two expressions—the golden dragons and Arthur. Merlin

interpretive skills and speech lead directly to Geoffrey's innovation. Merlin prophesies a moment

and fulfills it in the narrative, and then helps the author and audience reflect upon its historical

significance. This interaction of the character with the narrative is not only metahistorical, it is

metafictional. Merlin is Geoffrey's avatar, showing his audience that he is aware of his

manipulation of history.

Merlin's role as facilitator of Arthur's conception is well known and one of the most

consistently depicted aspects. This is a variation on the bed-trick, replacing Uther for Gorlois in

order for the king to spend "the night with Igerna and [be] cured[...]through the love-making he

had so long for" ["Commansit itaque rex ea nocte cum Igerna et sese desiderata uebere refecit"]

(137.506). It is through Merlin's meddling in this story that Uther is able to beget Arthur on

Gorlois's wife, whom he instantaneously desires. Merlin uses herbs to transform the king into the

appearance of Gorlois during the siege of the Duke's castle. Uther "entrusted the siege to his

retinue and himself to Merlin's herbs, being transformed into Gorlois" (137.499-500).[84] Geoffrey

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[83] Bell, "Merlin as Historian," 23.
[84] "postremo, commissa familiaribus suis obsidione, commisit se medicaminibus Merlini et in speciem Gorlois transmutatus est."

writes, "That very night she conceived the renowned Arthur, whose prowess afterwards secured his fame" (137.510-11).[85] It is not coincidental that the narrative voice assumes the role of prophet at this moment. Merlin and its voice are one and thus both within Geoffrey's purview. Merlin's skills have added lust to the story and transformed history, in a precursor to the themes of later vernacular medieval *romans*. The story of Arthur is by far the longest of one character, from background to demise in the whole *HRB*. Many aspects of *chansons de geste* may not have their origins in this book, but the first time they are applied to Arthur is in the *HRB*. Arthur not only proves himself in the twelve "historic" battles, like Badon Hill, as Nennius previously attributed to him, but he also goes on to conquer much of Gaul and even defy and defeat Roman emperors in combat. Prowess in battle is a prerequisite for any knight in a chivalric romance. As detailed in chapter four of this study, this aspect of Geoffrey's influence continues throughout the High and late Middle Ages in France and England.

Merlin is a reflection of Geoffrey's *ingenium* because he is the vehicle through which Monmouth inserts his most original invention. Merlin's prophecies are relevant to the narrative's internal logic and its external interpretation from Monmouth's contemporary moment, into the future. Geoffrey has predicted the climax and the end in the prologue. The Arthurian material may not end the *HRB*, but it certainly is the point of Monmouth's revisionist tendencies. Without the aid of Merlin, Geoffrey might have thought of another means by which to ensure the birth of Arthur, but he uses the prophetic and authorial roles to produce the hero through his avatar within the narrative. Geoffrey uses him to play with the historical limits with which he is presented, change the history, and to make the *fabula* his own. In other words, the bishop of St.

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[85] "Concepit quoque eadem nocte celeberrimum uirum ill Arturum, qui postmodum ut celebris foret mira probitate promeruit."

Asaph has unified both narrative and history through Merlin, producing one of the foundational episodes of Arthur's later legends that survive throughout the corpus of Arthuriana. But Monmouth's invention quickly becomes received tradition for the authors who follow and adopt Arthur and his histories and innovate the story for their own purposes. Those transformations will be the subject of chapter four. Next is an examination of the *Prophetiae Merlini* to demonstrate how the predictions of the past affect Geoffrey's contemporaneous historical moment and for generations to come, in which Merlin is not only an avatar but an author himself.

Chapter 2

The *Prophetiae Merlini*: Geoffrey's Present Predicted in the Past

In the previous chapter, Merlin fulfills the roles of historian, prophet, and author in the narrative, making and interpreting his own predictions and then fulfilling the prophecy of Arthur himself. Through his avatar Merlin, Geoffrey of Monmouth adapts his sources in order to reinvent history that was still recognizable, even in agreement with recognized sources in some details. However, the specifics are transformed to suit Geoffrey's continuing *agendae*. He utilized both authority and invention to produce history with an aggrandized hero for princes to emulate and to legitimate an empire. He established a link from the past to the present for his patrons by revealing his mostly Norman leanings. He uses a transitive property to show that if the Britons had been worthy occupants of the land, and the Saxons had supplanted them, then the Normans must be rightful heirs to the island because they defeated the English, the inheritors of the historical Angles and Saxons, and, supposedly, those who appear in *Historia Regum Britanniae*. His consistent pro-British stance against the Saxons only highlights that the Normans fulfill the return to British glory. Many of Arthur's and several other British kings' allies originate from the lands held by the Normans, their allies, and are the source of Geoffrey's family and patrons. The Normans derive their rule from two streams of *auctoritas*: conquest as a legitimating motif in the *HRB* and the eternal return of the British people throughout that text. Both of the routes toward lending the Normans an authorizing history depend upon reconstructing history in their favor. The idea of a unified island leading to eventual continental dominions, which were the imperialistic hope of Henry I and his successors for centuries, were seen as achievable goals supported by the "history" that Geoffrey (and his peers) invented.

As noted in the previous chapter, Merlin was directly involved in the renegotiation of history and the textual present. He interprets the dragons for Vortigern, predicts the king's death the rise of the house eventually known as the Pendragons, an interpretation that foreshadows and lends credibility to the rest of the history. Merlin's structuring prophecies all come to pass within the text, with a little self-fulfillment of his own in regard to Arthur's conception. The internal prediction of the ascendency of the "Boar of Cornwall" signals Merlin's role as prophet and author by predicting and fulfilling events that later occur. Merlin is Geoffrey's avatar, utilized to build legitimating prophecy into an invented *fabula* masquerading as *historia*. Merlin is also the historian and author who adapts the past of Stonehenge for the Pendragons' purposes while Geoffrey erects the past as a monument to the end goal of the literary projects of Henry I: Norman appropriation of British and English signs of authority in pursuit of their own legitimation. Thus, the process of revision, adaptation, and conflation of sources in order to authenticate history has roots in the methods employed in the Middles Ages. Popular and academic medievalisms imitate the process of re-writing as it was practiced in the Middle Ages: innovate the past to the current moment in recognizable, yet influential transformations. Monmouth adapts his sources to produce a character who at once shapes history and interprets it, virtually in the same breath. Merlin's effect on shaping the rewriting of the history internal to the narrative cannot be underestimated, but Merlin's impact on Monmouth's literary career and political present is tangible in the several iterations of the text and the subsequent proliferation of the *Prophetiae Merlini*. In this text—and its subsequent interpretations, rewritings, and translations into other languages—Merlin is utilized to construct the Britons' history and to structure all of British history up until Monmouth's moment. Many subsequent generations' apply Merlin to their own contemporary political and social situations through *ex eventu*

prophecy. In the process of these revisions, Merlin is transformed from avatar to an author himself, encompassing several of Bonaventure's roles of authorship: author, compiler, commentator, and scribe.

Only a brief discussion appears here on the influence of the Welsh prophetic tradition on the *Prophetiae Merlini* the "British book" and its role in the *HRB* having been explored in the previous chapter; its influence will be covered in more detail in relation to the *Vita Merlini* in the next chapter because of the correspondence between the *Prophetiae* and the *Vita* prophecies. That said, scholars since Giraldus Cambrensis have speculated that this version of Merlin is actually based on a different Merlin, Silvestris, or as he is sometimes named, Caledonius. Julia Crick suggests that "Geoffrey himself recognized the existence of two prophets called Merlin," and he explores Silvestris "in Latin verse at the end of his career."[1] While these statements are true, Geoffrey does not present them as different persons or characters. It is certain that Monmouth borrows from traditions that he does not name alongside Bede and Gildas, namely the British book from Walter Archdeacon. The Vortigern through Ambrosius section is in Nennius, whom Geoffrey mistook for Gildas, which is not the unnamed book. On this matter, Victoria Flood is correct when she states that "there are a number of Welsh prophetic texts that although recorded in later manuscripts are generally understood to pre-date Geoffrey in some form," as do many of the stories contained in the *Vita Merlini*.[2] This material is certainly more aligned with what might have been in that British book because it is all related to Myrddin, the

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[1] Julia Crick, "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition," in *Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, ed. Siân Echard (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), 67-82 (69). *Google Books*. https://books.google.com/books?isbn=0708323863.

[2] Victoria Flood, *Prophecy, Politics and Place in Medieval England: From Geoffrey of Monmouth to Thomas of Erceldoune* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2016), 24. https://books.google.com/books?isbn=1843844478.

Welsh version that many posit is the British proto-Merlin. Even the Arthurian section is unlikely

to be much more than Geoffrey's invention with some scant sources. Geoffrey specifically

claims, "I was surprised that[…]I had found nothing concerning[…]Arthur" (1.2-5). And

Monmouth implies that Walter's book helps him develop that character, but the Arthur of the

HRB is mostly *ingenium* with little *auctoritas* for the large portion devoted to Uther's son. The

PM and the *VM* are much more closely related to the Scottish, Irish, and Welsh material, as will

be demonstrated in chapter four. In any case, Geoffrey may have been aware of both traditions,

but he conflates the two when he adapted the boy Ambrosius from Nennius and called him

Merlin and then presents the *Prophetiae* as the work of the same character. And despite heavy

borrowings from Celtic/British oral and written sources for the *Vita Merlini*, Geoffrey, again,

twenty years after the *PM*, presents the same composite character. Merlin is both Latinate and

British in Geoffrey's depictions, translating between the two, just as Geoffrey is supposedly

translating all three of his works from the "authentic" British. Merlin then becomes the metonym

for Geoffrey's consolidation, making one character from two, a combination of all of his sources.

Monmouth adapts these materials in order to position Merlin at the nexus of times to continue

the epicycle of history, prophecy, and authorship reflected between the narrative and

Monmouth's own moment.

It is well-documented that the *Prophetiae Merlini* appeared separately, probably in 1135

before Henry I's death, before the *HRB* was completed.[3] It first circulates independently but later

is disseminated by being incorporated into many of the manuscripts of the *Historia*.[4] Geoffrey

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[3] See Julia Crick, *Historia Regum Britannie*: *Dissemination and Reception in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 1991). *Google Books*. Accessed June 27, 2015.

[4] Stephen Knight, *Merlin: Knowledge and Power Throughout the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 26.

claims that he interrupts the writing of the *HRB* to discuss how he had been ordered by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, to record the "prophecies of Merlin." Geoffrey says that he wanted "to finish the history first and only then set out this work so that the twin task should not make me less attentive to either" (109.10-12).[5] Yet, he says, "news of Merlin spread" before he had reached this point "in my history," and he was being pressed "to publish his prophecies by all my contemporaries, particularly by Alexander bishop of Lincoln" (109.1-3).[6] This may be a very significant moment since it is possible that the date of the *Prophetiae*—extrapolated from the idea that Orderic Vitalis had seen a copy sometime by late 1135—came near the end of Henry I's life or after his death. Why Alexander had insisted that this be published before the *HRB* proper is unknown, but one has to wonder if the current politics of the time influenced the decision. In a time when Henry I is dying or even already dead, the *Prophetiae* could be utilized for evidence of a claim as propaganda. As with the *HRB*, the dedication can be shown to resound within the political spheres of influence of his day. Alexander was the nephew of Henry I's "justificiar Roger, bishop of Salisbury," a position of power, though Alexander held no governmental office.[7] Perry and Caldwell also cite evidence that Alexander was a supporter of Matilda's claim.[8] It is possible that Geoffrey is looking for future patronage or personal advancement. Monmouth says that "Alexander bishop of Lincoln, my love for your noble person

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[5] "Proposueram enim illam prius perficere istudque opus subsequentur explicare, ne dum uterque labor incumberet sensus meus ad singula minor fieret."

[6] "Nondum autem ad hunc locum historiae perueneram cum de Merlino diuulgato rumore compellebant me undique contemporanei mei prophetias ipius edere, maxime autem Alexander Lincolniensis episcopus."

[7] Jean Blacker, *The Faces of Time* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 165.

[8] John J. Parry and Robert A. Caldwell, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 72-93 (73).

compelled me to translate from the British into Latin the prophecies of Merlin" (110.8-9).[9] Geoffrey reminds his audience that this is a translation of the "authentic" British, perhaps included in the gift from Walter Archdeacon. Given the extant Welsh material—detailed in the chapter three of this monograph—it is possible that Geoffrey received some of the prophecies from several British sources and Walter's book, a fictional metonym that allows a space in which Geoffrey may insert original material. The original sources are unknowable because there are no Welsh materials extant that predate Monmouth's *PM*. Geoffrey again uses a humility *topos* to underscore his "inadequacy" for the job. He again invokes his "rustic pipe" and "humble tune" and his "poor pen" as reasons for his unfitness to the task ["agrestem calamum meum labeliis apposui et plebeia modulatione ignotum [...]pauperi stilo"] (110.15-16). His unworthiness extends to all of his contemporaries who could do it better. Indeed, he compliments Alexander to the extreme, saying that he "could sing it best of all with your bold lyre" ["Tu solus es, quod non erubesco fateri, qui prae cunctis audaci lira caneres"] (110.19-20). Monmouth again calls upon a member of enfranchised nobility to inspire him "because of [his] political ability and high social standing."[10] Also, Alexander had shown some favor to Henry of Huntingdon, Geoffrey's explicit rival in the final lines of the *HRB*, and perhaps this motivated Monmouth to try to bend the bishop's ear more toward himself. However, the dedication of the *Vita Merlini* reveals that his efforts to impress Alexander probably failed. The combined efforts of the *HRB* and *PM* apparently yielded no titles or positions for Geoffrey of Monmouth. Yet his and Merlin's

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[9] "Coegit me, Alexander Lincolniensis praesul, nobilitatis tuae dilecto prophetias Merlini de Britannico in Latinum transferre."

[10] Blacker, *Faces*, 161.

reputation for prophecy lasts for the rest of the Middle Ages and even into the early modern period.

Victoria Flood and others have pointed toward the *Prophetiae*'s widespread reception and dissemination through the Middle Ages, saying that they survive "as a separate text in seventy-six catalogued manuscripts" outside of the many copies of the *HRB* that contain them.[11] Moreover, the *PM* is often paired with other Latin prophecies. Besides the Latin there are numerous instances of translations of the original and many other adaptations in Latin and romance languages of the High and late Middle Ages. The most contemporary readers, from whom there are several attestations, received the *Prophecies* variously. Orderic Vitalis says that "Men well read in histories can easily apply his predictions[…]who, still uncertain of their lot, await the future events that are ordained to them."[12] If he sees them at the beginning of the struggle for the throne, these prophecies and their interpretation could prove important to either side or both. Vitalis renders the first taste of application of the *PM* to historical events, giving his peers, generations, and modern academics "the standard interpretation of the 'leo justiciae' as Henry I, the Normans as the 'populus…in lingo et ferries tunicis.'"[13] Even the earliest readers of the *PM* could and did interpret the symbolic passages that were identifiable throughout history. Orderic is no doubt favorably interpreting for his patrons, their lineage, and their people. Even though it is accepted that Orderic reads the *PM* during the beginning of the Anarchy, both sides would claim their rights to the throne through Henry I. Orderic validates the *PM* and encourages the interpretation relative to his and Monmouth's contemporary history and even into their own

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[11] Victoria Flood, *Prophecy,* 19.

[12] Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of England and Normandy,* vol. IV, trans. Thomas Forester, (London: Bohn, 1861). https://archive.org/stream/ecclesiasticalhi04orde/ecclesiasticalhi04orde_djvu.txt.

[13] Blacker, *Faces*, 38.

future. Crick tell us that "[h]e recognized them as both spent prophecy—as a cipher for Insular history from remote antiquity to the present – and as live prediction, as a potential resource for men of power."[14] The reception of the *Prophetiae* was varied, however, with William of Newburgh notably calling them lies, Henry of Huntingdon omitting them, and Giraldus Cambrensis saying that he has the *real* prophecies of the *real* Merlin, since he was the first to interpret Geoffrey's figure as two Merlins, Silvestris and Ambrosius. He rejects Ambrosius for the Welsh prophet, Myrddin Silvestris, as being the true predictor. However, his prophecies have not survived, if they ever existed.[15] In subsequent generations, many, like Wace, feared to insert something so overtly political, but some, like John of Cornwall, adapt them for a specific political purpose. It is apparent from these different reactions that the *Prophetiae* at least made an impact on his literary and political moment and into subsequent generations. The relationship between Monmouth and Merlin is the link between the past and Monmouth's twelfth-century present.

Merlin becomes Geoffrey's avatar for connecting the fifth and sixth centuries to the twelfth by inventing a future located in the former timeframe from which to read the history of intervening centuries. In the *PM*, Merlin is not just predicting events within the structure of the text, as is seen in the *HRB*, nor is Geoffrey merely implying any favorable connections between the Britons and the Normans. Geoffrey is using Merlin—as many writers, commentators, and redactors will after him—to produce prophecies that will allude to his vision. Furthermore, the *PM* can be interpreted and modified in seemingly infinite ways to conform to the historical

[14] Julia Crick, "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition," 68.

[15] See Jean Blacker, "Where Wace feared to Tread: Latin commentaries on Merlin's Prophecies in the reign of Henry II," *Arthuriana* 6, no. 1 (1996): 36-52 (38); and Crick, "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition," 68.

present of dynastic and political struggle and succession in Britain from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries. Geoffrey mixes types of prophecies—varying biblical types with some astronomical—but adds his own style and meaning in what has become the known as "Galfridian" prophecy.[16] He has, again, successfully combined his *auctoritas* with his *ingenium* in such a manner as to produce an innovative category of prophecy that will engender a proliferation of subsequent exegesis. His unique style is borrowed from several sources, but never imitates them exactly, leaving room for interpretation, a hermeneutic space that makes several centuries of "Merlins" possible. Rarely does Geoffrey receive any credit for his invention throughout the subsequent centuries. Instead, the various Merlins, whether named Ambrosius or Silvestris/Caledonius, or some subsequent variant of both are used as *auctoritas* themselves. Merlin becomes the prophet and the author named by subsequent authors, compilers, and commentators. It will be demonstrated hereafter that Geoffrey's innovation works so perfectly that it elides the difference between him and his avatar, regardless of whether the various people revising it throughout the Middle Ages knew it was Geoffrey's work or not. Merlin becomes a real, historical personage and an author, an end goal that Geoffrey may have desired but whose extensive fame would have been difficult to predict.

In the twelfth century, the *Prophetiae Merlini* becomes an independent site for interpretation, glossing, translation, ripe for adaptations and additions to the text that range from Alain de Lille to John of Cornwall, the former commenting on Geoffrey's text which the latter modifies, invents, adapts, and borrows from elsewhere to construct a unique prophecy attributed to Merlin. Wace's redactors contradict his explicit wishes not to include the translated *PM* in his

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[16] Rupert Taylor coins this term in *The Political Prophecy in England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911). https://books.google.com/books?id=vBJaAAAAMAAJ.

Roman de Brut, a decision which contributed to the spread of versions of the prophecies in the

Brut traditions. Whether in the context of a *Brut* or independently, the prophecies almost always

transform Geoffrey's original or other previous versions into a new interpretative framework.

Versions of the *Brut* were not confined to Britain but made their way throughout Western

Europe. Surprisingly, Merlin's name survives being banned for nearly two centuries, only to

reappear during the Civil War and the Restoration of the seventeenth century. Again, a time of

conflict produces a need for Merlin's imposed interpretations of history through these

"*vaticinium ex eventu*."[17] All the while, most writers utilize Merlin's name directly, not

Geoffrey's. He has become the prophet whose predictions are always predicting the author's

moment until this strain of Merlin eventually dies out during the Enlightenment. The mystical

prophet is revivified by the medievalisms of popular culture and academics of the nineteenth

century, both of which speculated that "Druidism" was an ancient religion, a claim since shown

to have many inconsistencies. The New Age theology is probably the last strain of Merlin as a

true personage, prophet, and healer. For most of the other modern medievalisms, Merlin is some

form of the romanticized Merlin, to be addressed in subsequent chapters. The *PM* connects much

together that the *HRB* alone, the *Vita*, or the *romans* traditions cannot independently or

collaboratively corroborate. The commentaries begin the interplay of interpretations and

adaptations: the more prophetic voices, and the more versions of Merlin, the more the grand

narrative disintegrates to the point that, for instance, rival houses of the War of the Roses employ

Merlin for their own conflicting narratives, manipulating him for political, religious purposes.

Competing narratives are all using Merlin as an avatar for justifications of one sort or another.

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[17] Richard Traschler, "*Vaticinium ex Eventu:* Ou Comment Prédire le Passé: Observations sur Les Prophecies de Merlin," *Francofonia* (2003): 91-108.

He is the site of discourse, his name renowned, his word unimpeachable, or at least so the propagandists hope their audience will believe. First, we must explore Geoffrey's adaptations, appropriations, and his potential meanings first to understand the subsequent centuries of people posing as Merlin to justify whatever historical revision they wish to present with the hope of influencing their real historical future, not just the "history" of the ancient kings.

Reinventing Prophecy: Geoffrey's *Prophetiae Merlini*

Since the rediscovery of medieval Arthuriana in the early nineteenth century, Western academia has been keen to understand medieval literature in its contexts, both real and imagined. The prophecies of Merlin, whether Geoffrey's or subsequent versions, were on the backburner for much of the era, pushed aside for romances that became the basis for such works as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. However, when academics did catch on, they compared the *PM* to the animal prophecies in Daniel, messianic prediction in Isaiah, and eschatological vaticination in John's *Apocalypse.* The gospels unify biblical exegesis of *ex eventu* prophecies throughout medieval interpretive doctrine and practice. Early Christians began rereading into the prophets of the Hebrew Testament for signs of fulfillment of the prophecies about Jesus of Nazareth and recording them a century or more after the death of their savior. One need look no further than the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew for such a work of interpretive "prophetic" readings as applied to Jesus when an angel of God tells Joseph in a dream, "All this took place to fulfil what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emman′u-el (which means, God is with us)."[18] Several strategies are being

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[18] *Revised Standard Version* will be used for English translation. Biblegateway.com Accessed 15 December 2018. Latin will be noted, unless needed for demonstrative or interpretive reasons. "[H]oc autem totum factum est ut adimpleretur id quod dictum est a Domino per prophetam dicentem ecce virgo in utero habebit et pariet filium et vocabunt nomen eius Emmanuel quod est interpretatum nobiscum Deus." Matthew 1:22-3, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*

deployed in this passage that help elucidate the methods of the *PM*, its reception, and the contemporary hermeneutics in which Geoffrey would have been steeped. Joseph has just been told of the narrative future event of Jesus's birth to his betrothed Mary. The writer interrupts the narrative to tell us that this fulfills Isaiah 7:14, which he goes on to quote. The Gospel is written post-facto and is referring to a past event as fulfilling a pluperfect prophecy, from the writer's perspective. Prophecy begins with the end and posits it between the further past and the current moment in order to fit the salvation prophecy. The narrative temporal prophecies are the same as in the *HRB*, foreshadowing and justifying an event with words written in a distant future from the *Historia*.

Another narrative epicycle in the Gospels would be when Jesus predicted Peter's denial preceding his Passion. In Matthew 26, Jesus says that Peter will deny his involvement with Jesus three times before the cock crows the following morning. Peter protests that he would never deny Jesus but fulfills the prophecy. The narrative predictions are unverifiable but lent credence to Jesus's prophetic abilities, thus reaffirming Christians' belief in the truth of the story. The major difference in the passages of Matthew 1 and 26 is that the Book of Isaiah existed before the gospels. The prediction of Peter's denial is only internal to Matthew's gospel, and verified by the synoptic gospels. This type of prophecy is only relevant to the narrative. These and other internal prophecies are utilized to convince others of Jesus's divinity. The passage in the first chapter of Matthew involves an external source verifying the internal narrative, a much different, more complex task. These prophecies are intertextual and transhistorical. They are not just foreshadowing the plot of the Gospel, Matthew's angel justifies Mary's pregnancy ["totum

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(Stuttgart: German Bible Society). Accessed December 15, 2018, https://www.academic-bible.com/en/online-bibles/biblia-sacra-vulgata. Matthew is citing Isaiah 7:14.

factum est,"] a "perfect" event, in order that a pluperfect prophecy ["dictum est a Domino per

prophetam dicentem"] "might be fulfilled," ["adimpleretur"] an imperfect subjunctive in the

Latin. From the vantage of the "present" of his moment, Matthew constructs a logic that posits

Jesus's present in an epicycle of confirmation of the prophecy. Using Isaiah is a different type of

prophecy than those internal to the plot that read backwards from the present moment into

prophecies, commenting on their fulfillment in the present to demonstrate to the immediate and

future readers the legitimacy of a prophecy in terms of the present agenda. The author is using

Isaiah in order to frame Jesus as fulfilling this prophecy, thus proving his legitimacy as the

Messiah. The early Christians relied upon this external prophetic re-reading in order to legitimate

their faith to their neighbors for conversion reasons. Christianity is based on *ex eventu*

prophecies because it retroactively adapts the historical past to verify its agenda in the present

moment and throughout the last two millennia. Merlin's prophecies are fabricated post facto as

fulfillment of Geoffrey's historical moment. As discussed in the previous chapter, the credulity

lent to the prophecies delivered to Vortigern and the *PM* proper was immense, and Geoffrey

establishes their writings as "historical" and, thus, before the actual events in order to establish

their "truth." The temporal manipulation in the *HRB*, in which the story keeps verifying itself

through movements back and forth through the narrative, also verifies the *Prophetiae*. The

construction of Geoffrey's history hinges on Merlin's prophecies. Moreover, the *Prophetiae*

Merlini produces an innovative mode of interpreting the present and future from the past that

"predicts" Monmouth's twelfth-century moment. In order to read the *Prophecies of Merlin*, it is

useful to devise a key like the one developed for the internal narrative prophecies. However,

scholars have struggled with finding the right model.

Some believe that the symbols, as Taylor says, "in the book of Merlin were arbitrary."[19] This seems unlikely. In the *Prophetiae Merlini*, Geoffrey pulls from several traditions, but never fully adopts one mode. He rather adapts several to his own ends. Michael Curley divides the poem up into three sections: material contained within the *HRB*, material relating to the events between the end of the *HRB* and events that are contemporary with his writing, and prophecies that are supposedly related to the historical future from Geoffrey's time.[20] The narrative prophecies start with the passage of Merlin explaining the dragons to Vortigern, and the predictions are eventually fulfilled in the story. The beginning of the prophecies is grounded enough in the *HRB* and in recognizable events to Monmouth's generation. Those "successful" prophecies made by Merlin lend the rest of the *PM* enough dimension, the decoder key that Traschler says we are missing, the images "qui ne donnent prise," to bring context enough to the prophecies, until they disintegrate into indecipherable predictions.[21] It is at that point that the decoder becomes an asset in interpretation and propagation of commentaries and various revisions of the material. Geoffrey ventures into the political in the section after the *HRB* predictions and uses obvious referents to his nearer historical and almost contemporaneous political moment. Then he uses bestiary symbols that had potential biblical and heraldic meanings. The apocryphal material is present and works with the confusion of the stars adapted from Lucan for a mysterious finish, meaning the majority of the referents in the *Prophetiae Merlini* are indeterminable.

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[19] Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, 110.

[20] Jean Blacker, *Anglo-Norman Verse Prophecies*, 11.

[21] Traschler, *Vaticinium ex Eventu*, 91.

Some scholars point to the animal symbolism as Geoffrey's adaptive and interpretive models. Tatlock says that the "most recognizable (source) in the background is the Bible," and says Rupert Taylor "has made much of the animal symbolism [which is] extremely marked in the book of Ezekiel, Daniel and especially Revelation."[22] The seventh chapter of *The Book of Daniel* features a "lion with the wings of an eagle…a bear…one that looked like a leopard…" and "a fourth beast" that had ten horns. The eighth features a goat and a ram. The Apocalypse by John records when "[He] saw a beast [...]it had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns" and a dragon with "seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its head."[23] These and other animals are interpreted by Gabriel to Daniel, who functions as an omniscient commentary by the writer of the *Daniel*. The divine commentary here and later exegetical readings of *Daniel* and of the *Apocalypse* revolve around the animals being indeterminant kings who shall arise, persecute "God's people," and then succumb to the eventual return of the Son of Man, who will institute the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* uses some of the same animals and even borrows some of the imagery explicitly, as in the example of the girl who "will be killed by a stag with ten branches, four of which with golden crowns."[24] Even the red and white dragons, previously discussed, could potentially conjure biblical readings. The obvious referent would be, as Anne Berthelot points out, the Dragon of Babylon in *Apocalypse*, which adds a "dimension atemporelle marquée, mais en meme temps tout laisse à penser qu'elles sont à peu

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[22] J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1950)*,* 407. See *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard K. Emerson and Bernard McGinn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992) as a useful primer on exegesis on John's *Apocalypse*.

[23] Respectively: "et vidi de mare bestiam ascendentem habentem capita septem et cornua decem et super cornua eius decem diademata et super capita eius nomina blasphemiae." *Apocalypse* 13:1, and "et visum est aliud signum in caelo et ecce draco magnus rufus habens capita septem et cornua decem et in capitibus suis septem diademata." *Apocalypse* 12:3.

[24] Interficiet eam ceruus decem ramorum, quorum quatuor aurea diademata gestabunt..."(152-3).

près contemporaines des évenements."[25] The audience is simultaneously distant and close to the

events through the predictions. Geoffrey knew that his dragons would conjure the Apocalyptic

allusion in the minds of the Latin literati. But most scholars still agree with Taylor's perspective

on the subject when he posits, "Whatever likeness there is between Geoffrey's work and *The

Book of Daniel* consists in the use of symbols that seem to resemble each other. But the likeness

ends here, for the figures used in the prophecies are dissimilar. Both the prophecies of Merlin

and the Bible use animal symbolism, but in the former the animals when used are monstrous

personifications of abstractions; in the latter they are life-like and represent individuals."[26] For

example, the terrifying apocalyptic idea of the Dragon of Babylon sweeping the stars from the

sky would actually fit in the latter third of the *Prophetiae*, with its eschatological and

astronomical imagery. However, the dragons are internal prophetic symbols relevant only to the

struggle between Saxons and Britons in the *HRB*. Uther eventually becomes "Pendragon" after

his revelation interpreted by Merlin. His are golden dragons, but Wales has taken the red dragon

from the *PM* even into the twenty-first century in their flag. Merlin's dragons are not those of

John's prophecy. Michael Faletra believes that "[a]lthough clothed in the language of the

Christian apocalyptic, the *Prophetiae Merlini* remain rooted in the secular[…]Geoffrey's use of

the apocalyptic appears more aesthetic than anything else."[27] If his main goal is not

eschatological or even exegetical, then his upside-down world at the end is not an imitation of

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[25] Anne Berthelot, "Cartengles, Ferafus, Mingles et le Dragon de Babyloine: Les Variations du Bestiaire apocalyptique dans Les Prophéties de Merlin," in *Des temps et temps de la fin dans l'univers medieval* (Aix-en-Provence: la Presses Univ. de Provence, 1993): 53-65 (57). "…notable atemporal dimension, but at the same time allows everyone to think that they are close contemporaries of the events." My translation.

[26] Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, 26, 28.

[27] Michael A. Faletra, "Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Norman Colonization of Wales," *The Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000), 60-85. Accessed: June 27, 2018. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25096117.

John or Daniel, then there must be another purpose for it. Hypotheses have abounded, from the

first commentators to current academics. Geoffrey may use some of the same animals, but they

function differently in how the animals are chosen and how they are employed.

The most heavily used symbolic animals in the *PM* are the dragons, the wolf, the boar,

the worm, the lion and its cubs, an eagle, a fox, a snake, and a bear. Very few of these animals

appear in *Apocalypse*, while some appear in *Daniel*. Some of the animals mentioned have

corresponding constellations. It would be tempting to consider the animals in relationship to the

burgeoning astrological predictions beginning to become a genre by the twelfth century.[28] Indeed

the ending of the *Prophetiae* is, what Tatlock calls a "*götterdämmerung*," an eschatological

destruction of the known universe.[29] Everything in the poem becomes confused, including the

stars and rivers and many known objects. While it borrows elements from these several

traditions, there is no salvation through a second coming in this text and there is little

comprehensible historical value to the last third of the *Prophetiae*. He also points to the heavy

influence of Lucan's *Pharsalia* to demonstrate that Geoffrey "did not compose all of the

Prophecies" and that he "borrows for an impressive ending" (406). Indeed, the astrological

impetus had not been widely used before Geoffrey, but he adapts it to show a reversed world in

which "[t]he planets will look away from men and their customary paths" and "roots will change

place with the branches."[30] The world is flipped upside-down and the planets and stars are at war

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[28] Nicholas Whyte, "Astronomy and Astrology in the 12th century," Accessed 15 December 2018. http://nicholaswhyte.info/astrol.htm. Originally a conference paper, this article notes the influences and confluences of different types of astronomy and, thus, astrology, specifically in Western European literature.

[29] Tatlock, *Legendary*, 405.

[30] "Ab eis uultus auertent sydera et solitum cursum confundent." And "Radices et rami uices mutabunt" (158-9).

and the "twelvefold band that is home to the stars will weep to see its travelers run amok."[31]

Monmouth mentions that the zodiacal signs become unnaturally configured. The natural order of the world will be thrown into chaos, from the earth to the sky. If this portent is written after the death of Henry I, it might signify coming turbulence for Geoffrey's patrons. However, none of the other constellations are mentioned, let alone the animalian ones. And none of the animals would plausibly signify any contemporary person. Thematically, the astrological ending, indecipherable to modern readers, is more closely tied to the terrestrial disruption. In another section, the waters of Britain are turned into their reverse, as "the river Usk will boil for seven months" and the "springs of Bath will run cold and their healing waters will bring death" and the "Thames will turn to blood."[32] The geographical and aquatic references invite potential interpretation that commentators tried to associate with people or events throughout subsequent commentaries. However, it is through the reversals, both the Thames's change and the "roots to branches" transformations, which use of the verb "*mutare*," which make the normal into the abnormal, the natural into the unnatural. It is only through reversing expectations that the constellations and the rivers affect meaning. The animals are not party to these changes and transformations of the natural world or the apocalyptic disasters. Rather, Monmouth is adapting scriptural and astrological symbols to a new way of interpreting the corresponding animals. In the more obscure parts of the end of the *PM*, Tamar Drukker posits that "void of direct biblical quotations, these prophecies echo the prophecies of Scripture in their rich symbolic language."[33]

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[31] "Bissenus numerus domorum siderum deflebit hospites ita tanscurrere."

[32] "...et fluuius Oscae per septem menses feruebit...Frigebunt Badonis balnea, et salubres aquae eorum mortem generabunt...et Tamensis in sanguinem mutabitur." (150-1).

[33] Tamar Drukker, "Vision and History: Prophecy in the Middle English Prose *Brut* Chronicle," *Arthuriana* 12, no. 4 (2002): 25-49 (29).

There is a vague resemblance of the animals to biblical prophecies, but combined with different symbols for more contemporary meanings, which "has been dubbed Galfredian" using "animals to indicate kings and other nobles."[34]

The portions of the *Prophetiae* that correspond to his recognizable *HRB* referents, the kings of Britain, replace the hermeneutics of *Apocalypse* with a political key. This has tempted some scholars to interpret the animals in heraldric semiotics, pointing out that many of these creatures are common symbols.[35] Norma Lorre Goodrich suggests that the Lynx is "the totem of a northern Pictish clan near Inverness," though she does not offer a systematic approach to the potential heraldric readings. [36] Heraldric interpretations would be difficult to prove which symbols correspond to specific houses at the time of the writings and, thus, heraldry is not a useful method of systematically approaching the *PM*. Tatlock calls the task a "Serbonian bog" and asserts that the prophecies are "fanciful."[37] And Jean Blacker notes Southern's epithet, when he calls the majority of them "gibberish."[38] As Moranski puts it, "The fact that [Monmouth] chose to leave the vast majority of the animal symbols unidentified suggests he was aware of the possibility of multiple historical interpretations and of the powerful human impulse to particularize the universal. No animal can become so associated with a particular person that it

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Blacker, *Faces*, See footnotes on pages 123-146. As always, Goodrich's comments should be taken within a context of the larger discussion. Her rejection of many of the conventions proposed by Faral, Thorpe, Tatlock, and others are controversial, but hold possibilities that are worth noting.

[36] Ibid., 135

[37] Tatlock, *Legendary*, 403.

[38] Jean Blacker, *Anglo-Norman Verse Prophecies* (Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2005), 11.

cannot be used again."[39] After the predictions that supposedly relate to the year 1135, the animal

referents become more and more vague. Richard Traschler says that Daniel had "la voix de

Gabriel se charge de l'indentification de signes, tandis que les prophéties de Merlin gardent tout

leur secret, puisque aucune clé n'est donnée. Le lecteur reste seul face à un deluge d'images qui

sont visiblement à decoder, mais qui ne donnent prise à aucune interpretation en particulier."[40]

However, that freedom of interpretation should be embraced. Moranski agrees with Eckhardt's

analysis, which finds "no one orthodox exegesis" and its adaptability is the reason the prophecies

are interpreted, borrowed from, and re-adapted for the next six centuries for many different

people in many European dominions.[41] Indeed, the interpretive openness of the work lent itself to

immediate use and future commentary, but all medieval authors who revised, adapted, compiled,

or glossed the text used their own moment's perspective as their hermeneutic roadmap. The last

third of the *Prophetiae* is a hermeneutic dead end if it is approached on a historical, factual basis

because there is no way to unlock the meaning, even if there were one. If the *PM* appeared

separately from the *HRB*, as many manuscript examples attest, then there would not even be the

context of Vortigern's tower and the narrative prophecies of Merlin. However, if taken within the

context of the *HRB*, the internal prophecies provide an avenue for the *Prophetiae* to become

externally significant. Written as the intertextual context, Merlin's prophecies can be shown to

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[39] Karen R. Moranski, "The 'Prophetie Merlini,' Animal Symbolism, and the Development of Political Prophecy in Late Medieval England and Scotland" *Arthuriana* 8, no. 4 (1998): 58-68 (61).

[40] Richard Traschler, "Quelques Observations sur la prophétié médiévale," in *Moult Obscure Paroles: Études sur la prophétié médiévale*, ed. Richard Traschler (Paris: Presses l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2007): 7-18 (9). https//books.google.com/books?isbn=2840504804. Daniel had "the voice of Gabriel to take care of the identification of the signs, while the prophecies of Merlin protect all of their secrets, since another key is not given. The reader remains alone to face a deluge of images which is visibly decodable, but which does not give a foothold to another interpretation in particular." My translation.

[41] Caroline Eckhardt, *The* Prophetiae Merlini *of Geoffrey of Monmouth*: *A Fifteenth-Century English Commentary* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1982), 13.

signify Geoffrey's history and near-contemporary events. In the process, Monmouth's *ingenium* makes Merlin an *auctoritas* for future adaptations, perpetuating the innovations begun with Geoffrey himself.

Jean Blacker notes that "Julia Crick has found that the prophecies sections of more than twenty *Historia* manuscripts contain glosses relating to their contents to events in the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman periods and later, not including manuscripts in which the *PM* is glossed with events found in the *Historia* itself."[42] The conflation of history, present, and future—both fictional and historical—are predicated upon the vaticinations of Merlin. And Merlin's more vague references "invite his audience to an elaborate parlor game in whose deliberate ludic obscurities the resurgence of the Britons is both promised and dismissed."[43] Merlin is Monmouth's avatar in a game of political commentary that anyone who is able to interpret, can. Geoffrey produces his own game to see what interpretations others might infer and he has crafted an infinitely interpretable document within both fictional and actual historical circumstances, fitting both simultaneously.

Merlin's Prophecies: Epicyclical Key to the *Historia*

Geoffrey's firm referents within the context of the *HRB* are clear and even interpreted by Merlin in the text. The prophecies confirmed by the narrative of the *HRB* establishes Merlin's authority before Monmouth transitions into the predictions approaching his own near-contemporary era. Merlin in the *HRB* does not interpret them, but they are clear enough to elicit further credulity from the audience. This is an example of the *ex eventu* prophecies Geoffrey's

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[42] Blacker, *Anglo-Norman Prophecies,* 13.

[43] Faletra, "Matter of Britain," 76.

contemporaries and his future readers believe to be true throughout the Middle Ages, if it is possible to judge by its popularity and its subsequent re-adaptations. Moranski notes that "its popularity and longevity were assured through the never-ending promise of fulfillment. The kind of political prophecy that Geoffrey helped to develop served a variety of propagandistic purposes in the later Middle Ages"[44] The purposes will serve many different monarchs and even competing claims, based on the illusion of truth in the *Prophetiae*. Merlin's predictions are designed, as Traschler notes, "Pour convaincre les lecteurs que sous ces metaphors se trouve un sens masque[...]l'astuce consiste à avoir fait announcer par Merlin, contemporain du roi Vortiger et implanté au Ve siècle, des événements qui étaient, pour une bonne partie, extrapolés de l'histoire de l'Angleterre avant 1135."[45] In other words, the history and prophecy coincide both within the narrative and simultaneously with the rest of history, even into Monmouth's present moment and into the alleged future.[46] The audience is convinced by the connections within the text and then the commentators extrapolate their interpretations into the present, which opens many different routes for the commentator. The *Prophetiae* are specific in their references enough to be related to the *Historia* and then become somewhat recognizable into Geoffrey's present moment, but then they become opaque. In other words, Geoffrey leaves the door open for any and all interpretations; the obscurity of the majority of the *PM* is its greatest asset. Indeed, Geoffrey's invention from older sources of a unique type of prophecy is one of two of

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[44] Moranski, "'Prophetie Merlini,'" 61, 66-7.

[45] Traschler, "*Vaticinium ex Eventu*," 93. Merlin's predictions are designed, as Traschler notes, "to convince the readers that under these metaphors one finds a hidden meaning…the trick consists in announcing it through Merlin, contemporary of King Vortigern and implanted in the fifth century, events which were, for the most part, extrapolated from the history of England before 1135."

[46] For a cogent discussion medieval temporalities, see Gabrielle Spiegel, "Structures of Time in Medieval Historiography" *The Medieval History Journal* 19, no. 1 (April 2016): 21–33. doi:10.1177/0971945816638616. I am deliberately using unoccupied terminology in order to incorporate and differentiate from temporal conceptualizations like typology, Auerbach's *figura*, and synchronicity/diachronicity.

the most influential types for the rest of the Middle Ages.[47] He subsequently integrates the *Prophetiae* into the narrative of his *Historia*, while simultaneously making veiled references to his own contemporary struggles.

It is worth repeating some of Merlin's prophecies that coincide with the *HRB* as he later comments upon them. The dragons are the beginning of the prophecies that are in the *Prophetiae*. The warring white and red dragons are interpreted by Merlin as follows: "the white dragon, which symbolizes the Saxons whom you have summoned" will oppress the red dragon, which "represents the people of Britain."[48] Vortigern is a British ruler, as much as he has betrayed his people by inviting the Saxons to ward off the Picts and Scots. Merlin, as the first reader and interpreter of signs, adapts the signs that he sees to his audience, though he does not ingratiate himself to the king. After the white dragon has occupied the cave of the red, calamities will arise like rivers flowing with blood, but at last "the oppressed will rise up and resist the foreigners' fury. The Boar of Cornwall will lend his aid and trample the foreigners' necks beneath his feet" (112.38-40).[49] The dragons and the Boar forge the connection between Vortigern and the ensuing Pendragons and Arthur. Arthur is here portrayed by his birthplace, rather than his lineage. Geoffrey invents the story of Arthur's method of conception, Uther raping, as some might say, Igraine by means of Merlin's arts of disguise. Arthur is conceived in Cornwall by Igraine after Merlin's magical interference allows him to fulfill his own prophecy.

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[47] Moranski, "'Prophitie Merlini,'" 96. Moranski citing "R.W. Southern's 1970 lecture on prophecy and history suggests that between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries there were two primary strands of prophecy: the visionary, eschatologically oriented apocalypticism of Joachim of Fiore and Geoffrey's brand of secular political prophecy. Southern argues that in the thirteenth century Joachimism replaced the secular prophecies of Merlin as the dominant form of medieval prophecy."

[48] Reeve, *History*, "albus draco, qui Saxones inutasti significat. Rubeus uero gentem disgnat Britanniae" 112.35-6.

[49] "Praeuealebit tandem oppressa et saeuiciae exterorum resistet. Aper etenim Cornubiae succursum praestabit et colla eorum sub pedibus suis conculcabit.

Merlin authors the rise of the Pendragons as Monmouth's avatar in the *HRB*. The prophecy

delivered to Vortigern continues to predict the future of Arthur. The Boar will not only trample

the foreigners, as Arthur does in his twelve battles against the armies of the Saxons, but also the

boar "will occupy the glades of France" and the "house of Rome will tremble before his rage"

["et Gallicanos saltus possidebit. Tremebit Romulea domus saeuiciam ispius"] (112.41-2). These

lines predict Arthur's rise and subjugation of France and his challenge and initial defeat of

Emperor Leo in the ensuing books. This prediction also corresponds to the dragon-sign

interpreted on the day of Aurelius Ambrosius's death in the *HRB*. Merlin interprets one ray of

the comet that extends into France as a symbol of Uther's son.[50] The two prophecies are using

different symbols, but they are woven together by means of Merlin's vaticinations. These initial

dragons foreshadow the future of the future, further predictions of dragons. The white dragon

will recur after Arthur's demise and the "six kings" who succeed him have fallen. After these

kings, the *Prophetiae* continue to confirm the rest of the *Historia*, such that if it were read

alongside it, the predictions foreshadow post-Arthurian Britain and indicate Geoffrey's more

recent history.

The six kings correspond to the reigns of Constantinus through Kareticus in book eleven

of the *HRB*. After the six kings beyond Arthur, comes the "German worm" who is "raised up by

a wolf from the sea" mostly likely the Saxon who invites Gormund ["sed post ipsos exsurget

Germanicus uermis[…]sublamabit illum aequoreus lupus"] (112.44-5). As the *Prophetiae*

alludes and the *HRB* confirms, Gormund "will be accompanied by the forests of Africa" ["quem

Affricana nemore comitabuntur"] when, as the *HRB* later states, he commanded, "one hundred

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[50] See *HRB*, 132.349-54, 133.363-372. These predictions are fulfilled by the narrative in books nine and ten, roughly sections 158-176.

and sixty thousand Africans" [sexigenta milibus Affricanorum] to invade Britain (112.45, 184.126). The invaders "destroy religion," as confirmed later in the *HRB* ["Delebitur iterum religio"] (112.46). The "rain of blood" that "will fall" ["Pluet sanguineus imber"] in the *Prophetiae* corresponds with the levelling of Britain by Gormund in book eleven (112.50). The "red dragon will lament but will recover its strength" ["dolebit Rubeus sed emenso labore uigebit"] alludes to the interregnum between Kareticus and Caduan, who, once again, unites squabbling British potentates and drives back the Saxons (112.51). Upon Caduan's death, the Britons "embalmed his body with balsam and spices, and with great skill placed it in a bronze effigy, moulded to his size. This they placed, armed and mounted on an impressive bronze horse, high on London's western gate, as a memorial to his great victory and to intimidate the Saxons" (201.506-12).[51] This passage directly corresponds to the passage in the *Prophetiae* that says that he who restores the natives "will don a man of bronze and for many years guard the gates of London on a bronze steed" ["aeneum uirum induet et per multa tempora super aeneum equum portas Lundoniae seruabit"] (112.55-6). The image of the king literally enshrined for the ages, held up as a monument to the glorious past, is unmistakable and one of the most bizarre elements of folklore to be transmitted by Geoffrey in all his books. Civil war, famine, and pestilence are testified to by the *HRB* and the *Prophetiae* before the coming of the "rex benedictus," the last of the British rulers of the island: Cadualadrus, aka Cadwaladr.

Cadualadrus is named by Geoffrey, Bede, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* as the last British ruler before the Anglo-Saxons begin their age of dominance. The reascension of the Britons, predicted later in the *PM*, does not occur in the *HRB*. Cadualadrus inherits the kingdom,

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[51] "Cuius corpus Britones, balsam et aromatibus conditum, in quadam aenea imagine, ad mensuram staturae suae fusa, mira arte posuerunt. Imaginem autem illam super aeneum equum mirae pulcritudinis armatam et super ocidentalem portam Ludoniarum erectam in signum paredictae uictoriae et in terrorem Saxonibus statuerint."

but falls ill, and, without his leadership, it begins to fall to civil strife, compounded by a famine

and a plague. As in Gildas's *De Excidio*, the Britons are punished by God for their wanton ways

and civil discord. Cadualadrus is forced to flee back to Armorica. However, he never returns, and

it is partially Merlin's prophecies that are responsible for his abandoning his kingdom and the

reunification of the Britons. After a time, Cadualadrus decides to return, but he hears an angelic

voice that says, "God did not want the Britons to rule over the island of Britain any longer, until

the time came which Merlin had foretold to Arthur" (205.564-66).[52] Merlin never foretold such

an event to Arthur in the *HRB*, but Arthur is said to have been removed "to the Isle of Avalon to

have his wounds tended" ["rex Arturus letaliter uulberatus est; qui illinc ad sananda uulnera sua

in insulam Auallonis"] after battling Modred at the battle of Camlan (178.81-2). Monmouth

predicts the Arthurian return without it actually occurring in book eleven of the *HRB*. The return

of Arthur, in a messianic fulfillment of the Britons' hopes for the future, is predicted in the

Prophetiae, but only alluded to here at the end of the *HRB*. The angelic voice continues to tell

Cadualadrus that the Britons would regain the island "at the prescribed time," but not until the

Britons had returned his body to Britain (205.569-71)[53] However, Cadualadrus is still alive at

this moment in the *Historia*, trying to decide if he should return to Britain alive. He consults king

Alanus of Armorica, Salomon's nephew, and Alanus gathers "books of prophecies, uttered by

the eagle which prophesied at Shaftesbury, by the Sibyl and by Merlin[...]to see if what had been

revealed to Cadualadrus was consistent with the written prophecies" (206.575-7)[54] The narrator

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[52] A "uox angelica" says "Nolebat enim Deus Britones in insulam Britanniae diutus regnare antequam tempus illud uenisset quod Merlinus Arturo prophetauerat."

[53] "suae fidei insulam in futuro adeturum...nec id tamen prius futuram quam Britones, reliquiis eius politi, illas ex Roma in Britanniam."

[54] "Tunc Alanus sumptis diuersis libris, et de prophetiis aquilae quae Seftioniae prophetauit et de carminibus Sibillae ac Merlini...ut uideret an reuelatio Cadualadri inscriptis oraculis concordaret."

tells us that "When he found that they were in agreement" ["Et cum nullam discrepantiam reperessit"] (206.578). Alanus confirms for Cadualadrus that he should indeed heed the angel's words and not return to Britain. This is the last instance of events in the *HRB* that conform to an interpretation of vaticinations about the internal narrative. Cadualadrus remains in Rome and dies. His compatriots take up arms and harry the Saxons, but never regain dominion of Britain. The written prophecies of Merlin and the Sibyl confirm that the Britons would come back to inhabit their island again, but not right at that historical or narrative moment. That prediction is predicated partially on the "written prophecies" of Merlin. He is the authority by the end of the *HRB*, a metafictional move made by Geoffrey that further serves to arrogate credibility to both the *Historia* and the *Prophetiae*.

The authority that Merlin now possesses continues the epicycle of history, prophecy, and authorship, reconfirming Geoffrey's own version. Both Cadualadrus's and Arthur's bodies need to come back to Britain for them to reclaim the island, presumably from the current Normans. The one king will return alive, the other's corpse must be excavated in Rome, the holiest pilgrimage site in Europe, and returned to the island. The return narrative for the Britons is consistent with the rest of the themes of the *HRB*, which is full of exiles and returns, especially from Armorica (Brittany) and Normandy. Brennius, in book three, returns from Normandy to attempt to defeat his brother, though they reconcile; Maximianus claims Britain as his birthright, coming from Rome to Britain via conquering France; Constantine and Aurelius return from Armorica to defeat Vortigern; and Cadualo, similarly returns to defeat the Saxons. The *Prophetiae Merlini* retains the meaning of the ancient Hebrew prophets in exile, if not the exact style or details. This reading also highlights one of the most vivid ideas in the *HRB, Vita,* and *Prophetiae*: the epicyclical nature of history that confirms, in the medieval exegetical view, the

power of prophecy to make history. Merlin is the arbiter of the vaticinations delivered to

Vortigern that shaped the narrative of the rise of the Pendragons. However, at the end of the

HRB, the *Prophetiae* have become a separate text. Merlin becomes his own author, referenced by

Geoffrey, his original writer. Merlin's and the Sibyl's writings are consulted to ascertain the

veracity of the angel's words to Cadualadrus. Alanus determines that the angel's prediction of

return is consistent with the "sibylline" and Merlinic prophecies. Cadualadrus makes the decision

to remain in Rome—where he dies—based on the prophecies that structured the whole *Historia*,

but especially the Arthurian section. The *Prophetiae* are now interpreted as the work of Merlin,

not Geoffrey, by a character within the narrative. The implications of Monmouth eschewing

credit for the *PM* include establishing a provenance for the separate text confirmed by the history

that has been legitimated by the prophecies. Merlin's text, as Julia Crick puts it, "In the story,

then, Geoffrey, ostensibly depicting a reader in ancient times, modelled how future readers might

use his own text."[55] This hermeneutic model plays out in Geoffrey's contemporary moment, and

throughout the Middles Ages into the modern era. And Merlin's authority becomes the referent

point for the justification of much of history. The proliferation of this text, its variants, and its

commentary move Merlin from the invented avatar for one narrative to the *auctoritas* for many

narratives at play, including post-*HRB* actual history. Merlin becomes his own author, the basis

for constructing history, royal ascendency, and new adaptations and innovations.

Rewriting History through Merlin's Prophecies

The text becomes worthy of interpretation because of the fame of its supposed writer,

Merlin. His name lends credence to medieval writers, scholars, clergy and laity who continued to

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[55] Julia Crick, "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition," 67.

read, interpret, adapt, and revise almost *ad infinitum* these and other versions of the *Prophetiae Merlini* for the five hundred years after their initial writing. The academics who pick up the work in the nineteenth through the twenty-first centuries have long treated these vaticinations in the same way as medieval and early modern readers in their attempts to interpret their importance as well as their accuracy. Many may have modified them, but they are all seeking to interpret them, for whatever political purpose. The vantage point of the last century and a half of scholarship has led us in two directions: capturing the "original" meaning of the *PM*—verifying its "true historical" referents—and the reinvention of the prophecies and their historical counterparts. Since its inception, the *Prophetiae Merlini* has been read intertextually with the *Historia* as well as in the context of history. After the predictions surpass the narrative of the *HRB*, "[t]he *Prophetiae Merlini* are deliberately obscurantist. Although they do provide enough clear references to maintain internal consistency and to ground themselves at least to some extent in the real world, such concrete (or somewhat concrete) references also establish the tantalizing basis for a more comprehensive reading of the prophecies in all their vagaries."[56] The *PM* establishes Merlin's *auctoritas* upon the basis of its being "proven" through the *HRB*. Once that authority is established, Geoffrey continues to the intervening four centuries between the death of Cadualadrus and his contemporary moment. Many of the allegorical symbols and allusions "not only seem transparently allegorical but were interpreted as such and fairly unanimously by twelfth-century interpreters."[57] From its first readers until the present, a standard reading of the post-*HRB* section has been handed down, though differently explicated in small details at times. From these details a hermeneutical approach to the book, the commentators, and the adaptations

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[56] Faletra, "Norman," 75.

[57] Ibid.

was established. Merlin becomes the interactive avatar for generations of political "prophets." It may not matter if the prophecies are "true," in the purest sense of the word. It may only matter if people think that they are true. Caroline Eckhart remarks, "The interplay of the *Prophetia* [sic] *Merlini* interpretations with real events is part of the recurrent cycle. Real events provide material for the elucidation of the prophecies, and the prophecies provide impetus to real events."[58] In other words, the interplay of history, as it unfolds, and the *PM* epicyclically inform one another in order to structure conceptions of life and of history.

The precedent for such an approach is based in the medieval glosses and interpretations. Rupert Taylor's work is based at least partially on Alanus de Insulis and later medieval rewriters and commentators of various *Prophetiae*. Both are trying to invest the original with some meaning that may or may not be present and have, to assert its veracity *in situ*, and, finally, to relate it to their own moment and place. As in the *romans* and postmedieval depictions, Merlin is both *in* the discourse and the *site* of discourse itself. He mirrors the functions of the person holding the pen and commenting on the text. And, just like current medievalisms, the more people to adapt Merlin, or adopt his disguise, the more Merlins, the more multiplicity of voices, and the more often his story is told over time, then the less unity of narrative. The interpretations of the *PM* are a tradition of adaptations of authorities centuries old. The readings of them are a process that is itself a medievalism that extends back to the twelfth century. Layered readings of Geoffrey's *PM* and other *PM*s will further enhance an understanding of not just what the different iterations mean, but how different readers construct meaning over time.

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[58] Eckhardt, *Prophetiae Merlini*, 14.

While Jacob Hammer notes that "the number of scholars who essayed to interpret and elucidate the obscurities of the *Prophetia* is, considering the immense popularity of the *Prophetia*, disappointingly small," there is the encyclopedic *Explanatio* attributed to Alanus de Insulis, an anonymous commentary, Matthew of Paris's partial commentary, and "annotations of varying extent, written either by the original scribes or by later readers."[59] As always, with medieval manuscript traditions, a lack of evidence does not necessarily mean non-existence, but rather potentially non-extant. The only extant complete copy of Alanus's work was not recovered until 1603 when it was discovered in Frankfurt, Germany. However, the *PM* did inspire commentary in its own time and in immediately subsequent generations. Crick places Alanus's commentary c. 1170 and Stephen of Ruoen's *Draco Normanicus* no later.[60] The most interesting aspects of these commentaries is that both authors read the *Prophetiae Merlini* into their own times, even though the *PM* was finished by 1135. Rouen is using the prophecies as justification for history, as Irene Harris notes: "At each signal point in this retelling, the prophet Merlin speaks. Stephen uses the prophet's words to gloss the succession, so that it is elevated above the contingent forces of history. To present the story in this light would have been flattering to King Henry II, but it also ties his destiny to the fate of the Normans."[61] Even from the small sampling

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[59] Jacob Hammer, "A Commentary on the *Prophetia Merlini*," *Speculum* 10, no. 1 (1935): 3-30 (3-4). www.jstor.org/stable/2848232. Alanus's and Matthew of Paris's texts are unavailable for this study.

[60] Crick, "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition," 70. Crick states that "interpretation in the *Draco Normanicus* refers to the death of King Stephen in 1154. "See also Claire Wille, "Le Dossier des Commentaires Latins des *Prophetie Merlini*," in *Moult obscures paroles: études sur la prophétie médiévale* ed. Richard Traschler (Paris: Presse de l'Univeristé Paris-Sorbonne, 2007), 167-184 (173). Wille demonstrates that "les dernièr allusions historique dans le commentaire d'Alain se trouvent à la prophétie et se referent à des événements de son époque, qui ont eu lieu pendant le règne d'Henri II Plantagenêt en 1170." My translation: "the final historical allusions in the commentary of Alanus found in the prophecy refers to events of his epic, which have been placed during the reign of Henry II Plantagenet in 1170."

[61] *Irene Harris*, "Stephen of Rouen's *Draco Normanicus*: A Norman Epic" in *The Epic in History*, ed. Lola S. Davidson, Soumyendra N. Mukherjee, and Zdenko Zlatar (Sydney, 1994), 112–24. https://books.google.com/books?id=QtsZAQAAIAAJ.

size in the Latin commentaries, it is apparent that there was an immediate propensity, not surprisingly, to interpret the *PM* through the lens of contemporary events. Michael Faletra agrees with this by saying, "If prophecy is[…]history told backwards, then the composition of prophecy and of prophetic commentaries in the Middle Ages is certainly as politically charged as the writing of history."[62] Each author and commentator is displaying his agenda in his work as much as Geoffrey did in his. And, just as in all of Monmouth's works, Merlin is integral to the interpretations. The *ex eventu* prophecy hermeneutics is propounded as though Merlin were the author. Geoffrey, even though he is the actual author, receives little credit as the prophet's progenitor. As shown in the ending of the *HRB*, Geoffrey endorses Merlin's authorship. It is difficult to tell whether this is deliberate on the part of the commentators, but their willingness to attribute the prophecies to Merlin demonstrates that he was at least a sign that the commentators filled with authority, and thus, significance.

Subsequent transcriptions of Monmouth's *Prophetiae* became equal in significance to the Sibyl, John the Baptist, and the Hebrew prophets, such that many versions "were intensely glossed, both internally and marginally, and some were formally laid out as a *lemmata* to take an interlinear and marginal gloss" showing that the Latin version was an "authoritative text worthy of exegesis."[63] This treatment of the *PM* indicates that the texts were accorded a respect approaching other prophetic works of its time. The seriousness with which the glosses were undertaken by all parties involved further enhances the authority granted to the fictitious prophet. As Monmouth adapted his sources, the commentaries innovate Merlin's prophecies to lend

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[62] Michael A. Faletra, "Merlin in Cornwall: The Source and Contexts of John of Cornwall's Prophitia Merlini," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 111, no. 3 (July 2012): 304-338 (306). doi:10.5406/jenglgermphil.111.3.0304.

[63] Crick, "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition," 70. She cites Matthias Kaup's *De Prophetia Ignota,* which is unavailable for this study.

credibility to their interpretations. Merlin is the authority invented from Geoffrey's adaptations.

These readings of the text often overlap and, sometimes, build upon each other. In the

manuscript analyzed by Claire Wille, the interlineal gloss and the marginalia discourse upon the

same obscure passage: "Then the thumb will be rolled in oil from the first to the fourth, from the

fourth to the third and from the third to the second" ["Exin de primo in quartum, de quarto in

tertium, de tertio in secundum rotabitur pollex in oleo"] (115.97-9). Claire Wille says that the

writer of the interlinear interpretation believes the fingers represent the peoples who inhabited

the island and the thumb stirring the oil is the power itself passing to each group in turn

according to destiny. On the other hand, the marginalia, which she posits as a separate

commentator, elaborates and calls them the four peoples that Henri II then ruled.[64] Different and

even expounding readings on the same text are particularly useful for showing that Merlin's

words, since he was the ostensible prophet, allowed for discourse among multiple interpretations.

This layering of interpretation and the implied credulity lent to the *PM*'s alleged provenance

demonstrate that Merlin is part prophet, part historian, and now author. His *PM* is now the basis

upon which a discursive game is played, which continues through so many iterations. The

implications are that the Geoffrey may have shaped history in one way, but each hand in the

margins reinterprets the *Prophetiae Merlini* and history toward an ending closer to their own

historical moment, each one using Merlin as an avatar to manipulate the discourse between

history and the future.

Reading the Present in the Past: Commenting on the *Prophetiae Merlini*

In the *Prophetiae*, the death of Cadualadrus marks the point at which the time between

the end of the HRB and Monmouth's own is rapidly becoming historical fact. Since Merlin is the

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[64] Wille, "Dossiers," 173: The "premier commentaire…qui date du milieu du XIIe siècle, attribute les nombres…aux quatre peoples qui habitant l'île."

first interpreter of his own prophecies, the commentator is already aligned with him because he is borrowing from the *auctoritas* "annexed for the purpose of clarifying" the *Prophetiae*.[65] The post-*HRB* material needs a bit more skill at glossing; the several commentaries use the *HRB*-related key and apply it to the intervening history between Cadualadrus and Geoffrey's own time. After the sixth century, the time for the "red dragon" to "languish at the pool's edge," ["stagni languebit Rubeus"] the pool, here standing for Britain itself, or perhaps political power as a metaphor (112.65). The Britons have been displaced politically, replaced, not by the white dragon, but the German worm. Indeed, the white dragon has "a limit[…]beyond which it cannot fly" and "for a hundred and fifty years it will endure harassment and submission, but for three hundred it will be in occupation" (113.66-7).[66] The nearest antecedent is "German worm," which—if it were a "wyrm" as "uermis" is the Latinate of the Germanic word for "serpent"— might have its flight constrained. The bronze king is Cadualan, as previously mentioned, and attested to in commentaries published by Jacob Hammer.[67] Hammer uses several manuscripts of "partial commentaries" dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries that were indicative of typical readings that had been handed down through the intervening years. The interlinear commentary in Ms. Cotton Claudias B VII indicates that the pool "stagnum est Britannia" [the

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[65] Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 94.

[66] "Terminus illi positus est quem transuolare nequibit; centum namque quinquaginta annis in inquietudine et subiectione manebit…" Geoffrey borrows the predicted time frame directly from Gildas. During the council of Britons, Vortigern's decision to invite the Saxons to help fight the Picts is excoriated by the sermonist as foolish. He describes, with the vantage of history, the invaders as a "A multitude of whelps [that] came forth from the lair of this barbaric lioness…with their sails wafted by the wind and with omens and prophecies favourable, for it was foretold by a certain soothsayer among them, that they should occupy the country to which they were sailing three hundred years, and half of that time, a hundred and fifty years, should plunder and despoil the same." Gildas's *On The Ruin of Britain, trans.* J. A. Giles and T. Habington (London: Bohn, 1842), 19. https://books.google.com/books?id=bxI5AQAAMAAJ.

[67] Jacob Hammer, "A Commentary" (1935): 13.

pool is Britain] and that the "alieno semine" ["foreign seed"] is "Anglorum," ["of the Angles"]
but also the marginal commentary adds "scilicet, Saxonum, Iutorum" ["meaning of the Saxons
and the Jutes"] indicating all the Germanic tribes whose descendants became the rulers of the
Anglo-Saxon period.[68] The *PM* says next that "Exin" ["Then"]—the commentary adds "non
ante" ["Not before"]—"coronibatur Germanicus uermis" [the German worm will have been
crowned"] and the commentator in Cotton interprets "diademate Britanniae, Egberto principe vel
Athelstano" ["the crown of Britain, Egbert prince after Athelstan]. Hammer believes the gloss in
Biblioteque Nationale, Latin Fonds 6233 is based on a twelfth-century original though the text
dates to the fourteenth century.[69] The intervening centuries of Anglo-Saxon dominance are
somewhat truncated in the *Prophetiae*, but the commentators make sure to interpret them for
their audiences. These glossers have a function in the authorship model of the Middle Ages, a
field pioneered in Galfridian prophecy by Merlin, the author.

The next part of the *Prophetiae* is where the past begins to approach more recent history:
Merlin predicts that "there will be gilding in the temples, nor will sword blades cease to be busy.
The German dragon will be hard put to keep possession of its caves" (113.69-70).[70] Both of
Hammer's commentaries interpret the passage to mean the rise of the Danes under Svein
Forkbeard and, later, his son Cnut, the former holding the throne of England very briefly, and his
son ruling for over a decade and a half. Both commentaries use the metonymic reading, but the
Cotton explains that it was the custom of Danes to hang golden armaments in the churches, thus

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[68] Jacob Hammer, "A Commentary on the *Prophitia* [sic] *Merlini*," *Speculum* 15, no. 4 (1940): 409–431 (416). www.jstor.org/stable/2853460.

[69] Hammer, "A Commentary" (1935), 21.

[70] "Erit deauratio in templis, nec acumen gladiorum cessabit. Vix obtinebit cauernas suas Germanicus draco."

the interpretation. The German dragon "will prosper for a time, but Normandy's Tithe will injure it" ["Vigebit tandem paulisper, sed decimation Neustriae nocebit"] (113.71).The translation of "decimatio Neustriae" matters quite a bit, whether it means "tithe" or "decimation." It could be a reference to the killing of Edward the Confessor's brother Aelfred by one of Harthacnut's earls, which included a "decimation," of every tenth man in the Anglo-Saxon invasion force.[71] The Fonds commentator gives a history lesson. He renders "sed decimatio Neustriae" as Godwin, the Duke, father of Harold Godwinson because "Godwin, king of Northumberland destroyed the might of Neustria, and he perished while decimating the Normans."[72] This commentator reads "the decimation of Neustria" and the coming of the Normans as different occurrences. Rupert Taylor reads it a third way: the "decimation of Neustria" is the invasion of William, the iron-clad people are an elaboration of the decimation. This episode bridges the gap into the coming of the Normans. And this same gloss reads "Populus namque in ligno" as the Normans when it says, "here begins the reign of the Normans of whom Duke William will subjugate the overwhelmed Angles with a tenth of the men.[73] These different readings demonstrate the interpretative ambiguity of the *Prophetiae*, an asset to commentators and later redactors because they can be revised, rewritten, and reinterpreted to conform to the author's and his patron's agenda.

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[71] It may be that the commentator and Geoffrey are remembering the murder of Aelfred, brother of Edward, later named the Confessor. It is said that Godwin blinded Aelfred and killed every tenth man when the latter invaded in 1036. The reference to Neustria, or Normandy, is to Emma of Normandy, wife to both Aethelred and Cnut, and whose son by him, Harthacnut, was the very man Edward and Aelfred had come to defeat when they invaded from Normandy. It is Emma's brother, Richard I of Normandy who is William the Conqueror's grandfather, whence he derived his claim, since that made him close cousins to the childless Edward the Confessor. See Peter Rex, *King & Saint: The Life of Edward the Confessor* (The History Press, 2008), 34-5.

[72] Hammer, "A Commentary" (1935), 11.

[73] "hic incipit regnum Normannorum quorum dux Willelmus cum omni decimo homine supervenientes Anglos subiugavit."

Faletra sums up the mood of the passages approaching the twelfth century, saying, "Geoffrey seems to revel in current affairs, recalling specific happenings in the reigns of the Norman kings from William the Conqueror to Stephen."[74] The *PM* continues by saying that the "seed of the white dragon will disappear from our gardens and the remnants of its generation will...bear the yoke of unending slavery" (113.74-5).[75] The commentaries and most scholars agree that this is the subjugation of the Anglo-Saxon kings and people after the coming of William. He approaches and becomes current with the nearest moments to the *PM* in the following predictions, which are some of the easiest to read and universally accepted. Taylor reads the two dragons as "William the second in England and Robert the Second in Normandy."[76] He is following an established reading that dates to near-contemporary glosses. Orderic says: "For clearer than daylight" the prophecies are thinking of "the two sons of William which run, 'There shall follow two dragons'–that is licentious and warlike lords—'of whom one will be slain by the dart of envy'—that is William Rufus by the arrow while hunting—'the other' [that is Duke Robert] will return beneath the shadow of a name."[77] Vitalis and modern scholars are performing the same act of interpretation: finding ways to fit history into the prophecies and to use the prophecies to guide history. The reading has come down to us through the centuries and bears the resemblance. To wit, Robert, son of William the conqueror was given Normandy and his brother William Rufus was given Britain upon William the Conqueror's death in 1087. Robert had rebelled against their father while he lived and challenged Rufus in 1088. This interpretation seems to take advantage of a possible conflation of circumstances. Rufus was

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[74] Faletra, "Normans," 75.

[75] "Germen albi draconis ex ortulis nostris abradetur, et reliquae generationis eius decimabuntur."

[76] Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, 10.

[77] Blacker, *Faces*, 229. Footnote 169.

killed on a hunting trip under mysterious circumstances, but the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle notes

that he was shot "by one of his own men" because, as the *Chronicle* writer believes it is

retribution for evils like over-taxation and that he "over-trampled the churches."[78] Within days,

Henry seized the throne while Robert was returning from crusade, arguing his right through

porphyrogenitur.[79] Robert attempted to oust Henry but failed. Henry I eventually invaded

Normandy, imprisoned Robert Curthose until his death, and subsumed Normandy into his

holdings. This would point to the "lion of justice, whose roar will set trembling the towers of

France" because he occupies large swaths of northern France. Also, this moment seems to have

heraldric significance since the Plantagenet coat of arms includes the lion later in the twelfth

century, possibly as early as Henry II. Both commentators clarify that this is "Henricus," and

calls him "Beauclerc" as he was sometimes known. Orderic testifies to this reading, too. The

"justiciae" can only be seen as an honorific given to the ancestor of the current monarch and/or

his children. Henry I "had an important" reputation "as a strong king who stabilized the nation's

borders" and "subjugation of threats to Norman rule in England."[80] It is even more apparent to

whom the lion is referring when Merlin "predicts" that the "lion cubs will become fish." The

White ship disaster is almost always interpreted, as Fonds 6233 comments, "videlicet Willelmus

tertius et alius de concubina natus" ["This is William III (Adelin) born of the concubine"],

continuing their predilection for pointing out illegitimate births, having referred to William as

"notho" or "bastardo" at least twice. The words "aequoreos pisces" are glossed by saying: "quia

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[78] *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. and ed. M.J. Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1996), 235.

[79] *Henry I*, ed. C. Warren Hollister and Amanda Clark Frost (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 105.

[80] Flood, *Prophecy,* 27.

submersi in mari piscibus esca fient vel de eorum cadaveribus pisces."[81] This an amazing bit of interpretation and natural philosophy. He calls the tragic loading of that ship "esca," either "food" or "bait," for fish and, because they were swallowed by the fish, they became fish. Instead of "you are what you eat," he offers "you become what eats you." This is the cycle of life as seen by an educated man in the thirteenth century.

Hereafter, Merlin seems to "predict" the "Anarchy," discussed in chapter one, and potentially related events. And here flourish interesting ideas of what Geoffrey wrote and what was addended to his work. Flood claims that "Originally there appears to have been no direct reference to Henry I's death," but versions of the manuscript that date to around 1147 mention it.[82] Also, if the earliest copy is 1135, most of the predicted events in Neil Wright's edition are post-facto interpolations because he uses many texts that post-date Geoffrey's original. Geoffrey could have and probably did revise it, but that is speculative at best. However, the *PM* moves into current events here that are composites of later texts that may have been influenced by other comments in their reading. Matilda's claim to the throne, represented as "aquila eius" ["the eagle"] has been discussed and is here glossed, almost universally, here in Fonds 6233 it says, "id est, filia eius Matildis, scilicet imperatrix Romae" ["that is, his daughter Matilda, the Empress of Rome"].[83] He lends here the title of Imperatrix of Rome, a title acquired by Matilda's first husband's status as Holy Roman Emperor. When the *Prophetiae* says, "Apri igitur dentibus accinctus" ["Girt thus with the teeth of the boar"] the "helmeted man," it is no mistake that Geoffrey mentions the boar again (114.90). Geoffrey means the Boar of Cornwall to be Arthur;

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[81] Hammer, "Commentary" (1935), 16. My translation: the cubs are "submerged in the sea with the fish, who make food out of their cadavers."

[82] Flood, *Prophecy*, 26.

[83] Hammer, "Commentary" (1935), 16.

he and Merlin say so. The reason is not lost on the Fonds 6233 commentator. He names Arthur

as the boar, the ferocious man, and then compares Stephen to King Arthur.[84] The commentator

seems to be saying that Stephen arrogated to himself the reputation of Arthur because he knew

"it is not praiseworthy nor prudent to conquer the unarmed." In other words, Stephen is the new

Arthur because he prevailed against worthy opponents, not unarmed civilians. Stephen is an

honorable king and this commentary favorably compares him to the "historical" king who

defeated emperors and invaders. This example demonstrates the interaction of historical

interpretation and the prophecies and the *HRB*. Arthur has not even been born at this moment in

the *HRB*. But the reading retroactively places Arthur's glory upon Stephen because the events of

the *HRB* and of the twelfth century have already occurred, meaning the glosser also has another

layer of epicyclical interpretive logic to it. The *PM* predicts Arthur's conquest, and it is used to

justify a favorable reading of the man who essentially stole the throne from Matilda, despite

Henry I's specific instructions and oaths made by all, even Stephen.

After the reign of Stephen, the prophecies become vaguer and increasingly deal with a

"future" that would have been speculative for Geoffrey. The return of the Britons comes after the

"Norman section" of the *PM*. The passage says that because of a lynx

> Normandy will lose both islands...and then the natives will return to the island[...]
>
> Cadualadrus will summon Conanus and make Scotland his ally. Then the foreigners with
>
> be slaughtered[...]and the hills of Brittany burst forth and be crowned with Brutus'[s]

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[84] Ibid., 17. "ad modum Arthuri, ferocis hominis, qui aper supranominatus fuisse perhibetur…enim Stephanus postquam heredem Henrici maioris in regnum secum recepit omnes excellentiores virorum famam galeati militatur, id est, non inermis laude et probitate ante mortem superavit." My translation: "In the fashion of Arthur, that ferocious man, who was called the boar. For Stephen the heir in reign after Henry I greatest of men himself waged war helmeted, that is, for praise and probity, he conquered those not unarmed before death."

diadem. Wales will be filled with rejoicing and the Cornish oaks will flourish. The island

will be called by Brutus'[s] name and the foreign term will disappear (115.106-14).[85]

This passage is a conflation of several fictional and historical figures and events. It seems to say

that Monmouth's contemporary Norman-descended rulers will be overthrown. The "natives" are

presumably the Britons that have been exiled, perhaps as a reference to Celtic peoples who

migrated across the Channel to Brittany (Armorica). The reference to Cadualadrus and Conanus

is an interesting conflation. Both are names of rulers of the Britons after Arthur. But, Conanus

could be Conanus Meriadocus, the defender of Britain who retired to Scotland after his king,

Octavius, gave Britain to Maximianus, a Roman senator of British and Roman heritage instead of

Conanus. Later in book five, Maximianus gives Conanus France in exchange for his loyal service

and in recompense for having attained the crown that Conanus had sought. Once France was

subjugated, Maximianus ordered "one hundred thousand common people and thirty thousand

knights" be "spread throughout all the regions of Armorica, making it a second Britain" (86.350-

4).[86] The connection between Britain and Brittany is written into the *Historia* and is often

repeated as a site from which the Britons return to claim their dominion over usurpers, including

Aurelius Ambrosius and Uther over the betrayer Vortigern, to whom the *Prophetiae* are

supposedly told. And Arthur conquers Normandy and all of France later in the *HRB*. The

Conanus and Cadualadrus that come after Arthur do not fit the timeline since the prophecies

have already covered their lifetimes before the coming of the German worm and the white

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[85]"Per illam enim utramque insulam amittet Neustria[...]Cadualadrus Conanum uocabit et Albaniam in societam accipet. Tunc erit strages alienigenarum[...]tunc Amorici montes et didemate Bruti coronabuntur. Replebitur Kambria laeticia, et robora Cornubiae uirescent. Nomini Bruti uocabitur insula, et noncupatio extraneorum peribit."

[86] "...centum milia plebanorum...triginta milia militum...distribuit eos per uniuersas Armorici regni nationes fecitque alteram Britanniam."

dragon's dominance. Cadualadrus ends the British story of their kings much before any of the events that happen. It seems as though the *Prophetiae* are circling back to the end of the *HRB* and then predicting the fall of the Normans.

Read from this perspective, it seems that Geoffrey is predicting the fall of the very people patronizing his work. The Britons' return would mean that the Welsh would have to rebel against the Normans, perhaps in conjunction with the Scots or the Bretons. One wonders how this *could* be favorably received by a clerk so closely tied to the Norman aristocracy. However, this does align with Geoffrey's agenda if his oeuvre is considered as a whole. Faletra does not believe that Geoffrey wishes the rise of the British because "although they occasionally make clear references to some kind of pan-Celtic alliance or British resurgence, informed readers will realize that the exploits of the Boar of Cornwall or of Conan and Cadwallader belong to the closed off Briton past rather than to the Norman present."[87] He posits that the return of the British is not a foretold event coming after the Norman rule, but, like the commentator, some symbolic repetition of history that belongs to the people who lost the island, like Cadualadrus. The transitive legitimation of the Normans is then reinforced. But Victoria Flood, following John Gillingham, cannot help but posit that "it is probably no coincidence that Geoffrey made use of 'the theme of the British recovery…just at the moment when it seemed to be becoming historical reality.'"[88] The Anarchy had weakened the rule of the Normans over the Welsh and Cornish. Welsh princes had rebelled in 1136-1137, sometime around the original publishing and certainly known to later versions. In Geoffrey's own moment, to think that the Britons would return to supplant the Normans seems like a dangerous statement in a politically charged, divided country.

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[87] Faletra, "Normans," 75.

[88] Flood, *Prophecy,* 23.

But it still seems far from being ingratiating to the Norman-descended aristocracy of which all his dedicatees are a part.

The answer, perhaps, comes in the epilogue to the *HRB*. The Britons, he says, are not to be confused with the "Welsh, unworthy successors to the noble Britons" and never recovered their ancestors' glory because of "squabbling pettily amongst themselves" (207.597-8).[89] The ancient people are nowhere to be found on the British Isles. They are no longer an immediate threat because their descendants are either too busy killing each other or are exiled or are part of the kingdoms and duchies ruled by the current nobles. Besides, Geoffrey and the Normans did not see the tracing the history of their predecessors or their enemies as anti-nationalistic. Geoffrey says that Caradoc should stick to describing the Welsh, and Huntingdon and Malmesbury have every right to the Saxon histories that they are writing or have written by the time Geoffrey publishes. What better way to honor the current monarchs and nobles than by giving their lands a history worthy of conquering? The Normans have overthrown the descendants of the Trojans and the Romans, who themselves ruled Rome; they have conquered the Saxons, whom the British conquered, too, before ultimately succumbing to them. The noble race of the Britons is glorified as worthy, but structurally, they follow the logic of the prophecy's relation to history: as an epicyclical comparison and contrast for the current rulers. The history of Britain is that of exile and return, conquest and assimilation, civil war, and power in unity. Geoffrey is holding up the Britons as a mirror to the Normans: they could be similar to the British if they conquer the whole region (including the Wales), unify the island, and then turn toward the continent. The British return prophecy is not a direct threat to the Normans, but a consequence of the epicyclical nature of history. It is also relegated to the beginning of the

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[89] "Degenerati autem a Britannica nobilitate Gualenses numquam postea monarchum insulae recuperauerunt...immo nunc sibi..."

portion of the *Prophetiae* that are mostly fantastic interactions of beast and land, as outlined

above and which culminates in an eschatological destruction of the world. Most of the rest of the

Prophitiae Merlini might be characterized, as some say, gibberish, but it is most certainly neither

that nor decipherable with any accuracy, historical or otherwise. Again, Geoffrey and his

immediate scribes were not concerned with leaving another, more mysterious, version of history

and near events hereafter. He is engaging in, as noted earlier, modes of expression, not direct

commentary. There can be no further interpretation of the rest because that is not within the

scope of this project, nor do I think it is even possible from our removed time and place. The

idea of "authenticity" is also a medievalism that here has no place, since interpretation is the only

currency with the *Prophetiae*. From this point forward, the significances are determined more by

the audience, the commentators, redactors, scholars, and those who adapt, transform, and

innovate the *Prophetiae Merlini*.

Merlin after Merlin: The *Prophetiae* throughout the Middle Ages

The reception of the *Prophetiae Merlini* was widespread and mixed. Many believed that

Merlin had uttered them, and that Geoffrey had translated them from an original "British"

source. William of Newburgh, born a generation after Geoffrey, authored the *Historia Rerum*

Anglicarum. He says that the *Prophetiae* are false because "they proved to be untrue in the light

of later history."[90] And Giraldus says that the work of Merlin Ambrosius is not the genuine

article and that he has the authentic prophecies of Silvestris, though he fails to provide them. The

many versions of the original in Latin and commentaries attest to its wide reception. If the

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[90] Michael J. Curley, "A New Edition of John of Cornwall's *Prophitia Merlini,*" *Speculum* 57, no.2 (April 1982): 217-249 (221). www.jstor.org/stable/2847455. The most effective of Curley's work is his layering of the text, the commentary, and his own notes, which demonstrate the principles of modern scholarship in conjunction with previous commentary, all interacting in a moment supposedly fashioned by Merlin.

highest form of flattery in medieval writing is imitation, appropriation, and adaptation, then the *Prophetiae* were well-received in that way, too. John of Cornwall's *Prophitia Merlini* [sic] is a unique work that Michael Curley places sometime around 1153, the terminus post quem being 1155, the date of the death of Robert Warelwast, John's patron.[91] While only "thirty-eight prophecies out of a total one-hundred and thirty-nine" can be plausibly traced to Geoffrey, "it is easy to see that Monmouth's *Prophetiae*, or some common 'British' source, was a springboard for John's work, translation and commentary by him and future hands."[92] Curley and Faletra agree that John of Cornwall "bases at least part of his prophecy upon a genuine Brittonic source, specifically a roughly contemporary Cornish prophecy" that picks up the theme of a British resurgence and recasts it for much more pro-British propaganda than even Geoffrey's version.[93] Faletra confirms Curley's suggestion that the commentator is John of Cornwall himself because of the use of the first person, among other factors. The most significant aspect is that we have the voices of the author, scribe, and the commentator being aligned towards a singular purpose again, or, as Faletra puts it, "a prophecy that provides its own gloss," a difference that separates it from all of the commentaries of Geoffrey's work because all of the glosses are by different people.[94] The disparate commentaries of the Cotton and Fonds 6233 MSS and others diversify the interpretation, but this is an example of the reading being manipulated by the author, in which he invents, adapts, comments, or translates, using Merlin as his *auctoritas*.

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[91] Curley, "*Prophitia Merlini*," 222.

[92] Ibid., 222.

[93] Michael A. Faletra "Merlin in Cornwall," 305.

[94] Ibid., "*Prophitia Merlini*," 311.

John of Cornwall's *Prophitia Merlini* (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Ottob. Lat.

1474) is over 165 lines of Latin and a prose dedication and introduction as well as extensive

commentary after the *Prophetiae* proper. The actual prophecies begin with the Norman invasion,

a notable difference because the scene has not been contextualized by several hundred years of

history. The precipitous nature and the place in which John chooses to start paints the Normans

as the antagonists, not the heroes, of this *PM*. After the "decimatio Neustris," the defeated

Angles were "seruile iugum generis facit" ["made servile under the yoke of the people"] and

they will be forced to till the land "rastris…aratris" ["with hoes and ploughs"] (33-5).[95] In

essence the Angles become servants to the Normans. This passage corresponds to the

subjugation of the white dragon in Monmouth's version. Cornwall's gloss layers the

interpretation for his audience, saying, "Behold Merlin reviles them as enemies, though they

were not 'false,' because most of them, said truly what it is necessary to have said."[96] The

commentary ameliorates the historical British animus toward the Angles by commenting on

Merlin's wrath against them and how most of the peoples of Anglo descent were plain-speaking.

This may be a ploy to align the subjugated British with another race subservient to the Normans.

John is commenting on Merlin's distaste for the Angles and seems to be disagreeing with him.

Even if John of Cornwall believes that these are the true vaticinations of Merlinus—Silvestris or

Ambrosius—he cannot escape the idea that he is changing the text, as he confesses that he has

taken a liberty when he admits that "fateor transgressum" ["I have spoken a transgression"]

against Merlin's original in John's own comments.[97] If he is aware of the changing and sharing

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[95] The line numbers are from the version published as an addendum to the article cited.

[96] Curley, "A New Edition," 232, 241, 237. "Ecce hostiliter quidem sed non falso insultat eos Merlinus; quod uerodiciturproptermaiorem partem dici necesse est."

[97] Ibid., 57.

of that innovation with his audience and crediting Merlin as his source, then he is either having

an elaborate conversation with himself—unlikely given the tone of both the text and the

commentary—or reinforcing his own meaning by innovating the original and the commentary,

while still citing his *auctoritas*. Merlin is now, within Geoffrey's lifetime, either the fictional or

ostensible source of the *PM* in his own right. Merlin receives authorial recognition and is cited

by many.

Cornwall's particularly partisan *PM* makes his poem rich ground for translation and

commentary, especially on the episode of the "British Return," the return of Conan and

Cadwallader. It is unsurprising that Cornwall's commentary ends with his verifiable history and

breaks off several lines before the return of the British. This could be a reference back to the

HRB book five or forward to the kings of book eleven, or, as Faletra posits, the two names are

used as "ethnic symbols rather than as historical persons, and he strategically places the

prophecy regarding their triumph at the very end of his text."[98] Curley argues that it is also

possible that Geoffrey confused Cadwaella the King of Wessex, who did die in Rome, with

Cadwallader, mentioned by Bede and Nennius, the last of the British kings, but that matters little

because it is the interpretation that is important. Unlike Geoffrey, John wants the Normans out

sooner rather than later. He is building on the Welsh rebellions of 1136-1137 and the rebellions a

decade after. He is using a source that he says is in "our British tongue," showing an ethnic

identification that is underlined by the Cornish words that appear in the gloss, which may have

been John's. Jean Blacker also points out that John claims to be giving the prophecies of the

Seven Kings, pointing out that Henry II—if one counts Prince William, who "became a fish" in

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[98] Faletra, "Merlin in Cornwall," 332.

Geoffrey's version—as the sixth king, making the symbolic "Cadwallader" the seventh.[99] During

this time, "The Golden liberty and sky-blue Age shall last / Three, three score, three hundred

years."[100] Given that Richard I came after Henry II, and Richard's reign was marked by

absenteeism by means of crusading and squashing rebellions in Normandy, it hardly seems like a

historical allusion. The exaltation of the "crown of Great Briton" may exclude England, but

rather refer to Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany, since he once again valorizes "the mountains of

Armorica." Obviously, history did not "agree" with this "prophecy," meaning the numbers are

symbolic, not literal, invoking the Trinity to evoke a sense of salvation. But this time, the

messiahs of the British are Conan and Cadwaladr. While Geoffrey valorizes the Britons in order

to extol the Normans, Cornwall is using Merlin to champion openly the Celtic-identifying

people. Geoffrey's Merlin predicts the rebirth of the Britons toward the beginning of the vaguer

portions of his *Prophetiae*. That prophecy remained unfulfilled in the *HRB* and through

Geoffrey's own day. However, John of Cornwall ends on the hope of eternal peace and British

rule, which aligns Merlin with biblical prophecies of a messiah. The blessed reign of the Britons

makes the *vates* Cornwall's avatar because through the writing and the commentary, Merlin is

infused with John's own enthusiastic love for his British people.

Later Medieval *Prophetiae*: The *Brut* tradition and Beyond

Beyond the twelfth century, Jan Ziolkowski notes that "Geoffrey's *Prophetiae Merlini*

posed acute problems to medieval Christians because they were so different from biblical

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[99] Jean Blacker, "Where Wace feared to Tread," 43.

[100] Ibid., 42. Blacker's translation. "Tres ter uigenos ter centum finite annos, / Aurea libertas et celo concolor eras."

prophecies—and because Merlin himself was so different from biblical prophets."[101] Indeed, Merlin, at least in future iterations, is also conceived of being demonically inspired because in the *Vulgate*, he is produced when an incubus seduces his mother. And the fits of vaticinations that come over him are not seen, by Geoffrey at least, as divinely inspired speech. Robert de Boron, addressed in chapter four, redeems Merlin's soul and reputation by having God intervene and sanctify Merlin. However, in Geoffrey's *Prophetiae* and later versions that are sometimes included in the *Brut* tradition, Merlin is treated with respect and reclaimed in more subtle ways. The generations just after Geoffrey's writing would pursue several paths: interpreting *in situ* of the *HRB* and *ex eventu* to literary and historical moments, as in the Latin commentaries; adapting them or aspects thereof and/or commenting, as seen in Cornwall's *PM*; or changing them subtly or overtly *and* interpreting them through commentary to fit the author's political moment. Some revisers make "Merlin's" prophecies more overtly religious, and most of them are more politically motivated. Geoffrey's immediate vernacular heir, Wace, demurs at including the prophecies, not just because he "cannot understand" their meaning, but perhaps because he was afraid of the political consequences. The *Prophetiae Merlini* can be as dangerous as they are informative.

Writing during the reign of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine, Wace translates and changes the *HRB* and Merlin in many ways—explored further in chapter four. One of Wace's most pronounced changes to Geoffrey's text and Merlin is that he omits the prophecies. In his scene of Vortigern and the dragons, Wace mentions the prophecies, and admits that Merlin made

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[101] Jan Ziolkowski, "The Nature of Prophecy in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*," in *Poetry and Prophecy: The Beginnings of a Literary* Tradition, ed. James L. Kugel (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 151-62.

them "Que vus avez, ço crei, oïes" ["Of which, I believe, you have heard"] (7536).[102] He is

verifying with his audience that they have heard of the prophecies, acknowledging them, but

making no judgment on their truth. This is one of the first times that the *PM* is mentioned by

another author, but it will not be the last in the *romans* tradition. Merlin is the implied *auctoritas*

in this matter; these are Merlin's prophecies. They are lent the same authority as Geoffrey lends

Bede. But Wace skips Geoffrey. He has the *HRB* in some form at hand, but he does not credit the

Bishop of St. Asaph, especially not for this. For several reasons, Wace maintains the illusion of

narrative, while interpolating his own voice at times. He is comfortable using Merlin as a source

for internal predictions, like Vortigern's death, which is in the *Roman de Brut*. However, he

avoids the inter-historical prophecy. Merlin can prophesy events in the book, but Wace says, "I

do not wish to translate this book, since I do not know how to interpret it; I would not like to say

anything, in case what I say does not happen" (7539-42).[103] The veracity of the prophecies is not

the problem; it is interpretation that is an obstacle. If he cannot say what *will* happen, then he

cannot write it. He may fear writing something that does not please Henry II, or another that is

interpreted in his favor but does not turn out to become the truth. Paradoxically, this makes

Merlin a reflection of the author's anxieties about using the past to "predict the future." If Wace

wanted to relate the prophecies, he could, because they are a part of the past, but he is perhaps

being overly cautious. However, just because an author wants his text one way, does not mean it

will stay that way in the process of revisions and adaptations.

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[102] Judith Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut: A History of the British* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002). All translations are Weiss'. Line numbers are used for the French, which will be noted unless important to the reading.

[103] "Ne vuil sun livre translater / Quant jo nel sai interpreter; / Nule rien dire nen vuldreie / Que si ne fust cum jo dirreie."

One role in the process of adaptation of texts is the compiler, a role that Merlin may not fill directly, but one that his prophecies become the site of a different type of interpretation and transformation. The author according to Bonaventure "writes both his own materials and those of others, but his own as the principal," whereas a compiler "writes the materials of others, adding, but nothing of his own."[104] Jean Blacker's work on the Durham and Lincoln manuscripts of the Anglo-Norman verse prophecies is a testament to the power of compilers to alter works because the "editorial processes so often used by writers of this period[…]often included translating, collating, and adapting material drawn from multiple sources."[105] In at least two versions of the manuscripts of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, later editors have inserted the prophecies of Merlin in Anglo-Norman verse in the section in which Wace refuses to discuss them. The two compilers have changed both the *Roman de Brut* and the Anglo-Norman *Prophecies* by bringing them in conjunction with one another. In this case, Helias and Willeme—the compilers of Durham and Lincoln MSS respectively—complete the combination of the two texts that Wace sundered. These and other subsequent versions follow Eckhardt's pattern for the dissemination of the *Prophetiae*, either with the *HRB*, independent of it, or as individual predictions cited in other works.[106] This is a very important point to make because of the considerations of the different genres arising simultaneously around Merlin and Arthur. Eckhardt would assign the prophecies to the post-*Historia* tradition, while Blacker claims them in the *historia* tradition because they are still framed within the context of the history, more specifically in this case, Wace's *Brut*. The Durham manuscript, translated by a person named Helias, perpetuates the *Historia*'s narrative of

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[104] Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Authorship*, 94.

[105] Jean Blacker, *Anglo-Norman Verse Prophecies of Merlin* (Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2005), 1.

[106] Eckhardt, *Prophetiae Merlini*, 6.

Vortigern's castle. Many of the details are truncated, but the mention of Apuleius is not because it adds to the occult version of Merlin and his paternity. This introduction to the prophecies grounds this version of the Anglo-Norman prophecy in the *HRB*, even if it does confuse some of the chronology. The prophecies are much like their Latin predecessors, indicating that the author of the Anglo-Norman *Prophecies* had access to the Vulgate or Variant versions, though it is unclear whether he translated the prophecies or whether he compiled them from other sources.

Merlin's prophecies then become a discourse among Geoffrey's *Prophetiae,* Wace's translation and omission, and Helias' version. Several additions and changes among the mostly faithful translations of Geoffrey's *PM* can be shown to illustrate some important adaptations. First, Helias starts with an abbreviated *Historia* version, which indicates it circulated first separately or is based on a Latin version that did the same. However, the narrator of the verse translation starts with the famine that occurred during Cadwallader's reign, at the end of Monmouth's *HRB* and works backward and forward to the prophecies delivered to Vortigern. There is no mention of Brutus or ancient history, so the action is relegated to the second half of the *Roman de Brut*/*HRB*. Helias recounts the sailing from Brittany and the defeat of Cadwaladr, with the English driving "them away through power and might, / into Wales [Guales], where their heirs still remain: / They are the people we call the Welsh [Gualeis]" (17-19).[107] He starts this version of the *Anglo-Norman Prophecies* with the reminder of the tragedy of the Britons and their descent into being merely "Welsh." The Britons' defeat is already a *fait accompli*. Even "we" identifies Helias and presumably Anglo-Normans in semantic opposition to the Welsh, the ethnic others, the only heirs to the Britons. This seems a subtle point, but it is a perspective that Geoffrey uses at the end of his *HRB* to complete the defeat of the Britons, transferring their

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[107] Blacker, *Anglo-Norman Prophecies*, 27. Subsequently, lines are cited parenthetically.

dominance to the Saxons, who are in turn conquered by the Normans. Here Helias begins with

the etymological defeat of the Britons, but then the text makes a series of analeptic and proleptic

moves that undulate like a pendulum around Merlin.

This version of the *Brut* flashes back to the "tens d'un rei qui ot nun Vortigern," ["the

time of a king called Vortigern"] but the narrator speaks of the "rochers e merveillus e granz"

["the large and marvelous stones"], the Giants' Ring, which was moved from Ireland to Britain

through "l'engin Merlin" [the ingenuity of Merlin"] (27, 30, 32). The time seems to be out of

joint. The story of Merlin's capture and refutation of Vortigern's sorcerers has just happened in

the *Roman de Brut* and is going to be repeated again in a few lines. Merlin does not move the

Giants' Ring until after Vortigern's death and Aurelius's ascension in the *HRB*. Indeed, the

narrator then proceeds to the story of how King Aurelius "had a beautiful cemetery built there"

because, moving backwards again, "Hengist and his people killed the Britons," capturing many,

including Vortigern (40). The king ransoms his lands for his freedom and retires to "Guales" to

set to building "a tower on Mount Trier," the one that precipitates the capture of the fatherless

boy narrative reproduced in much the same manner as the *HRB* and *Brut* tell it (47). Placing the

memento mori at the beginning of this tale does not mean it works strictly backward, but it uses a

narrative structure that transforms Stonehenge from Merlin's triumphant war monument into a

further reminder of the tragedy of the Britons because the focus is on the cemetery and

Vortigern's treachery. The temporal adjustments to the story—pulling from later in the narrative,

and then reverting to Hengest's betrayal, and then forward again to the search for Merlin—

oscillate in such a manner as to create a concentric focus upon the moment in the text. Or as

Blacker puts it, "this reorganizing of chronology[…]creates another loop-like situation[…]where

the narrative ends up like a dragon chasing its tail," with post-Arthurian content becoming pre-

Arthurian only to become post-Arthurian again as Wace's text is presented after the prophecies in this compilation. The combination of several texts discourse with each other, other texts, and the historical present in which Helias writes. This *mis en scene* leaps forward and backward simultaneously to imitate Merlin's view of history and prophecy as part of the historical "present."

The majority of Wace's *Roman* manuscripts, Anglo-Norman or Continental, omit the prophecies, leaving the author's wishes intact, but versions of the *Anglo-Norman Prophecies* reinvent the reading of *Roman* by using Merlin as the pivot for Wace's text, as it was in many of the manuscripts of the *HRB*. The second version analyzed by Blacker, the Lincoln manuscript, is apparently inserted into the appropriate section of the *Roman de Brut* by a compiler named "Willeme," who innovates further and uses Wace's demurring from inserting the prophecies into a moment to engage the author in a textual dialogue visible to the audience. The Lincoln MS includes Wace's refusal to translate the prophecies, but then, inserted after the refusal, "But I, Willeme, will tell you / What I know of the prophecies / As I have heard them told[…]When the prophecies are over[…]I will go back to Master Wace / And I will recount his book from then on."[108] The act of compilation is visible in the choice of the adaptation of two parts of the process of textual production entering into dialogue with each other because of the prophecies of Merlin. Willeme makes a conscious choice against the wishes of the author in order to fulfill some patron's wishes or some sense of literary wholeness. It is not recorded who pays for either this or the Durham version, but it is an indication that someone, probably in the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, wanted the "whole story." The willful insertion revivifies the prophecies' interaction

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[108] Blacker, *Anglo-Norman Prophecies*, 5, 58: translation is hers. "Mes jo Willeme vus dirrai / De prophecies co ke jo sai / Si cum les ai oï ditees…Quant les profeciexs serrunt fines…/A meistre Wace repeirerai / E sun livere avant cunterai."

with the rest of the history. The prediction of the "future" of the text reasserts Merlin's role as

the axis of past, present, and future in the *Brut*, despite Wace's desire to appear as the cautious

historian. Unlike Geoffrey, Wace believes that his "history" must keep up appearances of genre-

specific truthfulness. The texts were thought of as in dialogue when presented together, obviating

some of the distance between the tripartite categorization of the three post-Galfridian traditions:

Historia, *Post-Historia*, and non-*Historia*. Through the editorial decision of Willeme, the

vernacular versions continue to bring the prophecies into distinct relief with the past and the

present because it structures the *Roman de Brut* like the *HRB*, by predicting Arthur and others

before branching off into potentially significant aspects of the prophecies for the audience.

After Wace's era, the *Prophetiae Merlini* take on a life that is as varied and sundry as the

audiences of the next several centuries, mostly in Britain and northern France. Richart

D'Irelande's version in French, crafted and presented in Italy, and several other continental

versions attest to the tepid dissemination throughout the continent.[109] However, the Anglo-

Norman, Welsh and other Celtic groups, as well as more "English" versions flourish for the next

five hundred years before devolving into satiric parody of the style with Jonathan Swift's

"Famous Prediction of Merlin." Only a few notable instances and their repercussions on Merlin's

role in authorship, prophecy, and history are here studied. The *Vita Merlini* reproduces and

rewrites many of the historical prophecies; and the Welsh prophetic materials are attested to later

than the *Prophetiae* and *Vita*, which most scholars take to mean that Geoffrey was influenced by

an established tradition, of which the only extant material has been corrupted by Geoffrey's

writings. This will be discussed further in chapter three. The *romans* tradition eschews the

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[109] Laura Lahdensuu, "Predicting History: Merlin's Prophecies in Italian XIIth-XVth Century Chronicles," in *The Medieval Chronicle III*, ed. Erik Kooper, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 93-100 (94). https://books.google.com/books?isbn=9042008342.

prophecies and relegates Merlin's vaticinations to internal narrative predictions and post-facto

authorship, as will be discussed in chapter four. After Wace's initial demurring, the prophecies

flourished alongside the *Brut* chronicle tradition, both in verse and in prose redactions and

rewritings that span several centuries of Anglo-Norman, Welsh, and Middle English examples.

Julia Marvin points out that of the several hundred manuscripts between the languages, "[t]he

prose *Brut* became not just a book to read but also a medium into which vernacular historians

could place their own work," continuing by saying that "historians seem to have arranged the

events they recount into meaningful patterns that endow the events of the past with predictive

value for the future."[110] This is the very basis of the idea of metahistory: reading backwards from

the present to say that now is where the story ends, but will predict the cyclicality of history. The

Prophecies of Merlin survive, in many different forms, like the *Brut PM* or an extrapolation and

rewriting of "Merlin's work" like the *Six Kings* prophecy, which is revised nearly every

generation or so to provide parallels and pedigrees. Versions of the prose *Brut* mix the

"traditional" prophecies, though distorted, with the *Six Kings* prophecies to Merlin, making him

the author, who then becomes the *auctoritas*, which provides titillating intertextual authorial

anxieties in the *romans*. Simultaneously, the further we recede from Geoffrey's *PM*, the more the

predictions change to suit the thoughts of the time. This means that the authors of these

prophecies and commentaries are enacting the same practices as Monmouth: making a familiar

original new with additions and changes. Many also include interstitial commentaries that

provide further perspective into interpretation. They are receiving and adapting Merlin, while

making him the author, and using his prophecies to conform to their own reading of history. He

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[110] Julia Marvin, "Arthur Authorized: The Prophecies of the Prose *Brut* Chronicle," in *Arthurian Literature* 22, ed. Keith Busby and Roger Dalyrymple (Cambridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 84-99 (85).

has become the avatar for the innovators of the the process of writing and interpreting their writings, producing many Merlins.

The *Prose Brut* prophecies are "not a retelling of the *Historia's* Merlin prophecies, they deploy some of the same cast of characters."[111] Eckhardt traces the Middle English prose version through several stages, winding up with texts that refer to and have commentaries upon events through 1333, but which are not attested in manuscript before 1400.[112] This is an interesting point in the development of the *PM* because elements, which are addended or adapted, survive over two centuries of change. F. W. D. Brie's version is "the longest version," but not the oldest version. There are many differences between the two, emanating from years of revision and reinterpretation. The oldest follows the *Brut* tradition, having Merlin disappear after Arthur's conception, but the longest, and newer version, as Julia Marvin notes, is delivered to Arthur with perfunctory notice, rather than working it into the narrative. This is a tremendous change if the "Boar of Cornwall" has already risen and scattered the Saxons. The association is not in the *HRB* or the *Brut* of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There may have been a cross-pollination from the *romans* tradition of the later Middle Ages. Toward the end of the prophecies, Merlin "predicts" that in 1215 "a lamb will come from Winchester," a reference to Henry III.[113] Interestingly, the commentator provides glosses for the *Six Kings* prophecy, saying that the "dragon" that follows the lamb clashes with an "evil greyhound" that the dragon crowns and then vanishes. The chronicler does more than just "read" the passage and provide gloss, as in the Latin commentaries. He says, "And this came true in the figure of Sir John Baliol, whom King

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[111] Eckhardt, *Prophetiae Merlini*, 91.

[112] Ibid., 36-7.

[113] Ibid., 38.

Edward (I) made King of Scotland, and who treacherously stood up against him," and who was later banished to France, more friendly territory.[114] The commentator affirms the veracity of Merlin's prediction, as do most authors at least implicitly, but then provides the "evidence" of fulfillment in what did occur from his perspective. The Latin commentaries offered readings, many post-facto, but they did not positively affirm the predictions through "evidence." The difference is subtle, but interesting. Merlin is "proved correct" in an *ex eventu* prophecy authored with this reading in mind, because the writer is also commenting as he authors. The motives for the adaptations to Merlin no longer have to be extrapolated or inferred. These, like John of Cornwall's, are boldly specific, often partisan, and employ several layers of voices, all of which revolve around their relationship to Merlin's voice and Geoffrey's original through the many similarities and differences between them. The combination of functions by this kind of *PM* is also heightened by inserting their own voice and understanding into the protean name of Merlin.

The only addition to this reading is to discuss a few moments of significant similarity and difference to the original and other commentaries. The text is unique so far because the scribe "distinguishes between the prophecies themselves, which are written in red ink, and the interpretations, which are written in darkish brown."[115] The commentary is by the same hand and interwoven into the prophecies themselves, which means the commentator is more closely aligned to Merlin's voice than the Latin commentaries or even John of Cornwall's interlinear and marginal glosses. For instance, when the prophecies in the Middle English *Brut* discuss the contested history of the white and the red dragons and the author fashions commentary that is

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[114] Ibid, 39.

[115] Ibid., 67.

much more extensive than the BNF Fonds 6322 commentary. The text reads, "Merlyn seid also

that þe whight dragon schal increase a yen but þe tithe of Normandie schal hurt him sore."[116] The

commentator/author avows that "Merlyn seid soth," maintain the mirage of *auctoritas*, masking

some ingenium, and launches into a lengthy explanation of the invasion of Edward and his

brother Aelfred from Normandy in1036 when Godwin blinded and killed the younger brother.

But further detail demonstrates how the "decimation" and the "tithe" came to be linked so

closely in this instance. According to the commentator, Godwin killed nine of ten of Aelfred's

commanders and "afftir þis tythyng he lete slee euery tenþe man of þies that were left."[117] The

ten percent of one's wages, a tithing, that were supposed to be given to God or a lord is here

nine-tenths at first, then a literal decimation, one out of every tenth man in Aelfred's force. That

the translation of the passage "decimation Neustriae" is received as tithe in Middle English is

itself significant. But that the commentator reinserts the numerical destruction of Aelfred's force

in the gloss demonstrates, some Latin or a French source that kept the original. Or perhaps they

wanted to show their own wittiness. In either case, the explanation is much more detailed,

indicating an audience that needs explanation, not learned historians who have already studied

the ascensions of the royalty of England. Here, as elsewhere, the commentator dons the clothes

of Merlin by reaffirming his statement and interpreting it for us in the manner in which Merlin

did for Vortigern in Geoffrey's *PM* and later Anglo-Norman versions. By mixing elements from

both texts together, which is different from the interlinear or marginal gloss, these prophecies

arrogate the authority of Merlin, even if it is separating his voice from Merlin's in a formal

manner. This manner of interpretive production makes life imitate art. It is metafictional and

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[116] Ibid., 77.

[117] Ibid.

metahistorical: the real commentator is imitating the character's interpretive ability in their own version of Merlin delivering prophecies while speaking from the distant past. The juxtaposition of the prophecy and gloss make them distinguishable, but reflective of each other, especially since the author is interpolating his own reading of history.

The ME *Brut* eliminates the "seed of the white dragon" being destroyed and skips to the two dragons that issue "that on schal be strangled with a dart. That other dragon schall retourne and rest him under his own shadow."[118] This commentary details the tragedy of Rufus' death, blaming Walter Tyrell specifically. The "greete debate" between Henry and Robert Curthose, it details how Henry rallies the Norman forces loyal to him and defeats his brother. But the commentator proclaims this defeat and imprisonment of Robert as "vengeaunce of god. For whan the duke was in the holy lond. God yaf (gave) sich might and honour to him ther. Wherfor he was chosen to be king of Ierusalem. And he wold not but for soke (forsook) [the kingship]."[119] Robert Curthose was an important commander in the First Crusade and an equal among other dukes and princes, but it was Raymond of Toullouse who demurred at the crown of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Perhaps the commentator believes Robert should have politicked for the position with more vigor and blames him for not doing so. More importantly, the sermonizing associates Merlin's prophecies with divine will and adds much more than just historical references. The Latin commentaries offer some but focus more on the explanation of references. The author's perspective not only demonstrates the veracity of the prophecies, like other versions, but also censures the historical referents. Metahistorical revisioning of the past is certainly common in commentaries throughout the exegeses of the Middle Ages, but is a marked

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[118] Ibid., 78.

[119] Ibid., 79.

difference from other, less judgmental versions. Influence from the history of commentary by less secular writers and glossers than Geoffrey have seeped into the tradition, tying it back into the history of Britain and the rhetoric of biblical and eschatological prophetic interpretation.

An even more marked difference can be seen in the interpretation of the "Tibi Neustria" lines as written and explicated in the ME *Brut* prophecies. The text reports that "Merlyn seid also woo (woe) to Normandie. For schall the leons brayn be spilt. And his other parties (parts) schall be dolven (buried) in his ovne contre."[120] The Latin commentaries all agree that the lion of Geoffrey's *PM* is Henry I's entombment in England, while his entrails remained in Rouen. Time and translation lose the meaning or perhaps simply give different perspectives. The commentator here interprets this prophecy as referring to Richard Lionheart, an understandable association considering his *nom de guerre*. While besieging a castle in Limosin, France, Richard suffered a shot to the upper torso or neck. It is well known that Richard was shot by a bolt from a crossbow, which he tried to remove but became gangrenous, causing his death some weeks later. But the commentator says, "Than went king Rychard[…]and a normanne smote him with a quarrel (arrow) in the brayn. The king drewe ovte the schaft but the hede a boode (abode) with Inne (within)."[121] Richard's legend has grown so far that a wound to his shoulder/neck turns into him pulling a "square-headed crossbow bolt" out of his brain and leaving the head of the bolt in his own head. The referent, the circumstances, and the interpretation of the prophecy, while different than Matthew of Paris' reading, could fit. The complete change of this prophecy in context and interpretation demonstrates the malleability of the prophecies and their vague allegorical referents. Interestingly, it says again, that the lion is Richard, whose body was "broght to Reding

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[120] Ibid., 81.

[121] Ibid.

where þat he was buried."[122] He was indeed dismembered, much like Henry I, but slightly more spread out with his lion heart in Rouen, his entrails in Chalus, where he died, and his body in Anjou. However, the commentator is here obviously conflating both Henry I and *Coer de leon*. This misinterpretation adds another dimension to the transmission of the *PM*: whether knowingly or not, the differing interpretations are rewriting history in the guise of Merlin's prophecies. The prophecy relegates Henry I to an historical footnote because Richard is replaced in the dismemberment and the commentary mentions Henry briefly and proceeds to the Anarchy between Stephen and Matilde. His entire reign is a few lines long in this version, whereas in others he is valorized as "leo justiciae" whose roar will make France's towers and the island dragons tremble. These prophecies revise history, for what purpose is unknowable: it could be accidental, received as such, or a deliberate change somewhere in the transmission, but it is a major revision to interpretation of the prophecies both in Merlin's moment in the past, the historical moment of Richard and Henry, and in the present of the commentary. We may only speculate at the effect on future transmission and interpretation that this revision has on future readers' understanding of history and their own moment. However, if this were the only version someone saw, they would not have much information on Henry I, nor are they likely to identify where Richard I is buried. This rewriting of the commentary, received and adapted, shows that accuracy of the past and "faithfulness" to the sources are struggles that were common in the revisions of Merlin and Arthur during the Middle Ages. Just as modern medievalisms have been judged by these criteria, we can evaluate the transmission of rewritings, misprisions, and inaccuracies as a game much like telephone. Some generations try to "get it right" and other versions only care about the agenda that they are positing, without concern for staying "true" to

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[122] Ibid.

the original. Merlin resembles his original less and less in the *PM* tradition and the same can be said for the *romans* tradition. This *Brut* prophecy has changed a great deal for the rest of the text.

Eckhardt's text and commentary truncate the rest of the *PM* by skipping the portion about the "thumb rolled in oil." This section becomes related the *Six Kings* tradition because of the past version and readings, all of which revise them for their own era or pass on a "believable" reading. The oil is chrism that anoints the new king "for stephin which was king anointed was the iiijte from king herry þe first."[123] He explains that Stephen was the fourth king after Henry I, counting Princes William and Richard, killed in 1120. If we were counting numerically, that would make Henry II the fifth, and Richard I the "sextus." But the commentary says that "king herry þe second[…]which was thrid from him" and Richard I is "secunde in birthe" from Henry II. Obviously, this reading was not available to Geoffrey's audience, nor for the subsequent two or three generations since none of this had happened in Geoffrey's, John of Cornwall's, or even in the Latin commentaries' eras. The interpretation is much different than the reading of the six being the peoples to have populated Britain from ancient times. The counting of past glosses is modified from William to Henry II. That was numerical, this gloss is using subtle strategies to fit his view of John as the "Sixth King." The prophecy is adapted to the history of its moment, retrospectively of course, but it did appear in the original and through a chain of transmission to this ME *Brut* chronicle. However, after this, there are several modifications of the extant prophecies and wholesale insertions of ones that are obviously not part of the "original." However, these additions are no different than Geoffrey's wholesale appropriation and reinvention of sources, recombining some prophecies, making up others. He has adapted the fatherless boy from Nennius, combined him with Myrddin, reworked the narratives of these

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[123] Ibid., 82.

sources and others, like Gildas, and mostly fabricated the Arthur section. The rest of the writers and commentators, compilers and redactors, are all working under a similar principle: make the familiar new to a new audience.

These prophecies completely omit the reascension of the British, unsurprisingly. No Conan or Cadwaladr. Eckhardt's *Prophecy* and commentator are unconcerned with the struggles of the long-defeated ancestors of the Welsh, instead dealing at length with the reign of King John. Most of these vaticinations are familiar in tone but are additions that are not part of the original or close imitations and adaptations. A later fabricated prediction tells of a "beeste of feble sight. Which schall cause greete hurt and damage vnto his people," which the commentator explains refers to Henry III, who, supposedly had poor vision.[124] The next part, according to the author of the gloss, refers to how the king and his barons "went to Oxenford and ordeyned lawes and statutes in amendment of the Realme," but then Henry III broke the terms of what would later be called the Magna Carta, leading to further civil war. The prophecy continues "And of this king henry þe third prophecied Merlyn and seide a lambe schall come out of Wynchestre in þe yere of þe incarnation of our Lord Jhesus crist a M.1CC.xvj."[125] Notice how the commentary has seeped into the "prediction." Merlin's words and the interpreter's have become interchangeable. The glosser has disguised himself like Merlin and he has mistaken himself for the prophet, but still affirming him as though they were separate, for "he seide sooth. For this king herry was born at Wyncestre."[126] The author has only reaffirmed what was already fabricated, while using Merlin's voice, and then agrees with the same voice. Geoffrey would

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[124] Ibid. 85.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibid.

have been proud of this literary legerdemain because it tops even his *PM* for complexity of metafictional and metahistorical references that are read through "Merlin's" words. Geoffrey's Merlin interpreted enough of the *HRB*-set prophecies to give us a key to all but the most fantastic and obscure sections. But he never, as far as we know, gave a full account of all of the *PM*. He balanced *auctoritas* and *ingenium* through vague references, using sources that he obscures and attributes to Merlin, and then fashions the rest as an infinitely interpretable utterance. This version goes further: it is the specificity of the commentary, correct or incorrect in interpretation, and the invention of new predictions where the author and the commentator are even more closely aligned with "Merlin," even to the point of the voice of the commentary and that of Merlin becoming the same at the end. The gloss also says that Merlin delivers these prophecies because "king Artour askid the aventures of Vj last kings to regne Englond."[127] Obviously, the commentary is fixing the end date of the prophecies, even if we say that it is written sometime during Henry III's reign, though this is a fifteenth-century transcription. And "the last" six kings seem to be a fixed historical point from which the prophecies are told and thus the point from which the author and commentator begin their understanding of history. The mixed commentary of Henry III's reign, alternating between a feeble-sighted beast and a lamb, which is a positively connoted animal in Christian nations, does not produce much in the way of understanding of the author's and commentaries financial or political motives. But whatever they may be, they demonstrate that the medieval writers and commentators used Merlin, both a character and "real" person to them, as the authority, and they leveraged his credibility to insert new prophecies and to change interpretation. Merlin's name can be used for anything that the writer and glosser want.

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[127] Ibid.

This is precisely what happens in the political realm as age passes into age. Taylor

outlines how the *Six Kings* comes to be transformed into a running commentary of ascension,

spanning the reigns of Henry III through Henry IV, in which Henry III is still the lamb, Edward I

is read as a Dragon, Edward II as a Goat, Edward III as a Lion and/or a Boar, Richard II as an

Ass, and Henry IV as a Mole.[128] However, it is much more complicated than he lets on. This

tradition becomes a palimpsest for any and all interpolations. Helen Fulton states, "[t]he

prophecies of Merlin were invoked in various forms by both sides" of the Lancastrian-Yorkist

War of the Roses, "as a means of associating each king with the ancient Arthurian past and all its

connotations of legitimate and exemplary rule."[129] They are reinterpreted and rewritten within

the context of the history and separately to suit the political powers of the moment. Merlin's

authority is invoked as the legitimator of kings, the commentaries "confirming" the veracity of

his statements and enforcing their own *agenda*. This is the process that extends all the way into

the seventeenth century, with some brief interruptions like Henry IV's prohibition of Welsh

Merlin prophecies because they returned to the theme of rebellion by "British people." Also, the

Council of Trent in the sixteenth century banned the prophecies as not divinely inspired and,

thus, false. It seems a stretch of the imagination to us that Merlin's name could be taken so

seriously as to be banned by the Roman Catholic Church and monarchs of England. However, by

the time William Lilly invents "Merlinus Anglicus" during the Civil War, he has become

unmoored from any recognizable manifestation of the medieval Merlin. Astrology is much more

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[128] Taylor, *Political Prophecy*, 49-51.

[129] Helen Fulton, "Arthurian Prophecy and the Deposition of Richard II." *Arthurian Literature* 22, ed. Keith Busby and Roger Dalyrymple (Cambridge, U.K.: Boydell & Brewer, 2005): 64-83 (64).

fashionable and permissible, superseding the animal imagery. The method is all that remains: the *ex eventu* "prediction" and commentary that helps elucidate the author's point.

Merlin becomes the vehicle of the writers, commentators, and compilers by which their agenda and perspectives can be posited. Moreover, he is the author of these and many unreferenced prophecies. The adaptations from the original through several languages, iterations, and eras has turned the intertextual, metahistorical epicycle of the *Prophetiae's* place in the *Historia* into the basis of authority upon which to write and interpret anew, which in turn became an empty cipher to be filled with whatever propaganda one wishes to place into it. This is exactly the method employed by the *Brut* and *romans* writers and the method used by medievalism of all kinds for the last five hundred years. Modern iterations have been perpetrating the same literary technique upon the Middle Ages, Merlin, and Arthur. Merlin's name is integral in revisions of literature itself and of Arthur. Moreover, the methods of medievalism are perpetrated by Geoffrey of Monmouth and the redactors, compilers, and commentators upon the various Prophecies of Merlin. The sage's prophecies changed the past through interpretation, transformed the present by legitimating it through *ex eventu* prophecies, and innovated the future by creating a new, indeterminate type of prophecy upon which several hundred years of writers inscribed their contemporary agenda and perspectives. Just as the *HRB* demonstrated that the past is malleable to present needs, the *Prophetiae Merlini* has shown that the present and future are shaped by how we understand the past.

Chapter 3

Reinventing Merlin: The *Vita Merlini* and Merlin's Past, Present, and Future

Geoffrey of Monmouth's innovations of received material are extensive, illuminating his political leanings, his philosophical ruminations upon history, authorship, prophecy and the very basis of interpretation and *auctoritas*. His works were clearly adaptations of several known and unknown sources with some *ingenium* mixed in to produce new characters, stories, and even genres out of the old ones. The *HRB* and the *Prophetiae Merlini* were influential in the decades and generations during and after Monmouth's life. The Latin derivatives of both the *HRB* and the *Prophetiae* are numerous, and relatively quickly the vernacular versions of both begin to disseminate. Both works are adapted by other authors, as shown in chapters two and four of this project. The adaptations of his work testify to Geoffrey's success because he innovates his sources and then becomes an author himself. However, the most unique portion of Monmouth's works, the stories surrounding the Pendragons, produce the most exceptional characters: King Arthur and Merlin. Merlin alone acquires regard throughout the Middle Ages as an author, historian, and prophet unto himself. Merlin Ambrosius assumes a life of his own, a persistent literary legerdemain, the magic of writing and controlling a narrative. Whether Geoffrey of Monmouth could foresee the fame of Merlin or not, in the last years of his life, he revisits his most original creation. The *Vita Merlini* is his most curious adaptation of Merlin because he reinvents his own character in a way that is simultaneously—and paradoxically—innovative and yet hearkens to Merlin's Welsh roots: Myrddin.

Monmouth's previous works are politically motivated, even if tangentially at times. The *HRB* reflects real tensions and issues of legitimacy and conquest within Geoffrey's lifetime. The

Prophetiae reinforce several of the same motifs. Along with the other commissioned works by his peers, Monmouth participated in a metahistorical project to focus the point of the history of the islands on the Normans. The epicycle of Monmouth's history, with an end in mind that is confirmed by Merlin's "predictions," legitimizes the Normans' perception of their rightful inheritance to the land of the Britons. Any criticisms of the present within the combination of the past and the future that Geoffrey writes are not seen as overt or damaging enough to lose him favor, but neither work seems to help his career within the Church. His famous writings earned him patronage, but not the positions he had hoped for from Bishop Alexander or Robert of Gloucester, his two previous works' dedicatees. Ironically, Geoffrey's most obscure work—his least popular by manuscript count and least influential throughout the Middle Ages and into the modern era—may have earned him a bishopric and an unprecedented honor.[1]

Approximately twenty years after the *Prophetiae*'s initial publication and more than a decade after that of the *HRB*, Geoffrey dedicates his final work, the *Vita Merlini* to Robert of Chesney. In his dedication, Monmouth invokes the newest Bishop of Lincoln to "Guide my pen, Robert, glory of bishops" and imploring him to "Approve, then, my project" (3, 7).[2] After praising his wisdom, principles, and birth, Geoffrey situates Robert of Chesney among the Muses and patrons for the poem, even saying that he would have written about Robert if Geoffrey were worthy enough. Why the effusive praise? The clue comes in the line asking the Bishop of Lincoln to be "more indulgent to this poet than was that other whom you have just succeeded,"

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[1] Basil Clarke points to only one nearly complete manuscript: Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Life of Merlin*, trans. Basil Clarke (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973), 8. Clarke has produced a facing-page, prose translation that is accessible and well-conextualized.

[2] Lines are parenthetically noted from Clarke's edition. I will include the Latin in the footnotes, unless very brief or imperative for translation or interpretation. "Tu corrige carmen / gloria pontificum calamos moderante…/ Ergo meis ceptis fave."

Alexander of Lincoln, to whom Geoffrey dedicated the *Prophetiae* (8-9).[3] Geoffrey's career may

have languished since the appearance of the *Prophetiae* and the *HRB*. Despite lauding

Alexander, the dedication to him did not produce the political promotions to which it seems

Geoffrey aspired. He may have been famous for literary reasons, but perhaps dangerous

politically because of his seeming preference for Matilda's losing faction. His dedications mostly

favored Robert of Gloucester, who backed Matilda in her failed attempt to win her birthright, the

throne of England, which had been bequeathed to her by her father, Henry I. By the time the *Vita*

Merlini appears, King Stephen is close to ending the Anarchy and has—at least officially, if

disputedly— worn the crown for most of the last two decades. In any case, Geoffrey's position

has not improved much by the late 1140s, the earliest the *VM* could have appeared.[4]

Robert de Chesney ascends the bishopric of Lincoln in 1148/9, after Matilda has

informally relinquished any aspirations to the throne. Robert was appointed by King Stephen,

perhaps as a way of putting allies in powerful civilian and religious positions.[5] Geoffrey sees a

way to capitalize on an opportunity. O. J. Padel points out that he seeks a new appointment

"since the college of canons was dissolved in 1149."[6] The result, apparently, was a success.

Within two or three years of writing the *Vita Merlini*, Geoffrey "witnesses charter as '*electus*

sancti Asaphi'" and "was ordained a priest, and eight days later consecrated as bishop" of the

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[3] "[A]uspicio meliore velis quam fecerit alter cui modo succedis merito promotus honor."

[4] Clark, *Life*, 40.

[5] Nikolai Tolstoy, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Merlin Legend," *Arthurian Literature* XXV, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (Cambridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 1-42 (41). "Robert de Chesney had been installed as Bishop Lincoln at the beginning of 1149. It is inconceivable that King Stephen would have permitted the appointment of anyone to the See of his favoured city other than a committed supporter. Robert's brother William, one of the king's most loyal and valued supporters throughout his reign, was appointed governor of Oxford in 1143."

[6] O.J. Padel "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Development of the Arthurian Legend," *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 51 (2006): 36-65 (42).

newly created St. Asaph diocese, which is in North Wales.[7] The appointment there was not

coincidental, but rather was related to his own personal, professional, and literary history. Even

though it is unclear if Geoffrey ever occupied the See of St. Asaph, the connection of the

dedication to the appointment is significant for several reasons. Some of the sources of the

material for the *Vita Merlini* may have come from the region of St. Asaph's diocese. Geoffrey

could have seen "An abridgement of Jocelin's *Life of Kentigern* [that] was ascribed to St. Asaph"

and "it is possible that Geoffrey learned about Kentigern and Lailoken from contacts with the

monks of St. Asaph monastery."[8] Furthermore, St. Asaph was, according to legend, an acolyte of

Kentigern when the latter was banished from Scotland into Wales, where he purportedly found

and cured Lailoken before the wild man's triple death. Lailoken is often cited as an analogue,

and potentially a source for Myrddin, Geoffrey's model for the Merlin portrayed in the *Vita

Merlini*.

Suitably, Geoffrey's end is in his beginning. If the few sketches of his biography are true,

the appointment is a recompense that represents a symbolic homecoming to the West Marches.[9]

Furthermore, even though he seems to denigrate the Welsh as the unworthy inheritors to the

name of the Britons, Wales is still the heart of former British lands, close to the heritage of his

subject and his sources. Instead of establishing Norman ascendency through ancient analogues,

or predicting their future success, Geoffrey is decrying all civil strife in the *VM* as counter to

God's will and he once again claims that invasions and scourges like famine and war are proof of

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[7] Clarke, *Life*, 33.

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[8] Mark Walker *Geoffrey of Monmouth's Life of Merlin: A New Verse Translation* (Amberley Publishing, 2011), *Kindle*. Aubrey Galyon and Zacharias P. Thundy, "Lailoken" in *The Romance of Merlin: An Anthology*, ed. Peter Goodrich, trans. Zacharias P. Thundy (New York: 1990), 3-11 (4).

[9] Clarke, *Life*, 33.

divine retribution. This is a theme carried over from the *HRB*, borrowed from Gildas, which says explicitly that the Britons were punished for their internecine strife. At the time of the *VM*'s circulation, the Anarchy had already raged for over a decade. Geoffrey had always been critical of the internecine warfare of the Anarchy's participants, but only mildly, and perhaps appealing to both sides through his seemingly competing dedications to the *HRB*. The beginning of the *Vita Merlini* consists of a diatribe against the perils and results of civil war. He may have become the bishop of St. Asaph based on the *VM* because of its message of unity in an era of infighting. It is a decided privilege that his "one recorded episcopal act was the witnessing...of the charter King Stephen issued at Westminster before Christmas in 1153[...]preparing the way for Henry of Anjou," Matilda's son, to become the heir to the throne of England after Stephen, ending the Anarchy after nearly twenty years of strife.[10] Geoffrey's work of the last twenty years had signaled that above all other things, unity was key to the ruling people's dominance over Britain, and his final recorded official act affirms this position. Geoffrey's major contributions to literature may or may not have influenced the final outcome of the Anarchy, but it is possible that he was honored for his warnings, delivered in the guise of Merlin, by being given the privilege to witnessing the unification of the Norman holdings on both sides of the English Channel. However, that is not the only unification that Monmouth performs in the *Vita Merlini*. He finally attains the opportunity to merge the British and Latin Merlins, Ambrosius and Silvestris/Caledonius, together into one character.

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[10] Maureen Fries, "The Arthurian Moment: History and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britannie*" Arthuriana 8, no. 4 (1998): 88-99 (92). http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869401. "Geoffrey was even, and interestingly, a witness to the Treaty of Westminster between Stephen and Henry that marked the impending passage of power to the Angevins, in November 1153. His signature there constitutes a part of what little we know about him."

While the changes wrought upon the stories of previous Latin materials with extant sources have been explored and are fairly apparent, the place of the British material in the oeuvre of Geoffrey's work is much more contentious. Some assert that little of the supposed Welsh material—from Walter Archdeacon's supposed book or other sources—enters the *HRB* but plays a much more prominent role in the *Vita Merlini*. There are some consistencies in characterization of Merlin among the three Galfridian texts besides the name. In the *VM*, Merlin recapitulates some of the *HRB*, refers to some of the same or similar prophecies as in the *PM*, and an abiding association with Arthur. Differences include Merlin as the protagonist, specifically struggling with his grief, madness, and love interests. As noted above, Geoffrey's change of the name of the fatherless boy, whose character is based upon Nennius's "Ambrosius/Embresgulectic," affords an opportunity for Geoffrey to balance *auctoritas* and *ingenium*. Changing his name to Merlinus Ambrosius adapts Nennius's character to a new one who is, as always, an innovation of previous characterizations. In order to understand the adaptation of Celtic sources, once again, it is necessary to return to the beginning of the *HRB* and discuss the "book in the British tongue."[11] If there were such a book—note the subjunctive—it perhaps provided Geoffrey a name to attach to the fatherless boy. If Geoffrey's main goal in the *HRB* is, as he says, to speak of the British and especially of Arthur, then it would be incumbent upon him to include characters from that tradition. While his Latin sources speak of Vortigern and Arthur and Cadwallader, they do not speak of any character known by an appellation close to "Merlinus," which Geoffrey affixed to the extant "Ambrosius." The authenticity of Merlin as derived from his provenance is incomplete

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[11] Chapter one of this project demonstrates that Merlinus Ambrosius is mostly based on Nennius's Ambrosius from the *Historia Brittonum*, which is unmentioned in the prologue as a source. It is unlikely that Walter's book is the *HB* because it is written in a "British" language and Nennius's is in Latin. This makes it further unlikely that Merlin Ambrosius is influenced directly by Myrddin.

without this aspect. The most remarkable point of this revision is that Monmouth is rewriting his own character with stories that more "authentic" than his Merlinus Ambrosius. His original is an adaptation that is being transformed back to *the* original Merlin, Myrddin, whose antecedent may be Taliesin.

It has been posited that a Welsh character by the name of "Myrddin" was the progenitor of this name and that Geoffrey changed it. Basil Clarke rather blithely asserts that "Merlin as a name is Geoffrey's own variation on Myrddin, made, it is surmised, in order to avoid sound-similarity to '*merde*' with which his Anglo-Norman audience might have produced ribald jokes or perhaps by which they may have been offended."[12] Perhaps he wanted to lend a less scatological name to a character who would be so important to so much of his work. However, this assumes that Geoffrey knew of Myrddin before writing books seven through eleven of the *HRB* and the *Prophetiae*. This is a difficult assertion to rectify with the characters named Merlin in the *HRB* and the *Vita Merlini*. A.O.H. Jarman's analysis of Geoffrey's reception and re-transmission of the Welsh was long considered the most reliable and palatable theory, asserting that Monmouth had some materials, but not others, before or during the writing of the *HRB*.[13] But O. J. Padel asks invaluable questions that plague the inconsistencies of Jarman's reading, "Why write a new story about Merlin which did incorporate exactly those aspects he had previously omitted?" and "How did Geoffrey come to omit from the story of his Merlin all trace

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[12] Clark, *Life*, viii.

[13] A. O. H. Jarman, "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy," in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. by Peter Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 105-30 (119). He continues, "at some time subsequent to 1138, however, Geoffrey must have learnt more about the Myrddin of legend and realized that the account given of him in the *Historia* was contrary to popular tradition." This seems to be the tacit hypothesis for many scholars, but it seems contingent on too many assumptions.

of the 'northern wild-man' in the *HRB*?"[14] Padel is right to question the accepted etymology of

"Merlinus" as a deliberate change of "Myrddin." If Clarke's assertion—and that of most scholars

in the last hundred years—were true, Geoffrey knew of Myrddin while the *HRB* was being

written. And yet, Merlinus Ambrosius shares none of the integral features of the Welsh/Scottish

predecessor. Furthermore, there is no absolute agreement as to which came first, Geoffrey's

Merlin or the Welsh Myrddin because of a lack of extant Old Welsh material. However, scholars

can trace Merlin's analogues, the manifestations of Myrddin, and references to the *HRB* to

demonstrate that no matter which came first, Monmouth is always focused on the process of

innovating his sources, on playing Merlin, using the avatar of historian, author, and prophet to

produce another adaptation of himself. This is the very act that video gamers will deploy in the

twenty-first century, to be addressed in chapter five.

The discrepancies between the Ambrosius and Silvestris versions of "Merlin" are so

disparate that it led Giraldus Cambrensis to posit in his *Itinerarium Cambriae* that

> there are two Merlins. The one called Ambrosius, who thus had two names, prophesied
>
> when Vortigern was king. He was the son of an incubus and he was discovered in
>
> Carmarthen, which means Merlin's Town[....]The second Merlin came from Scotland. He
>
> is called Caledonis, because he prophesied in the Caledonian Forest. He is also called
>
> Sylvester[...]the second Merlin lived in the time of Arthur.[15]

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[14] O. J. Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," 39.

[15] Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae* and *Descriptio Cambriae*: *The Journey through Wales/Description of Wales*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 192-3. Cited by, among others, J.S.P. Tatlock, "Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*," *Speculum* 18, no. 3 (1943): 265-287 (275); AOH Jarman, "The Welsh Myrddin Poems," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 20-30 (26); and Neil Thomas, "The Celtic Wild Man Tradition and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*: Madness or *Contemptus Mundi*?" *Arthuriana* 10, no.1 (2000): 27-42 (27).

This is one of the first recorded instances of the confusion of characters under this moniker, whose interpretation has influenced centuries of scholarship. The prophet and magician of the *HRB* and madman of the Caledonian woods have widely disparate characteristics. Merlin Ambrosius is the one that Geoffrey grafted onto Nennius's character. The "homo Sylvester" has an analogue in Welsh sources known as "Myrddin." However, that is merely the beginning of the discussion of where the name and the disparate characters are derived because it has been heavily debated which came first: Merlin or Myrddin. Furthermore, how Myrddin is being discussed depends on the text and the scholar analyzing it. The sources ascribed to Welsh authorship are varied in their content, form, scope, and material. The extant manuscripts of the "four ancient books of Wales"—The Red Book of Hergest, The Black Book of Carmarthen, White Book of Rhydderch, and the Book of Aneurin—date from a time after Geoffrey of Monmouth, and therein lies the problem.[16] One of the original provenances of the four Welsh books was conducted by the first serious commentator on these materials, William F. Skene. He details the post-medieval movement of the "four ancient books" from monastic collections to the

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See also Nikolai Tolstoy, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Merlin Legend," in *Arthurian Literature* XXV, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and David F. Johnson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 1-42 (8). Accessed June 27, 2015. https://books.google.com/books?id=FY3P_DUGTyAC. This is a intact article in Google Books. Padel and Nikolai Tolstoy have an interesting discussion through articles and present complementary if conflicting arguments.

[16] The materials in the *Black Book of Carmarthen* (c.1200), the *White Book of Rhydderch* (c.1325), and the more complete—and more interesting since it contains the *Mabinogian* in its only complete copy—*Red Book of Hergest* (c.1400), include the Welsh prophetic poems and the Welsh Triads. Though these manuscripts show the manipulation of later redactions of the story at the hands of Christian scribes, A. O. H. Jarman believes that there is still a core of the original poetry in *Yr Afallenau* [The Apple Tree Stanzas] and *Yr Oianau* [The Little Pig Stanzas]. See AOH Jarman, "The Welsh Myrddin Poems," 20. Also, Nikolai Tolstoy, *The Quest for Merlin* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1985), 25. The definitive discussion on the triads is still Rachel Bromwich, "The Welsh Triads," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*: *A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 44-51. The triads as a form "has been popular as a literary device among the Celtic peoples since the Middle Ages, if not longer. It was used commonly as a means of codifying moral aphorisms, general gnomic and antiquarian matter, and the technicalities of poetic composition and of the law…the triads were drawn up in the bardic schools as a mnemonic aid for students, who were required to show proficient knowledge of the extensive body of oral lore inherited from the past[...]professional storytellers known as *cyfarwyddiad* (sing. *Cyfarwydd)* […]But it was only at the time when this oral history was beginning to disintegrate, probably during the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, that the redactors of the triads set to work to classify and preserve it.

post-Reformation dissolution of these institutions to the private collectors' various efforts to preserve them, eventually leading to inclusion in national archives.[17] More importantly, his first chapter treats the reception of the material in the nineteenth century. Skene was among the first to study Welsh material with the same linguistic, academic approaches with which Victorian scholars had already analyzed the body of English poetry as far back as *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon and Middle English works. Skene upbraids the quasi-scholars who believed that these materials had not only historical significance, but also of mystical, Druidic importance.[18] Skene and his academic colleagues even debated the timing of the books' authorship. He says that Thomas Stephens's work dispels these poems' authenticity as "spurious," believing them to be late-medieval.[19] However, he says that D.W. Nash "implies that none of the poems are older than the twelfth century.[20] Thus, the debate has continued for over a century and a half as to what constitutes an authentic Welsh poem and whether the poems discovered in the "Four Ancient Welsh Books" were "authentic" to the original Welsh oral poems, themes, and characters. Hanging in the balance of this discussion, among other things, is the mystery of Merlin's origin.

As the discussion continued through the nineteenth century, the discrepancies between the Merlins continued to puzzle scholars, who began inquiries that still haunt this character's

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[17] William Forbes Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales* (Edinburgh: Edmonton and Douglas: 1868): 1-4.

[18] Ibid., His commentary on Rev. Edward Davies's *Mythology of the British Druids* (1809), Algernon Herbert's *Britannia after the* Romans (1836), are politely scathing criticisms of the "positivist" readings of the authenticity of the works and particularly Davies's and Herbert's. One of my favorite quotations: "It would probably be difficult to find a stranger specimen of perverted ingenuity and misplaced learning than is contained within the works of Davies and Herbert" (5). This reading later influences nineteenth and twentieth century writers, despite their lack of any factually historical claims or independent verification. On the other hand, Skene praises attempts to linguistically determine the era in which the poems were written by Thomas Stephens, *The Literature of Kymry* (1849), and D.W. Nash's *Taliesin*: *Bards and Druids of Britain* (1858).

[19] Skene, 7.

[20] Ibid. 8.

existence. John Veitch says that the Merlinus Ambrosius and Merlin Caledonis are almost

certainly incompatible because the one is associated with Vortigern and Aurelius Ambrosius in

the *HRB*. Veitch explains that "Aurelius Ambrosius comes into prominence as the successor to

Vortigern about 457, and then disappears in 465" and that the "Wildman" Merlin went mad at

the battle of Arfderydd [Arthuret] in 573.[21] Veitch's premise here is that either there were two

"Merlins" or that one was very old at the time of the battle near present-day Carlisle. Such a

conclusion leads him to surmise that "the mythical attributes of the earlier Merlin have been

assigned to the latter, while a third wholly legendary Merlin arose in the imagination of the

romancers of the 11th century."[22] In other words, the two characters became conflated, while

Geoffrey's version is a character unrelated to the two "historical" Merlins. Veitch seems to

overlook that Geoffrey invented the "Ambrosius" version by adapting Nennius's fatherless boy,

instead supposing that the "Ambrosius" Merlin whom Giraldus differentiates from the

"Silvestris" to be an original invention.[23] Such is the state of confusion at various points of the

Merlin origin discussion that Geoffrey's own invention is cited as the "original." The Myrddin of

the Welsh tradition is thought to be a separate real human or character and that Ambrosius was

invented or that they lived in different times. The most important part is to observe the discourse

of a myth among several writers and redactors, Monmouth included, to see in what way each

version manipulates the story to influence the moment.

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[21] John Veitch, "Merlin and the Merlinian Poems," *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 45 (1889): 123-30 (123). doi: 10.1080/00681288.1889.11888297. The dates are drawn by various scholars from the *Annales Cambriae*. See Padel 39-40, Clarke, *Vita Merlini*, 42; J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 272.

[22] Veitch, 127.

[23] It should also be noted that he wrote a book entitled *Merlin and Other Poems* (Edinburgh: Blackwood & Sons, 1889), in which the preface reads "The Merlin of this poem is Merlin Caledonius...He ought not to be identified as Myrddin Emrys or Merlin Ambrosius, who was the *vates* for Vortigern" (4).

Theories differ on why Geoffrey transformed his adaptation into a disparate portrayal, but there is not a definitive answer. Instead, it is best to focus on the provenances of the legend and its variations in order to discern authenticity. One solution has been to look to the material of the "four ancient books of Wales" for clues to the origin of "Myrddin," the presumed precursor. In the mythology of the northern Celtic peoples, there is a triumvirate of madmen and prophets that are portrayed as related stories with different names attached to the protagonist.[24] Lailoken and Suibhne [Sweeny] appear in separate manuscripts from Myrddin yet have very similar lives and incidents. Lailoken was a legend in Scotland in the first millennium of the common era. He is known through the *Life of Saint Kentigern* by Jocelin of Furness, written in the twelfth century.[25] The history of this saint is integral to the legends of Christian Scotland because he is the founding patron of Glasgow, upon the crest of which are represented the miracles of Kentigern. The saint, while exiled in southern Scotland near northern Wales, prays in the mountains but is disturbed by "a madman, naked, hairy, and wretched" named "Lailoken; some say he was Merlin [Myrddin], the famous seer among the Britons, but this not an established fact" (5). The link between the characters is here established, but the author is already covering his tracks by adding the disclaimer. The illusion of authenticity is paramount to a hagiography. Some have used this line to show that Jocelin was influenced by Geoffrey since he lived in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Jarman asserts that this "statement at the beginning of *Lailoken and Kentigern* that Lailoken was said by some to be Merlin was no doubt associated with the

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[24] Jarman, "The Welsh Myrddin Poems," 25. The *Vita* is "the elaboration by early story-tellers of the well-known folk-lore theme of 'the wild man of the woods.'"

[25] "The primary source for this saint's legend is the twelfth-century *Life of Saint Kentigern*, by Jocelin of Furness, preserved in Cotton Vitellius C. VIII from the fifteenth century." Galyon and Thundy, "Lailoken" in *The Romance of Merlin*, 4.

activities of Geoffrey of Monmouth."[26] He is theorizing that the Lailoken myth is already

influenced by Geoffrey's Merlin in the *VM*. However, this character is a site of overlap and

adaptation. The provenance of this character and Merlin are so fused by a mere two generations

after Geoffrey that the analogues are almost indistinguishable. When asked how Lailoken

happened to be in the same woods, the madman recounts the frenzy that overcame him during a

battle at which many were slaughtered. Lailoken says, "In the battle between Lidel and

Carwannock"—which has been convincingly traced to the battle of Arfderydd—a heavenly

messenger says, "'Lailoken, since you alone are guilty of the blood of all your slain comrades,

you alone shall suffer for their sins.'"[27]After this divine curse, Lailoken flees to the woods,

where he is purported to prophesy his own "triple death."[28] Fortunately, Kentigern rehabilitates

the cursed *homo silvestris* with an absolution and Eucharist before he dies. In several ways, the

protagonist of the *Vita Merlini* bears close resemblance to Lailoken.

In the *VM,* Geoffrey follows the *Annales Cambriae* in aligning southern Scottish

monarchs against northern Welsh ones, pitting Peredur and Rodarch [Rhydderch Hael] against

Gwenddolau.[29] At the battle are three of Merlin's brothers who "so fiercely and impetuously" ran

into battle "that they were soon struck down and killed" (36-7).[30] Even though the Britons win

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[26] Jarman, "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy," 110.

[27] Galyon and Thundy, 3-5: "Sweeney is associated with the Battle of Magh Rath in A.D. 637; Lailoken and Myrddin with the battle of Arfderydd in 573."

[28] Jarman, "Welsh Myrddin," 27. he compares to "Suibhne Geilt, legendary king of Dál Afraid" lost his wits and became a wild man of the woods after a battle in "Magh Rath in 673."

[29] O.J. Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," 39-40. His previous work "had placed Merlin in the second half of the fifth century. The new story placed him in the later sixth century (the battle of Arfderydd having occurred in 573 according to the Welsh annals, which Geoffrey knew)."

[30] "Inde per infestas cum tali munere turmas acriter irruerant subito cecidere perempti."

the day, Merlin laments their loss, apostrophizing the brothers and meditating on the ephemeral nature of life. After he grieves for "three days…a strange madness came upon him. He crept away and fled into the woods" of Caledon (70,72-3), where he spends a long time in the woods, eating whatever plants he can find, until Rodarch has him captured.[31] The analogues are at least comparable, though Merlin is not blamed for his brothers' deaths, as Lailoken is in his analogous battle. Among other events at the court of Rodarch, Merlin incurs the wrath of the queen Ganeida, his own sister, who is cheating on Rodarch. When Merlin reveals this damaging information, she tests his prophesying ability by sending the same boy to him in three different disguises in order that Merlin may predict his death. This move would surely discredit the prophet if he were false. She even believes that she has triumphed because when asked three times, Merlin gives three answers. He says the first time, "[T]his lad will die by falling from a high rock"; upon the second inquiry he says, "[H]e will meet a violent death in a tree through misjudgment"; and again on the third time—with the boy disguised as a girl—Merlin predicts, "Girl or not[...]she will die in a river" (320-1, 338).[32] Of course, his sister ridicules him as an ignorant charlatan until the triple death comes about when the youth is hunting a stag and, as the narrator states, "His horse happened to slip and went over a high precipice...he fell in such a way that one foot caught in a tree and the rest of his body was submerged in the flowing stream. So then, he fell—he was drowned—he hung from a tree; and by his triple death he proved the

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[31] "iam tribus emensis defleverat ille diebus[...]Inde novas furias cum tot tantisque querelis aera complesset cepit furtimque recedit..."

[32] "hic morietur homo de celsa rupe ruendo"; Puer hic cum venerit etas / mente vagans forti succumbet in arbore morti[…]Hec virgo nec ne[...]morietur in ampne."

prophet a true one" (409-15).[33] The episode is analogous to Lailoken's prediction of his own

triple death in the *Life of Saint Kentigern*. A bishop who is trying to discredit the madman has a

priest ask Lailoken three times how the madman will die. Lailoken prophesies that he would be

killed that day "by stones and clubs" and "my body will be pierced by a sharp wooden spear"

and finally, he says, "This very day I will be swallowed up by the waves."[34] The circumstances

and the means are different, but the prophet being proven by the same method points toward a

similarity in the two narratives. Another text translated by Thundy, "Meldred and Lailoken"

seems to support these fictional circumstances: "As Lailoken had predicted and as it has been

written above, tradition has it that he met his death there...thirty miles from the city of Glasgow.

Lailoken rests in a grave in the town's cemetery," and written on the tombstone is: "Pierced by a

spear, crushed by a stone, / And drowned in the stream's waters, / Merlin died a triple death."[35]

The scenarios and the details differ, but the effect is the same: the seeming contradictory

prophecies are proven true by coincidental circumstances. The triple-death motif seems to show

that Lailoken and Merlin were linked and their predictions, though changed, are consistent as a

motif. In the *VM*, the proof of the prophecies' veracity is enough to cast doubt upon Queen

Ganeida—and exonerate an absent Merlin—and in the *Life of St. Kentigern* to earn Lailoken the

Eucharist to which he aspired before his death. Furthermore, Lailoken is called "Merlin." Their

separate legends are conflated, adapted, and innovated in many ways until the two wild men

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[33] "Contigit interea dum duceret impetus ipsum / labi quadrupedum celsa de rupe virumque / forte per abruptum montis cecidisse sub amnem, / ut tamen hereret pes eius in arbore quadam / et submersa forent sub flumine cetera membra. / Sicque ruit mersusque fuit lignoque pependit, / et fecit vatem per terna pericula verum."

[34] Galyon and Thundy, "Lailoken,", 6-7.

[35] Thundy, 11. Parry and Caldwell, "Geoffrey," 91: "Welsh tradition accounts for the story of Merlin's madness induced by a battle" and the Irish and Scottish versions have the "triple-death" prophecy and the "prophetic laughter" is in the "Irish *Death of Fergus Mac Leide*" and the "Scottish *Lailoken and Meldred*."

have approached indistinguishability. They have become interchangeable in a written discourse, different versions competing with each other, playing Merlin, while simultaneously attaching the name to a legendary figure in order to add to its own notoriety.

These similarities demonstrate the reception and adaptation of the sources for the *Vita Merlini*, but none of the extant manuscripts of the four "books of Wales" predate Geoffrey's work. The impossibility of proving prior versions has not deterred most from formulating a common ancestry, however Phillippe Walter states that the collective myths of Merlin, Lailoken, and Suibhne "constituent des variations sur un même schéma mythique…Le mythe est içi compris comme la survivance d'une ancienne tradition religieuse précrhrétienne centrée sur une divinite ou un événement original."[36] Positing a common myth that pervades several closely related and geographically contiguous societies is reasonable, with cultures borrowing tales and adapting them. One thinks of how the Romans adapted the Greek pantheon and rituals to their own society, and Christians appropriated pagan ideas and shrines. The *homo fatuus* or *homo silvestris* is a common motif among Celtic peoples throughout northern Europe. Indeed, Galyon states, "The mutual influence [of Lailoken, Suibhne, and Myrddin on each other's stories] is not surprising, since during the Dark Ages British tribes from Strathclyde settled in Wales, and frequent contacts existed between kingdoms of Southern Ireland and Wales and northern Ireland and Scotland."[37] It is understandable how these names can correspond if they are indeed separate, but related, characters. It is also comprehensible that Geoffrey had some material at hand that would have influenced the writing of the *Vita*. But that still begs the question of the

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[36] Philippe Walter. *Le Devin Maudit* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 1999), 6. The myths "constitute variations on the same mythic schema…the myth is here comprised like the legacy of an ancient pre-Christian religious tradition or an original event."

[37] Galyon and Thundy, 3.

origin of the name of "Merlinus." If it derives from "Myrddin," then Geoffrey knew of the South

Wales version of the myth *before* he wrote the *HRB*. If this is true, then tracing the migration of

the myth and Geoffrey's adaptation from one text to the other should be easy. However, attempts

to trace the history of the Welsh Myrddin, the purported progenitor of Geoffrey's Merlin,

encounter a lack of evidence prior to the *HRB* and *Prophetiae Merlini*.

The geographic migration of the stories is important to the poems contained with the

manuscripts. John K. Bollard points out that "although these early traditions were articulated in

Wales, they are not located in Wales. They refer primarily to events in the Celtic kingdoms of

'the Old North,' in what is now northern England and southern Scotland[...]the descendants

themselves migrated to friendlier territory" ahead of the Anglo-Saxon invasions.[38] Lailoken is

the link between Myrddin and the Scots. Myrddin is associated with the Battle of Arfderydd near

present-day Carlisle, which would have been occupied by Scots at the time. So is Lailoken. It is

widely held that "the crystallization of much early Welsh legend into verse form occurred during

the ninth century and it is possible that between 850 and 1050 a poem on the Myrddin legend

was composed of which these three stanzas" in some of the Welsh texts "are a remnant," an Ur

text, for the subsequent thirteenth-through fifteenth-century Welsh manuscripts. Then Myrddin is

an import from the northern Pictish myths that migrated south. Therefore, Myrddin is an

adaptation even before Geoffrey applies his pen to reshaping the story. Even if he is just another

moniker for a shared mythological person, Myrddin has been adapted from received oral stories

to conform to the local customs within the manuscripts, which have been subsequently adapted

by later redactors to fit Norman influence and to adjust for Geoffrey's contributions. It is useful

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[38] See also John K. Bollard, "Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition" in *The Romance of Merlin: An Anthology*, edited by Peter Goodrich, trans. by Zacharias P. Thundy (New York: Garland, 1990), 13-54.

to track the similarities in order to demonstrate the most daring innovation yet: fusing these traditions to that of Merlinus Ambrosius.

The wildman comes to resemble Geoffrey's prophet, but in a slightly different form. In the *Vita Merlini*, after being released by Rodarch, Merlin makes a second trip into the woods. Soon, his sister comes to check on him. He sends her home to her husband, but not before he has her commission a building "to which you will give seventy doors and as many windows, through which I may...watch by night the stars wheeling in the firmament; and they will teach me about the future of the nation. Let there be as many secretaries trained to record what I say[...]committing my prophetic song to paper" (555-61).[39] He has her establish a hermitage, astronomical observatory, and a scriptorium dedicated to his vaticinations. After her departure, Merlin looks into the stars and sees the future, crying out, "The madness of the Britons! Their universal affluence leads them to excess[...]they engage in civil war and family feuds" (580-1).[40] This preface to the coming vaticinations echoes Gildas's excoriation of the Britons in book twenty-one.[41] Gildas details the sins of the Britons, who, knowing peace, had allowed themselves to become complacent: "[T]he island was becoming rich with so many resources of affluence that no age remembered the possession of such afterwards: along with these resources of every kind, luxury also grew," and furthermore "the hatred of truth[...]he taking up of evil instead of good" and "kings were anointed not in God's name, but as being crueler than the rest."[42] Gildas

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[39] "Ante domos alias unam compone remotam / cui sex dena decem dabis hostia totque fenestras / per quas ignivomum videam cum Venere Phebum / inspiciamque polo labentia sydera noctu, / que me me de populo regni ventura docebunt, / totque notatores que dicam scribere docti / assint et studeant carmen mandare tabellis."

[40] "O rabiem Britonum, quos copia divicarium / usque superveniens ultra quam debeat effert."

[41] Gildas, *Works*, from *Six old English chronicles*, trans. J. A. Giles (London: Bell & Sons, 1891).

[42] Ibid., chapter 24.

then tells of the divine retribution that comes in the form of the Saxons, who were "let into the island like wolves into the fold."[43] Geoffrey's Merlin predicts a future retribution upon the Britons in the form of a "sea-wolf" [lupus equorus], referring to the Saxons in the same manner as Gildas had centuries earlier (591). The progression of imagery after this refers to boars and foxes, including the veiled references that appear in the *Prophetiae*. Merlin predicts that the "The nephews of the Cornish boar disrupt everything[…]they put one another to death with their evil swords" (586-8).[44] As demonstrated in chapters one and two, Arthur is the Cornish Boar, a signal repeated in the *HRB* and separate copies of the *Prophetiae*, wherein the boar was triumphant against Vortigern. Here, the Britons are engaged in civil wars, as born out in the generations after Arthur's death in the *HRB*. More tellingly, the allusion rekeys the *Vita* to sound like the *Prophetiae* and thus be read in a similar manner as political prophecy. Civil war must end if the Britons are to flourish and by the same transitive properties that make the Britons a reflection of the Normans, including King Stephen whose reign was nearing an end with an agreement that would end the Anarchy upon his death. But neither Monmouth nor Merlin foresee the king's death in the early 1150s.

Monmouth continues to speak to his own time in the *Vita Merlini* through his depiction of the past. Even though Merlin is speaking at the time of Rhydderch Hael, supposedly in the late sixth century, Merlin delivers similar prophecies as those delivered by Merlinus Ambrosius to Vortigern in the late fifth century. He says, "[t]he Danes will come with a fleet, defeat our people and reign for a short while[...]Then the Normans will come over the sea in wooden ships[...]they

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[43] Ibid., chapter 26.

[44] "Cornubiensiis apri conturbant queque nepotes. / Insidias sibimet ponentes ense nephando."

will make a violent attack with sharp swords on the Angles, kill them and win the field" (651-1, 654, 656-7).[45] After he finishes his vaticination, Merlin says, "All of this I once predicted at greater length to Vortigern when I was explaining to him the mystic battle of the two dragons as we sat on the bank of the drained pool" (681-3).[46] The historical problem here is that the predictions to Vortigern would have been delivered over a century previous to Merlin telling this to Ganeida in the *Vita*. Hence, the argument of two Merlins. However, the more important consideration is metahistorical: what does Geoffrey wish the audience to believe of the past and its relationship to his time and to his future? He adapts his own innovation when he revises Merlin to be the Wildman of the woods. He is playing with his own avatar, producing a combination of Silvestris and Ambrosius. As a signal toward his intent, Geoffrey has Merlin cite himself, investing the character with further authority to add to the myth. He is now simultaneously *auctoritas* and *ingenium*. The commentaries and re-inscriptions of the *Prophetiae* were only beginning at the time of this writing, but the myth of Merlin Ambrosius' authorship of the future is again posited by his author. Furthermore, this the moment at which Monmouth is fusing the Welsh material to his own innovations. In the process of modifying his own adaptation, Geoffrey further alters the course of the Welsh material.

The influence of the imagery of this portion of the prophecies from the *HRB* and *Vita* upon later "four ancient books of Wales" is consistent. In "The Prophecy of Myrddin and Gwenddydd, His Sister," [*Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei* Chwae] from the Red Book of Hergest, Merlin and his sister, analogous to Ganeida in the *VM*, engage in a dialogue in many

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[45] "Classe supervenient Daci populoque subacto regnabunt breviter propulsatique redibunt[...]/ Indeque Neustrenses ligno trans equoro vecti[...]/ ferratis tunicis et acutis ensibus Anglos / acriter invadent, periment campoque fruenter."

[46] "Hec Vortigerno cecini prolixius olim / exponendo duum sibi mistica bella draconum in ripa stagni quando consedimus hausti."

poetic triads that predicts a series of monarchs and events. Like many of the other material in the four ancient books of Wales, several contemporary references overlay the original work.[47] They indicate certain ideas that become relevant to the *VM's* concept of time, the character of Merlin, and Geoffrey's adaptation of the legends. These versions of the prophecy uses the animal imagery of the *Prophetiae* when it describes a king who is "[n]ot a servant of boars / a lion of a king with an uprooting hand, / beak-like tongs, with the grasp of a wolf."[48] In the *Prophetiae*, the dragons of Merlin's prophecies are "succeeded by the lion of justice, whose roar will set trembling the towers of France and the island of dragons."[49] There is no reference to the lion in the prophecies of Merlin in the *Vita*, though the imagery subsequent to the lion is retained when both the *HRB* and *Vita* use almost exactly the same phrasing: "Girt thus with the teeth of the boar, he will rise above the mountain peaks and the shadow of the helmeted man."[50] The influence of the prophecies in the *HRB* very well could have been grafted onto the original "Myrddin and Gwenddydd," which includes very little other animal imagery, but which is heavily politicized. The Welsh poem then turns back to its previous style of lists and deeds of kings after the section referring to the Norman successors. The most important aspect of the congruities between this text and the prophecies in the *Vita* is the immediate return to the era of Rhydderch Hael. Prophecy in the narrative past "predicts" the history and present of whomever

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[47] Bollard, "Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition," 30: "It has been argued plausibly that the core of the poem was composed before 1100." However, Padel disagrees and bets his entire argument against Jarman's hypotheses on the origins of the Welsh material on dating the *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei Chwaer* "The prophecy of Myrddin and his sister Gwenddydd" after 1150, saying: "be unwise to insist on a date earlier than c. 1150...on linguistic grounds."

[48] Bollard, "Prophecy of Myrddin," 38, stanza 61.

[49] Reeve, *History*, 113.78-79. "Succedet leo iusticiae, ad cuius rugitum Gallicanae turres et insulani dracones tremebunt."

[50] Ibid, 148-149: "Apri igitur dentibus accinctus, cacumina montium et umbram galeati transcendet." Clark, *Life*, 88. "ut apri dentibus accinctus galeati transeat umbram." The differences in construction are from the "ut clause" subjunctive.

writes it. Merlin is again a vehicle and an avatar for Geoffrey's machinations. Previously, he is

the device by which Geoffrey can demonstrate that the coming of the Normans was predicted

and thus the character who legitimates the dynasty. Here, Geoffrey utilizes Merlin to unify his

sources. Ambrosius is now *also* Silvestris. From here the two become further (con)fused and

even begin to subsume other traditions.

Geoffrey adapts several sources through Merlin by introducing a character who is

Merlin's equal in song and prophecy, Taliesin. In the "Conversation of Myrddin and Taliesin,"

extant in the Black Book of Carmarthen, another analogue to the *VM* offers insight into the mix

of stories that are influenced by and influencing Geoffrey. John K. Bollard opens the door for

several intriguing possibilities when he says that "[i]t has been suggested that ["The

Conversation"] is fragments of two different poems" that have been joined because of the switch

in verb tense from the past to the future and that one of them could pre-date Geoffrey's writings

because there is an "absence of any reference to the Normans."[51] Their discussion is of the

famous battles of their "time," one past and the other future. The first battle is the one in which

Taliesin names a participant: "Maelgwn, whom I saw fighting." This may be Maelgwn

Gwynedd, "who is berated by Gildas in *The Ruin of Britain* and who died in 547."[52] The two

bards discuss this battle until line 23 in the poem, which is discussed in the past tense.

Afterwards, they begin to discuss Arfderydd in the future tense, "prophesying" the battle in

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[51] Bollard, "Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition," 17. However, it has been established that the Black Book is mostly post-Monmouth. He also refers to the "Apple Tree Stanzas" and "The Little Pig, "which stanzas are obviously post-Monmouth, referring to the "five leaders from Normandy" in number 4: "William the Conqueror, William II, Henry I, Stephen, and Henry II," 21. Padel, 43: "By the time the poems [*Afallenau* and *Oianau*] were written into the Black Book of Carmarthen (mid-thirteenth century) Geoffrey's contributions were both known in Wales" making the record of Welsh legend spotty at best and there is still no indication that these poems "were ascribed to *Myrddin*."

[52] Bollard, "Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition," 16-17.

which "seven score generous nobles went mad; / in Celydon Wood they ended. / Since it is I, Myrddin, in the style of Taliesin, / my prophecy will be just."[53] He does not mention his participation in the battle, but several noblemen go mad. This prediction is an inconsistency that is revealing about the dating of the poem. Jarman points out that "[w]e thus have the incongruity that Myrddin, speaking in Dyfed before 547, is made to utter a prophetic description of the northern battle, fought a generation later, at which according to his legend he himself became mad and acquired prophetic powers."[54] The battle at which he is driven insane and gains his prophetic powers is in the future, creating a contradiction that might be explained by a manuscript that compiles several sources and links them inconsistently. But the story demonstrates that Myrddin in the "Conversation" is ascribed the same powers as Ambrosius in the *HRB* and the *Vita*. More importantly, no matter who influenced whom, Myrddin is the lynchpin of this poem's chronology: he has knowledge of the past, and in the present of the song composes a piece about it and about the future battle in the form of a prophecy. All three times are utilized by the compiler of this poem, who is mixing up his dates in such a way as to be contradictory, but reflective of the uses of the character. Myrddin and Taliesin are given the roles of the authors because they have recorded the battle in a song, which reflects the oral tradition that led to their being written down. Of considerably more import is that the prophetic powers are links to Geoffrey's agenda by unifying all the prophetic personages under one tradition, including Taliesin and the myths of Lailoken and Suibhne.

The longest section of the Red Book consists of the romances of the *Mabinogi*, which contains the "Book of Taliesin" in which the bard undergoes many trials of skill in the

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[53] Bollard, "Myrddin in Early Welsh Tradition," 19.

[54] Jarman, A.O.H. "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy," 106.

"beginning of Arthur's time and of the Round Table."[55] After a story of his birth and association with the era in question, he is given over to prophesying in much the same manner as the Merlin in the *HRB* and the *Vita*. The prophecies at the end of this story demonstrate that "the Red Book collection in more than one instance shows unmistakably the influence of the Welsh versions of Geoffrey of Monmouth."[56] Taliesin "predicts" that "a coiling serpent[...]/ on her golden wings from Germany" will come and "[s]he will overrun / England and Scotland[...]/ Then will the Brython / be as prisoners[...]/ Their land they will lose, / Except wild Walia."[57] The imagery and the wording reflect Geoffrey's version of the prophecies by "Merlinus Ambrosius." The association of Taliesin and Merlin and ascribing them prophetic powers is crucial to understanding the role of the *Vita Merlini* within the Latin and the Welsh traditions. It is the Taliesin section of the *Vita* that unites past, present, and future of Geoffrey's stories and brings together the redactions of several sources. Rachel Bromwich discusses how "already in eleventh-century Wales Arthur was in the process of becoming the vortex to which were drawn the heroes of originally independent saga-cycles."[58] This logic can be extended to Merlin's role in shaping the mythos of the region. Monmouth is using the life of Merlin to encompass many of the aspects of the various *homo silvestris* stories and associate Merlin with all of the famous and supposedly historical British prophets and bards.

Geoffrey is depicting Merlin as a vortex, but he also chooses to amplify Teliesin's importance to Merlin. In the *VM*, Merlin bids his sister to send Taliesin [Thelgesin] to him in the

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[55] The Round Table does not first appear until the writings of Wace, to be discussed in chapter four, indicating that this piece is composed far after Geoffrey's writings.

[56] Bromwich, "Triads," 48.

[57] *Mabinogian*, translated by Lady Charlotte Guest (1849) 135-136. http://aoda.org/pdf/mbng.pdf.

[58] Bromwich, "Triads," 48.

woods. One of the most notable portions of this request is when Merlin reveals that Taliesin has "only recently returned from Brittany, where he has been enjoying the sweets of learning under the wise Gildas" (685-8).[59] Geoffrey is introducing a character from the Welsh tradition, Taliesin, but framing it in terms of his Latin source for the sermons in the *HRB*. Monmouth is uniting his received traditions by making the Welsh bard the bearer of knowledge from the British writer who is one of Geoffrey's Latin sources. He is signaling the cross-pollination of his various traditions by associating his British sources with the Latin writer of British heritage. Moreover, he infuses myth into history by placing this Merlin in the time of Gildas (500-570 CE). This seems to indicate that Monmouth thought, or at least wants his audience—and future readers—to think that the setting is still in the very near future of Arthur, corresponding to Gildas's claim that he heard of a war chief from eyewitnesses a generation older than he. Monmouth is rewriting history, condensing it, to fit Myrddin into the Ambrosius tradition. Taliesin bridges that gap with the one external reference to Gildas and with two extremely important intertextual references.

The section that involves Merlin's discussion with Taliesin is natural philosophy that is an adaptation from the writings of Isidore of Seville.[60] For the next several hundred lines, the two bards discuss the construction of the universe, including the heavens and its occupants, waters, animals, birds and their meanings and histories, referring to several texts. An important detail that relates this section back to the network of sources for Geoffrey is Taliesin's discourse on the messengers between heaven and earth, saying that the "space down below the moon is full of demons skilled in deception[...]they even have intercourse with women and make them pregnant,

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[59] "Venit enim noviter de partibus Amoricanis / dulcia quo didicit sapientis dogmata Gilde."

[60] *Geoffrey of Monmouth's Life of Merlin*, ed. and trans. Mark Walker (Gloucestershire, UK: Amberly, 2013). *Kindle*, location 278.

an immoral fatherhood" (779-82).[61] Merlin knows this all too well since that is how the prophet

was conceived. Here Geoffrey, through Taliesin, reiterates Apuleius's teachings on the nature of

incubi, though in the *HRB*, the spirits "are part human, part angel, and take on human form at

will and sleep with women" (107.545-50).[62] Again, Geoffrey is using the same material to tie

together his disparate works and his protagonist with Ambrosius. Also, Geoffrey is investing this

character with knowledge from other received materials than those usually associated with his

Welsh sources. Toward the end of the conversation, Taliesin mentions *Tiles* or the *"*Island of

Apples" that "gets its name 'The Fortunate Island' from the fact that it produces all manner of

plants spontaneously," a veritable second Garden of Eden (906-909).[63] Linguistically, he's

talking about Avalon, the place where Arthur is taken in the *HRB*. Taliesin says, the "Island of

Apples" ["Insula pomorum"] is the place where "the nine sisters," including Morgen, "practice

medicine and astrology[…]It was there we took Arthur after the Battle of Camlan, where he was

wounded" (930-1).[64] Astonishingly, Taliesin recounts it as though he were there. As

demonstrated in previous chapters, neither Merlin nor any named person was present at Arthur's

transferrence to Avalon in the *HRB*. Geoffrey is seeking to unite the two bards and prophets

retroactively into the account in the *Historia*, which only mentions that "the illustrious king

Arthur too was mortally wounded; he was taken away to the island of Avalon to have his wounds

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[61] "post lunam subtus habundat / qui nos decipiunt.../ Quin etiam coitu mulieres agrediuntur / et faciunt gravidas generantes more prophano."

[62] See Tatlock, 171 for a summary. "Nam ut Apulegius de deo Socratis perhibet, inter lunam et terram habitant spiritus quous incubos daemones apellamus. Hii partim habent naturam hominum, partim uero angelorum, et cum uolunt assumunt sibi humanas figuras et cum mulieribus coeunt."

[63] "Tiles eterno producit vere virentes / flores et fronds per tempora cuncta virendo. Insula pomorum que Fortunata vocatur."

[64] "Illuc post bellum Camblani vulnere lesum / duximus Arcturum nos conducente."

tended, and in the year of our Lord 542, handed over the crown."[65] Taliesin in the *VM* represents a more philosopher who is associated with the Silvestris and Ambrosius.

After this reference to the end of Arthur's reign in the *VM*, Merlin declares that Arthur will not return to help the Britons. Rather they must rely on other means. Taliesin comments that Merlin has seen many civil wars ["inter concives"]. Here Merlin returns to the beginning of chapter seven of the *HRB*, recounting in brief the history of the Britons from the time of Vortigern and Hengest, to the flight of Uther and Ambrosius through the time of Arthur, and int the reign of Conan, who "seized the territories over which he now exercises a weak and witless control" after Constantine, Arthur's nephew, established a short-lived peace (1133-5).[66] The end point of this section before Merlin's madness is dispelled by the spring is comparable to Geoffrey's account of history in books seven through eleven in which "Aurelius Conanus" had a "fondness for civil strife."[67] This lineage is discovered to be quite different than the extant Welsh sources in which Conan is listed by Myrddin in the "Prophecy" with his sister as coming after Cadualan and Cadualadrus.[68] This is odd because in the *VM*, Merlin stops his history with Conan because of the curative spring being announced, but the *Historia* continues to discuss the reigns of Malgo, Cadualo, and Cadualadrus. These last two, at least, are the usual ending point for the kings of the Britons in many of the Latin and Welsh sources as well as several versions of "prophecies" and histories in both traditions and Geoffrey's own works. Monmouth plays with the historical and mythical characters and his several Latin and Welsh sources to blur further the

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[65] Reeve, *History*, 178.81-4. "Sed et inclitus ille rex Arturus letaliter uulneratus est; qui illinc ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis euectus Constantino cognato suo...anno ab incarnatione Domini .dxlii."

[66] "Conanus / propripuitque sibi regiones rege perempto, / quas nunc debiliter nec cum ratione Gubernat."

[67] Reeve, *History*, 181.107. "foret ciuitis belli amator."

[68] Goodrich, *Romance*, 34-5.

lines between history and fiction, ultimately strengthening his own version as more characters are integrated.

One of the subtler changes that Geoffrey makes to his received material is that Merlin is "on the winning side" of the Battle of Arfderydd "as a follower rather than an opponent of Rodarch" as Myrddin was said to be.[69] According to Neil Thomas, this leads to madness out of grief, rather than divine retribution. He retreats to the woods in an act of "contemptus mundi" that would place him among holy hermits, joined by Taliesin, Maledin and Ganeida in the "coenobitic life," which shows that they are "essentially forming a monastic cell."[70] Geoffrey is inculcating Merlin into the religious life. As Philippe Walter puts it: "Assuredly, Merlin is not a saint but his legendary biography presents some analogues with these hagiographic works and other legends[…]these *lives*."[71] His position is that the *Vita Merlini* is a hagiography, a biographical genre written to commemorate saints. A saint's life usually had specific parameters, including divine revelations, miracles during life or involving their corpse. At the very least, Merlin must somehow be reclaimed—like Lailoken—and converted from demonic paternity. The internal logic of the narratives of both the *HRB* and the *Vita* dictate that Merlin needs to be rehabilitated. If Geoffrey has the same character in mind, then Merlin is born of a spirit of a dubious origin. Even though Apuleius posits creatures like Merlin's father as divine messengers akin to angels, Geoffrey's works make these sub-lunar creatures more akin to demons. That Merlin was born of the deception of a maiden by such an alien being raises two theological problems: Merlin's birth, life, and prophecies are potentially demonic, thus making any of his

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[69] Neil Thomas, "The Celtic Wild Man Tradition," 32.

[70] Ibid, 36.

[71] Philippe Walter, *Le Devin Maudit* (Grenoble: ELLUG, 1999), 17. My translation. "Merlin n'est assurément pas un saint mais sa biographie legendaire présente quelques analogies avec les récits hagiographiques et autres légendes…. Les *vitæ*."

previous work antithetical to any Christian nation, person, or idea. The other theological quandary is that Merlin's conception and his birth is the opposite to the begetting of Jesus. That he is engendered in the same manner upon a virgin by a demon may not have been comfortable genealogy for Geoffrey, who was aspiring to a bishopric.

The difference in genre turns the ending of the *Vita* into a sanctification that presages Robert de Boron's later redemption of the son-of-an-incubus through his mother's purity. If the Merlin of the *VM* is ascribed certain characteristics of Lailoken from Jocelin's *Life of St. Kentigern*, then it makes sense that Geoffrey might imitate, while adapting, the genre to fit Merlin. The related legend of Lailoken in the *Life of Saint Kentigern* has the wild man taking communion in order to be reconciled to the Church before his death. Lailoken is rehabilitated as a prophet within competing Celtic folklore and Christian traditions. In the *Vita*, Merlin is cured by a spring that he says, "removed the error of my mind[...]I was taken out of my true self, I was as a spirit and knew the history of people long past and could foretell the future" (1160-2).[72] This freedom from his "error" is at odds with the entire body of the character's traits and actions in all of Geoffrey's works. He is a celebrated prophet within the narratives and externally he is used by other, later histories and prophecies as an author and authority. Merlin's admission that he "was like a spirit" returns to his conception by the sub-lunar being. His power, as has been shown, stems from being the fountainhead of the spirit. The dubious nature of his powers would have cast suspicion upon his character and the veracity of his prophecies. There was certainly reason to fear authority over time given by demons in the Middle Ages. Dante Alighieri condemns the "false" prophets of the eighth circle, the fourth malebolgia four, and given a punishment that

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[72] "[Q]uo sensus rediit mentisque revanuit error! / Raptus eram michimet quasi siritus acta sciebam / preteriti populi predicebamque futura."

Dante Pilgrim deemed gruesome enough to weep. Prophecy, when given by God, is orthodox, as

seen by examples as wide-ranging as Moses, Elijah, and St. John in his *Apocalypse* and

heterodox when divine sanctioning is thrown into question. An aspiring ecclesiastical may have

had a problem reconciling Merlin's demonic nature with the orthodoxy of the time. So, Merlin

not only renounces his former powers, but praises God for restoring him to his rightful self.

When asked from whence the curative spring came, Taliesin says, "The bountiful Director of the

universe" ["Rerum moderator opimus..."] (1179). He has been given his powers, but he will be

expurgated by his sister, thus releasing Merlin from any dubious associations.

One of the oldest set of texts related to the topics and characters of the *Vita Merlini* are

the poems and the triads.[73] The triads mention the Battle of Arfderydd, but not Merlin, and

another, later one, the "only triad that names" Myrddin "clearly shows the influence of Geoffrey

of Monmouth's works and subsequent[...]bifurcation of the Merlinus/Myrddin character."[74]

Overlap from several different iterations of the same episodes demonstrates how Geoffrey's

work was adapted and innovated to become virtually a part of "authentic" Welsh sources. Again,

the "Prophecy of Myrddin with Gwenydd," in which the succession of kings "predicts" the rise

of "Rydderch [Rodarch] the Generous" and at the same time says that "there will be no Rydderch

the Generous the day after tomorrow" (32). After him comes Maelgwen, Cadualan, and

Cadwaladr, Cynan [Conan], and Gruffydd, among others (32-5, 37). After that there are

references to the "whelp of Henry the arrogant king" and "after the son of Henry, a king who is

no king, there will be tribulation" (39). These are references to Henry I and his nephew Stephen,

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[73] Bromwich, "Triads," 44.

[74] Bollard, "The Myrddin Triad," 53.

who, depending on who is asked, was not the king of England. Thereafter, the predictions become vague, but again the poem returns to the prophecies about Cadwaladr and Rydderch. The corruption of an older set of prophecies by the fourteenth century resembles the time shift between more ancient and more present-day references in the discussions between Ganeida and Merlin in Geoffrey's work. Moreover, this seems to set a precedent for Geoffrey knowing and modifying the prophecies with Merlin's sister or perhaps it being an adaptation of his work. However, this authority gives the author the ability to rehabilitate his avatar.

In the *Vita*, after being cured, Merlin renounces his powers, saying, "I was taken out of my true self, I was a spirit and knew the history of people long past and could foretell the future" (1162-3).[75] After the discussion of the waters of the world and their healing powers, Ganeida makes her prophecies. His sister Ganeida takes up with the three men—the third another madman Maeldin—in their hermitage, where she is struck by the power of prophecy. She predicts, "Lincoln walled in by a fierce army," and that one of the defenders of Lincoln "escapes to return to the siege with a wild people and their chief to defeat the fierce host after capturing their commander" (1474-7).[76] This is almost assuredly a reference to the Battle of Lincoln on 2 February 1141 in which Ranulf, Earl of Chester—supporter of Empress Matilda's claim to the throne and who had previously escaped King Stephen's attack—returned with a troop of Northern Welshmen, including Cadwallr ap Gruffydd, brother of Prince Owain of Gryffydd to help defeat and capture Stephen.[77] In the *Vita*, Ganeida again predicts a battle at Winchester at

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[75] "Raptus eram michimet quasi spiritus acta sciebam / preteriti populi predicebam futura."

[76] "Cerno Laerloytcoyt vallatam milite sevo / inclususque duos quorum divellitur alter ut redeat cum gente fera cum principe vallis / et vincat rapto sevam rectore catervam."

[77] See *Gesta Stephani*, ed. Richard Sewell Clarke (Sumptibus Societas, 1846), xi. https://openlibrary.org/books/OL6327548M/Gesta_Stephani. The *Gesta* describes the battle in Latin on page 72 of Sewell's edition. The history is still considered a source even for current studies, like Edmund King, *King Stephen*

which there would be "two lions acting with ferocity" (1485-6).[78] In the year 1141, Stephen's

forces, commanded by his wife Matilda (not to be confused with Stephen's half-sister against

whom he was warring), laid siege to and then routed the forces of Robert the Earl of Rochester,

ultimately leading the Angevin commander's surrender. Though the details of the prophecy are

vague and do not match the extant details of the battle on September 14, the "two lions" are

assuredly referring to the warring factions of the Anarchy, referring to them by the lion that

Henry I may have used as a standard, and about whom the *Prophetiae* says that he is the "leo

justiciae." The prophecies of Ganeida end with her rebuking the Normans, saying, "Normans--

go! No longer take your armies of violent soldiery through our native kingdom" and "Christ

succor your people! Curb the lions, put a stop to war, and give the kingdom peace and quiet"

(1511-14).[79] This explicit explanation of the British-leaning, antiwar, anti-Norman sentiment

could have also disrupted any chance of patronage for the author. Indeed, Robert was part of the

established pro-Stephen Anglo-Norman faction that would have received such criticism

negatively.[80] Geoffrey displaces responsibility of the dreadful predictions of battles at Oxford

and Lincoln (at which Stephen was captured) that are tinged with pro-Welsh sentiment in

response to Merlin's sister. He positions Merlin at a safe distance from the harshest criticism of

the ruling elite—his patrons—by giving the prophecies to Ganeida. And it can be inferred from

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(New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), who devotes all of chapter five to the year 1141, including discussing the Battle of Lincoln.

[78] "Inspicio binas prope Kaerwn in aere lunas / gestarique duos nimia feritate leones..."

[79] "Iteque Nuestrenses, cessate diutis arma / ferre per ingenuum violente milite regnum.../ Christe, tuo populo fer opem, compesce leones, / da regno placidam bello cessante quietem!"

[80] Tolstoy, "Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Merlin Legend," 42: "Robert de Chesney had been installed as Bishop Lincoln at the beginning of 1149. It is inconceivable that King Stephen would have permitted the appointment of anyone to the see of his favoured city other than a committed supporter. Robert's brother William, one of the king's most loyal and valued supporters throughout his reign, was appointed governor of Oxford in 1143."

the placement of this rebuke at the end—and closest to Geoffrey's valediction and declared

alignment with the Britons—that these antiwar sentiments and upbraiding of the rulers are the

ultimate expression of a theme from a work that began with a diatribe against civil strife.

The predictions are not specifically the same, but the association of Merlin and his sister

and Myrddin and Gwenydd suggests that Geoffrey knew of the connection between the two in

terms of prophecy. That said, Gwenydd never makes any of the predictions in the Welsh poem,

but instead asks her brother a series of questions. Geoffrey apparently changes their relationship

and Ganeida's role to recuperate Merlin and unify the varying traditions from which Geoffrey

drew Merlin's life. Merlin's final words in his *Vita* are a pronouncement of approval: "Sister, is

it you the spirit has willed to foretell the future? He has curbed my tongue" but "under my

authority declare everything faithfully" (1521-4).[81] Though the word used is "auspiciis,"

Merlin's authority is enough to give her prophecies the necessary *auctoritas* with which to

mingle her *ingenium*. There the book ends, and Geoffrey writes his valediction. Merlin's

doubtful prophetic powers have been replaced by and transferred to his sister but given by a

"spiritus" that is approved. This could be the Holy Spirit or the other spirit that had previously

inhabited Merlin. In either case, Merlin has come under the dominion of God and thus been

released from the suspect association with the demonic world. The proliferation of the

Prophetiae would suggest that his name was not associated with heterodoxy of any sort, but

doubt may have prevented Geoffrey from further and higher appointments under Alexander of

Lincoln. The latter idea does seem to be a possible implication of Geoffrey's dedication to

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[81] "Tene, soror, voluit res precantare futuras / spiritus osque meum compescit atque libellum? /...Leteris in illo auspiciisque meis devote singula dicas."

Archbishop Robert of Lincoln. Geoffrey brings Merlin into the fold of divine prophets, and he may hope that this will prove his own orthodoxy, leading to greater favor by Robert.

Because of the heterogeneity of the material in the *Vita* and because of apparent differences in the stories related to Merlin and the differences in his attributes, many have questioned where the Merlin of the *Vita* originated and why Geoffrey changed him so much from the *HRB*. The Myrddin of the supposedly Scottish/Welsh tradition has several stories revolving around him that are unrelated to the "Ambrosius" of the Gildas/Nennius tradition that Geoffrey adapts to his character in the *HRB*. It seems inconceivable that it is simply coincidence that Myrddin and Merlin have such similar stories attributed to them. Did Geoffrey mean for his modified Merlin to be the same character despite the grafting of a very different tradition onto his character derived from Latin material? There is no absolute answer on the first point because of the lack of textual evidence that predates Geoffrey. The internal evidence, however, points to a more definitive conclusion: the Merlins of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Vita Merlini* seem to be one and the same. Merlin's admitted authorship of the prophecies delivered to Vortigern and the recounting of the plot of the *Historia* are enough internal evidence to link the *Vita* to Ambrosius. Despite the difference in the eras in which Merlin appears in the two texts, Geoffrey makes Merlin Ambrosius very old in the *Vita*, a prophet who had lived through the ascension and decline of Arthur and had prophesied to Vortigern. Geoffrey even uses much the same imagery and verbiage to establish the links between the vaticinations of both texts. As J.S.P. Tatlock definitively states: "The Merlin of the *Vita* is meant as one and the same man as he of the *Historia*. Could there be the least doubt of this it would be settled by his being a South Welsh sage, who long before had prophesied under Vortigernus."[82] Though there has been a

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[82] Tatlock, *Legendary*, 271.

contentious debate on that point because of the changes in the character and the stories, Geoffrey himself inextricably links the two versions, Merlin Ambrosius and Myrddin/Merlin Silvestris. The discrepancies are perhaps accounted for when Geoffrey further explores stories about the South Welsh bard and prophet after the writing of the *HRB*, an idea proposed by Jarman. Perhaps someone brought him another book, like Walter Archdeacon's, a manuscript containing some of the texts compared to the *Vita Merlini*.

Based on the evidence at hand, Tatlock posits that there is not "any shred of evidence or presumption that a Merlin-tradition existed in the north before Geoffrey."[83] And half a century later, Padel asks if it is possible that "supposing that the northern wild-man was merged with the south-Welsh prophet, not within Welsh tradition before the twelfth century, but by Geoffrey in his *Vita Merlini*?"[84] It is conceivable, though perhaps unlikely, that Geoffrey fabricated the material in question from which stems all of the poems and stories, prophecies and histories that appear in the four "ancient" books. That would mean that "Myrddin" was reverse-engineered to conform to the Celtic traditions of the sylvan wildman that Lailoken and Suibhne inhabit by later Welsh writers who saw Geoffrey's material as an ethnic inspiration in times of war and occupation. Or maybe a compromise position could be worked out. Perhaps, Geoffrey knew of some legends of Myrddin, to which were ascribed prophecy and magic. He then appropriated the name, its connotations within the British tradition, and changed the name and origin to Carmarthen to build a basis for his myth in the false etymological association. That would make Merlin, as Philippe Walter puts it, "the imaginary fusion of a mythic personage and a historic

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[83] Tatlock, *Legendary*, 271.

[84] Padel, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," 42.

personage[…]he is a clan chief named Myrddin confused with Ambrosius about whom Gildas speaks."[85] From disparate traits and myths, Geoffrey has fused attributes, tales, and eras to create a character who is wholly his own. He has infused Merlin with new attributes that are likely closer to the Welsh Myrddin than the Ambrosius of the *HRB*.

The *Vita Merlini* innovates Geoffrey's own material aimed toward a different purpose. Thematically, it matters little whether Merlin predates Myrddin or vice versa; or whether Merlin is derived from the analogues of Lailoken and Suibhne or the converse; or whether the material of the "Four Ancient Books of Wales" was appropriated by Geoffrey or the ideas were disseminated after he became bishop. Geoffrey has produced a Merlin from his sources, his imagination, and his own writings who is the same character. In all versions, Monmouth has articulated his vehement protest against war and the rulers who would perpetrate war against its own people, some of whom Geoffrey sympathized with and had since his dedication to the *HRB*. Geoffrey uses Merlin to expound the legends of the Britons by investing him with supernatural powers and a hagiography. Merlin transforms into an analogue of a saint through a hagiography in order to dispel ideas about the heterodoxy of Merlin's character and vaticinations. From this position, Merlin becomes the voice of God's judgment upon the inhabitants of the once-British island who make war upon their own for the sake of power. His only concession to his patron, Bishop Alexander, is to mask the final call for the end of civil war as mostly aimed at the Britons But in Ganeida's prophecy, Monmouth specifically names the warring Normans. It appears as though he is finally rewarded for his writing by being witness to the Winchester Treaty and a diocese in his beloved Wales. Merlin has served Geoffrey's purposes once again, even though the

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[85] Walter, *Devin Maudit*, 9. My translation. "la fusion imaginaire d'un personage mythique et d'un personage historique…[il est] d'un chef de clan nommé Myrddin confondu avec Ambrosius dont parle Gildas."

character, his prophecies, and his orientation have all been transformed once again by the same author.

Merlin can then be said to be a fixture in the legendary landscape before, during, and after the works of Geoffrey of Monmouth. However, his roles as the officiant of history, the author of events, and divine prophet make him the pivotal figure of many eras at once. His function in the narrative mirrors Geoffrey's own. By placing current events at the remove of ancient history that foreshadows present events, Geoffrey is given the freedom to invent history for the purposes of his present agenda. He paints the picture of a Merlin who uses his knowledge of things past, present, and future unknown to others to prophesy a future that conforms to his previous predictions, but which constitute the history of Geoffrey's present. And if this prophet, historian, and author is a character who can traverse time through his knowledge, divine and otherwise, then he becomes analogous to the author and is used to further the author's present ends. Geoffrey has adapted all his sources and his own work to forge a character who can be anything, anytime, for any reason. This protean malleability has been seized upon by all the authors who have incorporated Merlin into their own narratives. The Sage becomes the property of whichever author is using him to fulfill his goals, his quest. Merlin is the avatar of the author in a game called history. The function of writing with Merlin as an avatar is apparent: to invest whichever meaning suits the moment's end and the author's agenda, as demonstrated in subsequent medieval portrayals of the historian, author, and prophet.

Chapter 4:

The Medieval Merlin: The Many Faces of Authorship

The adaptations of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* are acts of choice that affect the meaning and the use of Merlin in several ways. The transformations are sometimes consistent with Monmouth's different materials, but often add, change, and innovate, much in the same vein as Monmouth invents new characters and ideas as he modifies his sources. Monmouth's re-inventions of Merlin, of the story of Arthur, and of the history of the British Isles are myriad and constitute re-imaginings of the past that are consistent with his own contemporary ideas, *agendae*, and audience. These are the similar processes of adaptation by which medieval stories and medievalisms—the post-medieval versions of the stories of Merlin and Arthur—work to bring the past within the comprehensible scope of an author's audience. Monmouth's dedications toward nobility on both sides of the Anarchy show the purpose of reaching out through Latin. Many of the high-ranking clergy had the ear of King Stephen and the Empress Matilda. The message would have ultimately arrived at its destination, if not been directly consumed by Matilda or her cousin. Monmouth's immediate patrons were players in the civil war that he so vociferously warns against in the *Historia*, the *Prophetiae Merlini*, and especially in the *Vita Merlini*. His patrons fulfilled his monetary needs and in return he uses Merlin and the Pendragons to modify and amplify his sources directed toward his ultimate purpose, using his writing as justification for Norman rule, but also as an educational tool about the results of internecine war, conquest, and the transience of power on the contested islands of Britain. The subsequent writers who innovate the tale in its several forms continue to adapt the past and previous writing to their present moment by using Arthur, Merlin, and history in general for their individual purposes. Just as in Monmouth's works, Merlin reflects different aspects of

authorship, the interplay of history and romance and prophecy in ways unique to him, but consistent throughout the disparate texts of the Middle Ages in England and France. He again becomes the authors' avatar for many aspects of literature and literary production, including the innovation of received material. He is often depicted as an author of the Arthurian tale being told. And he is still a prophet, though mostly narrative prophecies in the *romans* because the *Prophetiae* were considered a competing genre. This chapter demonstrates that after Geoffrey of Monmouth, individual authors shape Merlin to their own ends, producing a metahistorical effect, yet there are many Merlins and genres in which he participates, such that the many strands constitute an identifiable discourse. Playing Merlin and Arthur is now the game itself, signifying "authenticity" in many ways, and thus affecting the course of the legends masquerading as history. By the end of the Middle Ages, the process of adaptation and revision engendered by these authors becomes the provenance for most medievalisms, ultimately demonstrating that medievalisms are based in medieval literary practice.

Combining Fact and Fiction: Wace Transitions from *Historia* to *Roman*

After the works of Monmouth, there are several adaptations that become traditions themselves. Monmouth and Merlin have become *auctors* through the process of rewriting the history and predicting the present through prophecy. This progression is repeated throughout the Middle Ages: the reader of a source that has *auctoritas* becomes the writer, and, in turn, becomes the authority upon whom further reiterations are based or with which they contend. As Caroline Eckhardt puts it, there are the "*Historia*…post-*Historia*…and non-*Historia* traditions," representing the respective genres of the history, the prophecy, and romance traditions.[1] The

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[1] Caroline D. Eckhardt, *The* Prophetia Merlini *of Geoffrey of Monmouth: A Fifteenth-Century English Commentary* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1982), 26-8.

historia tradition is best exemplified in the early works of Wace and Layamon and their respective *Brut*s, but there are also many other poetic and prose versions throughout subsequent centuries that demonstrate changes both in subtle and overt ways. The prophecies have notable exceptions, but many of them are anonymous refashionings of Monmouth's original. They are also edited and collated with contemporary politics and commented upon by others. Many times, they are sponsored by a potentate who desires a pedigree by association with the most famous prophet of the Middle Ages. This was discussed briefly in chapter two. The "non-*Historia*" tradition consists of a wide-ranging genre of romance exemplified in many different kinds of texts, such as the *lais* of Marie de France, the fanciful adventures of Chretién de Troyes, and the prose and poetic romances stemming from Robert de Boron's work, becoming the French Vulgate, Post-Vulgate, and Suite cycles, and, in English, the adaptations known as the *Prose Merlin* and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*. The goals, styles, languages, and audiences are disparate over the vast corpus of medieval Arthuriana, and Merlin's role is altered in many different ways. The three traditions often incorporate elements of the others to various extents, informing, competing with, and expanding upon, and even occupying lacunae in the other genres. Essentially, history, romance, and prophecies are separate genres, but they are not as distinct and inviolable as perhaps Eckhart's statement suggests. Merlin's transformations often reflect the concerns of each retelling and comments on each genre's place among the others. Merlin's authorial significance may change for each author, but he is always the author's avatar for the construction of the past, present, and future and writing about each.

If Laȝamon's introduction is to be believed, Wace presented the manuscript of the

Roman de Brut to the royal court in honor of Henry II's Queen Eleanor around 1155.[2] It seems

like a fitting gift for a king who united a warring people and a land scarred by more than twenty

years of civil war, just as Arthur had briefly united the island under a *Pax Britanniae* amid the

many stories of conquest and internecine conflict in the *HRB*. King Stephen had successfully

prosecuted his claim against Matilda, who eventually retired to the Norman holdings while

raising Henry (later nick-named Plantagenet—the first of that name) to become a claimant to the

throne. Henry launched several attacks as he came to the age of majority, but Stephen managed

to hold the Eastern coast, while by 1153, Henry had control of Cornwall and had alliances with

Wales and Scotland, as well as Ranulf of Chester and Robert of Leicester, holding much of the

western and northern lands. The impasse seemed implacable because Stephen's son, Eustace,

had designs on the throne and had been engaged in fighting Henry for years. However, Eustace

died in 1153, paving the way for the Treaty of Winchester, signed by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the

newly created Bishop of St. Asaph. The treaty acknowledged Henry as the legitimate heir to the

throne upon Stephen's death, passing over Stephen's second son, William, who swore fealty to

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[2] "þa makede a Frenchis clerc. / Wace wes ihoten.../ he hoe gef þare æðelen. Ælienor / þe wes Henries queen" ["There was a French cleric Wace he was called…/ He gave (the book) to the ruler / Eleanor / that was Henry's queen."] Layamon, *Brut*, ed. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1963), 19-23. I will follow the more complete Caligula MS presented in this text. For salient discussion of the accuracy of this account, see Charles Foulon, "Wace," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*, ed. Roger Sherman Loomis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), 94-103 (95); F.H.M Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer: 2005), 82. https://books.google.com/books?isbn=184384043X.; and Jean Blacker, "Will the Real Brut Please Stand Up? Wace's Roman de Brut in Anglo-Norman and Continental Manuscripts" *Text* 9 (1996): 175-86 (175). She continues, "Wace's *Roman de Brut*, the earliest extant Old French Brut, c. 1155, is known for its account of the birth, reign, and defeat of King Arthur, based on the Vulgate and First Variant versions of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britani*."

Henry.[3] Stephen died in October of 1154 and King Henry II was installed in November of that year.

Prior to Henry II's coronation, Eleanor of Aquitaine had become his queen under an odd set of circumstances. Henry was her second husband; she had been the wife of King Louis VII of France, but they had become estranged before and after their ill-fated Crusade journey, which is the stuff of history and legend itself. Louis and Eleanor were granted an annulment based on consanguinity by authority of Pope Eugene III, who had initially refused the annulment. As she was returning to Poitiers, she was almost kidnapped twice, once by Geoffrey, Count of Nantes, and by Henry II's brother, Theobold V of Blois. For her own reasons, she asked Henry II to marry her—even though they were closer in kinship than she had been with her previous husband and despite the fact that Henry was over a decade her junior—which they did without the usual pomp and circumstance. The marriage united much of Britain with Brittany, Normandy, Anjou, and Aquitaine, among other duchies, creating one of the most formidable kingdoms in Western Europe at the time. With the end of the Anarchy and the marriage of rulers of large swaths of modern day France and England, a relative peace prevailed upon the various territories under the Anglo-Norman control. This peace allowed for more of the arts to flourish, especially under the queen's guidance and patronage, which would continue well into Eleanor's later life. Wace's *Roman de Brut* seems to anticipate Eleanor's patronage of literature over the course of the next three decades of her life. It also anticipates many of the themes of chivalry and love that would surface in her sponsorship of the arts.

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[3] See Edmund King, "The *Gesta Stephani*," in *Writing Medieval Biography, 750–1250: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow*, ed. David Bates, Julia C. Crick and Sarah Hamilton (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2006), 263-83; and Jim Bradbury, *Stephen and Matilda: The Civil War of 1139–53*.(Stroud, UK: The History Press, 2009), 178-84.

Some have called into question whether the presentation was to Henry or to Eleanor, but given the circumstances, F. H. M. Le Saux decides that "the *Roman de Brut* is probably to be understood as a flattering gesture towards the young monarch, designed to enhance his prestige," but furthermore, "[t]he presentation of the work to Eleanor would then make sense[...]a translation from Latin to French would have been a suitable gift to a lay woman, but not necessarily to a king with a reputation for learning."[4] It is almost assuredly being translated from Latin to Anglo-Norman so that the court may have more ready access to the stories of their time. Geoffrey's *Historia* and *Prophetiae* are already in circulation—though it is unclear how many manuscripts of either are extant in 1155, the year of Geoffrey's death—and perhaps the learned royals would have been aware of the stories, even if translated for them. With translation, the audience widens from clergy and kings to the Anglo-Norman aristocracy in general, and as Le Saux and others believe, specifically noble women. Translating a learned work from Latin to French confers a legitimating air upon the language spoken in court. By co-opting the Latin version into a recognizable form, Wace is not only bringing the history of the Britons to the ruling class, but he is also elevating the status of a romance language in a reversal of the Latin legitimizing the vernacular.

Henry and Eleanor's reaction to Wace's initial presentation is unrecorded, but considering his future patronage, it was probably favorable. Indeed, Henry II was at least so pleased with this history that he commissioned Wace to write a familial epic, the *Roman de Rou*, in the same vernacular, which Wace famously leaves incomplete for Benoit de Saînt Maure to finish, apparently at Henry's behest. However, the manuscript records can show us how it was

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[4] Le Saux, *Companion to Wace*, 83.

received in subsequent generations. While the original presentation copy of the *Roman de Brut* is non-extant, scholars can interpolate the original from the several manuscripts available. There are several complete copies and fragments, both in Anglo-Norman and Continental French.[5] The number of manuscripts indicates a somewhat influential heritage for the *Roman de Brut*, and the change in language underscores the idea that it was well-received on both sides of the English Channel. More to the point, Jean Blacker points out that "[t]he ways in which the manuscripts were bound on either side of the Channel reveal differing attitudes toward the text: seven of the ten complete Anglo-Norman versions of Wace's poem are bound with other vernacular verse histories, including Jordan Fantosme's *Chronicle* and Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*."[6] Wace's *Roman* was seen as part of a larger project for the Angevin rulers, a complete history of the peoples who have ruled the land that they have now consolidated under their rule. These several histories may have functioned like the several texts by Monmouth, Huntingdon, and Orderic Vitalis a generation earlier for Henry I's legitimation history. The motive of the *Roman* can be deduced from these records and can tell us how Wace, his audience, and his contemporaries and literary descendants viewed the purpose of history.

In this case, Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman believe the old adage to be true, observing that "Wace's *Roman de Brut* was history written for winners, written for an aristocracy with enough capital to commission its production, with enough leisure time to be interested in its

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[5] Blacker, "Will the Real Brut Please Stand Up?" 177. "The *Brut* is extant in twenty complete manuscripts and thirteen fragments...Of the twenty complete manuscripts, ten are Anglo-Norman and ten are Continental...eight of the complete manuscripts can be considered significantly 'altered': that is, they contain interpolations or other changes which render them distinct—beyond levels of orthography, dialectal changes or lexicon—from the Brut as we know it."

[6] Ibid., 179.

accounts."[7] The subsequent bindings of the *Roman de Brut* and *Estoire des Engleis* and the commissioning of the *Roman de Rou* demonstrate that the young king Henry II desired a legitimating historical tradition that spanned the entire history of the British Isles and his extant territories. History again is considered the genre of truth with some artistic license, but retrospective analysis demonstrates that Monmouth's and other *historia* are comprised of *fabulae* as well. The inventions often serve the current monarchs, as did Geoffrey's *HRB*. The texts used to chronicle the Britons' and Angles' ascensions utilized Latin *historia* to transfer the reflected glory of past rulers of Britain to the young king. So, too, does Henry II's *romans* and *estoire* appropriate their cultural, literary, military, and political heritage. Language transferal of the stories from Walter the Archdeacon's mysterious book to Latin may have elevated its status of the stories in the literary world, but the translation and adapting into the Anglo-Norman makes the stories closer to the throne's purview, more personal, accessible. Henry II and Eleanor are bringing the entire past of Britain within the scope of a recognizable language and history.

Wace manipulates history in favor of his audience through language and genre. The two most important methods are the claim to truth so frequently repeated by Wace and the end itself, which establishes authenticity, usually at the precise moment when he is fabricating his story the most. The second way of manipulating the past is with references to Wace's present moment, which establishes materially and literarily, the end of history. *Historia*'s veracity is combined with a *fabula* in order to produce a narrative structure, which demonstrates, in Hayden White's theory, the purpose of metahistory. Finke and Shichtman state, "Wace's *Roman de Brut* provided an official progressive history—a closed continuity leading to the reign of Wace's Angevin

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[7] Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, *King Arthur and the Myth of History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 93.

patrons."[8] If history leads to the present moment, through the histories of several peoples, this demonstrated that Normans were superior to the previous inhabitants, either militarily, politically, or morally. But also, as Dennis Green points out, the glory of past monarchs could be used to flatter the current one: "Presumably as a historian Wace was commissioned to write both his histories by Henry II so that past glory, incorporated in the figure of Arthur, was reflected in the Anglo-Norman past[...]for the cultural leadership of Henry II's court was made possible, as it was for Arthur, by a period of peace."[9] Wace was holding up a mirror for the prince of many of the same lands that Arthur supposedly ruled during his rise and following conquest of Roman territories.[10] If Arthur could conquer the former empire, then so could Henry II, since his family had defeated the previous winners who had at least succeeded the Britons in the dominance of England. The historical end, the present moment, lends shape and meaning to the past in this regard, just as much as the past provides the present moment its significance.

The two-way street of signification persists throughout the Middle Ages in the several genres here considered, but no more so than in the history. Edward Donald Kennedy cites Bernard Guenée's idea of how history functioned in the Middle Ages: "The historian in the Middle Ages had not simply the power to reinterpret the past; he had the power to reinvent it. The past in the Middle Ages was as accommodating as it was respected, as malleable as it was

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[8] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 75.

[9] Dennis Green, "King Arthur: From History to Fiction," in *The Fortunes of King Arthur*, *Arthurian Studies LXIV*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 66-76 (71).

[10] Jean Blacker, *The Faces of Time* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 179: "In this way, the *Roman de Brut*...probably served as both a model for and a mirror of the upwardly aspiring Anglo-Norman nobility, fulfilling a need of the new aristocracy to legitimize social standing."

prestigious."[11] Historians pretend to embrace the truth whereas willful and constructed

reinventions are a necessity of the form, to serve the purposes of the day and age. Like

Monmouth's text, Wace's version relies heavily on its purported truthfulness and accuracy in

order to position itself as a text that is legitimate and, thus, legitimating. From the opening lines,

Wace is emphasizing, and will continue to emphasize, the "authenticity" of his work, even in the

fabulous sections. He, in the third person, claims that "Master Wace has translated it and tells it

truthfully" ["Maistre Wace l'ad translaté / Ki en conte la verité"] (7-8).[12] Isidore of Seville was

still cited as the propounder of the difference between history and fable, casting the one as truth

and the other relying on untruths.[13] As has been demonstrated, this division is much more

permeable than this definition, especially in Monmouth's three works. The authenticity of the

work depends upon plausibility, which depends on the provenance, the *auctoritas* cited, rather

than accuracy to facts. These distinctions will play a large part in the further analysis of the text

below, but for now, the assertion of veracity in the *Roman de Brut* is the moment at which

history becomes most malleable. The roles of author and the historian converge to assert the

"facts" that are often subject to the individual will or the will of the patron.

In Monmouth's introduction to the *HRB*, his provenance was derived from the sources,

verifiable and otherwise. However, as Jean Blacker notes in *The Faces of Time,* "Wace is acutely

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[11] Edward Donald Kennedy, "Visions of History: Robert de Boron and English Arthurian Chroniclers," in *The Fortunes of King Arthur*, ed. Norris J. Lacey (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2005), 29-46 (32). Bernard Geunée, *Histoire et culture historique dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Aubier, 1980), 351-82.

[12] Judith Weiss, *Wace's Roman de Brut: A History of the British* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002). All translations are Weiss's. Line numbers are provided parenthetically for the French, which will be noted unless important to the reading.

[13] Specifically, Isidore of Seville *Etymologariarum sive originum libri*. Green, "From History to Fiction," 66. "...in the Old French the word *fable* can be contrasted with *la plus veraie estoire*" delineating instructional and "true" history from "the Arthurian romance, the Matiere de Bretagne, [which] is not more than untrue, merely entertaining."

aware of the necessity of historical accuracy yet distinctly uninterested in linking his text to the tradition from which his sources came and thus, by extension, the tradition out of which he shaped his own work."[14] Wace, at least in our extant manuscripts, makes no citation of his source, which is probably the Variant version of Geoffrey's *HRB*, a work about which the court would have at least heard. Instead, he points backwards to the indirect source when he says, "As the book relates it" ["Si cum li livres le devise"], the Trojans, including Aeneas and his family fled Troy after the defeat related by Homer and, more importantly, Virgil (9). He is attempting to appropriate Virgil's *Aeneid* as the authority upon which his truth is founded. Wace is reaching backwards even further than *HRB* or Gildas or Bede to Virgil's work, in much the same way that Geoffrey does not mention Nennius and seems to reach back to older sources. Adapting from a more ancient book, rather than Monmouth's, may have been seen as giving his *Roman* a more rarified lineage. And Wace's later suppression of the prophecies might also be read as a way to play down his source. But Wace makes a more significant adaptation of his sources by using a different name for the land. He says that he will discuss the "the successive kings and their heirs" who came to "England" ["Ki Engleterre primes tindrent, / Quels reis I ad en ordre eu"] (4-5). In a book about the Britons, one might expect the name "Britain" to come up first. And if he were using *HRB* as a primary source, Wace would read the words "Britanniae" or "Britonum" or some declension of them many times more than any form of "Angle" is written in the *HRB*. Indeed, Geoffrey makes references to English names of objects, places, or landforms, but his most significant use of "Angle" might be the dedication to Robert of Gloucester, son of "Henricus illustris rex Anglorum." Monmouth is calling Henry I the king of the English, a separate people from those chronicled in the *HRB*. For the grandchild of the conquering Normans to be called

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[14] Blacker, *Faces*, 30-1.

king of "England" belies the military and political attempt at appropriation of the term. Geoffrey

is only calling Henry king of the English, not English himself, and not applying the term to the

land. However, Wace performs the opposite function in his opening. He tells us that he will

recount the kings of "Engleterre," that is, the island itself, whereas Geoffrey is clear that he is

engaged with "the kings of Britain." Wace is granting Henry II the land through its naming,

whereas Geoffrey's name for the island denies Henry I the linguistic conquest. Since scholarship

has shown the source to be Geoffrey's work, it can be surmised that Wace's change is deliberate

and with his current moment in mind. Blacker observes that "Wace grafts his ideas of language

change and enlarges upon his idea of the historian's role: it is the historian who resists the

shifting sands of time, by recording in one language events to be remembered by readers of later

generations who will[...]have different interpretations of the past."[15] Wace has recalibrated his

source's wording for a different moment with one word and a different focus. Furthermore, his

translation of the text to Anglo-Norman verse is a significant external adaptation of the text. This

adaptation is one that is repeatedly performed throughout the history of these stories, from the

Middle Ages through modern languages. Renaming the land is an internal adaptation of language

of perhaps equal importance to the purpose of the history it relates.

In the naming of the island early in both the *HRB* and the *Roman de Brut*, there are

similarities and one major difference that provide a key to reading his reiteration of the *Brut*.

Geoffrey says, "Brutus named the island Britain after himself and called his followers Britons.

He wanted to be remembered forever for giving them his name" (21.459-61).[16] The name Albion

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[15] Ibid., 32.

[16] Reeve, *HRB*. Latin will be footnoted unless crucial to the reading. "Denique Brutus de nomine suo insulam Britanniam apellat sociosque suos Brittones. Volebat enim ex diriuatione nomins memoriam habere perpetuam."

is referred to a few lines before Brutus's naming, but the verbs Geoffrey uses indicate that it is a naming ceremony either without prior knowledge or any other reason other than Brutus's enduring reputation. Wace, on the other hand, recounts the passage of names much differently:

> The country was called Albion, but Brutus changed its name, calling it after his own, and he had it called Britain. He named the Trojans, his companions, Britons after Brutus[...]The language which they spoke before, which they called Trojan, they now between themselves called British. But the English have since altered it. The language and the name lasted until Gormunt arrived; he drove out the Britons and handed it over to Saxons, from being Angles, were called English and called the land England. They drove out all the Britons, who never regained power (1175-1200).[17]

There are several cultural implications at stake in the changes that Wace makes in this passage that shed light on his attitudes toward the Britons of the past, Merlin and Arthur included. While Geoffrey's Brutus "calls" ["appellat"] the island and the people after his own name ["de nomine suo"] for his own glory, Wace's Brutus "changes" ["chanja"] the people's and the island's names from Albion to "Bretainne," Britain. The link between the former name and the one in the story is much more direct in Wace's version, a stylistic choice perhaps, until we consider the rest of the passage. The conqueror exercises the power in the story and Wace performs the colonization in the language by having Brutus *change* the name, rather than just name it. Since he has already

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[17] "La terre aveit nun Albion / Mais Brutus li chanja sun nun, / De Bruto, sun nun, nun li mist, / E Bretainne apaler la fist; / Les Troïens, ses compainuns / Apela, de Bruto, Bretuns.../ La language qu'il ainz parloent / Que il Troïen apeloent, / Unt entr'els Bretun apelé. / Mais Engleis l'unt puis remué; / La [parole e li nuns dura / Tant que Gormund i ariva; / Gormund en chaça le Bretuns / Si la livra a uns Saissuns / Qui d'Angle Anglais apelé erent, / Ki Engletere l'apelerunt; / Tuz les Bretuns si eissillierent /   Que unches puis ne redrescerent."

named the island "England," Wace is seen as invested in this strategy of translation. That linguistic adaptation is only in preparation for the next one that erases the Britons almost as soon as they have been named. In Geoffrey's version, the language passively becomes "British," but in Wace's version, the people name the language among themselves, imparting a much more active role to the formation of language. But Wace subjugates the language immediately, saying, "But the English have since altered [British]" (1192). The *Roman* then describes how Gormunt handed the island over to the Saxons, who became the Angles, and thus renamed it England. The end of the British is here in the very founding of Britain. In an era of blending and separation of Norman French and the Anglo-Saxon, this is a remarkable textual moment. The supposed subject of the history, the protagonist and his progeny, who become heroes by turns, are all conquered within moments of being named. The fate of the Britons is sealed from the start in a moment of heavy foreshadowing by the author. He is correct, ethnically and chronologically. But when he says, the Angles are the "English" who "called the land England" and "drove out all the Britons, who never regained power," he has oriented his audience's attention to the end of the *Roman*, a metahistorical epicycle (1199-1200). The Britons were always defeated in Wace's *Roman*; history is a closed narrative whose end is known in the beginning. It is certainly an adaptation of his *auctoritas*.

Monmouth's acknowledgment of the races and his comparisons of multiple namings, like the "Giants' Ring" and "Stonehenge," imply the existence of the Anglo-Saxons and the influence of their language in Geoffrey's moment, but it is always put on a parallel footing with the British names. The five peoples he introduces in the beginning all have a chance to dominate. And, similarly, the end is predicted in the beginning because of his audience and what had happened in the already-established historical records of Britain. But Monmouth is always careful to grant

the Britons their own time and space in his version of history. But Wace undercuts his subject from the formation of the word "Britain." Geoffrey may have been biased, based on my earlier demonstrations of his connections to Wales and a British leaning provided by his heritage and by the book given him by the Archdeacon Walter. Wace's attitude toward his subject is revealed in his naming and dismissal because, as Le Saux argues that Wace thinks of the *Roman* as a "history of an alien people, taking place in a distant, quasi-mythical past," whose "rise and fall he feels free to translate without political implications."[18] Apparently, he considers them to be second-class players for the island, to be conflated with the Welsh, whose land and language were, at the very moment of birth, predestined to be excluded. Far from being a depoliticized version of the *HRB*, as some have claimed, Wace instantaneously colonizes the British as he adapts them into obscurity. The transitive property that Geoffrey used in the *HRB* still applies because the English were subjugated by the Normans, who become the dominant force on the island. Geoffrey acknowledges, but Wace positively affirms the "Englishness" of Henry II. The Britons were colonized by the English and they, in turn, have their name appropriated by once-foreign, now "English" nobility. If the Britons become English and the English become the subjects of the Norman-descended king, then it is all under the official identity of, though incorrectly arrogated to, the young monarch. It is also part of the larger project, as seen in the collations. In combination with the *Estoire des Engleis,* and the eventual *Roman de Rou*, the royals can demonstrate the progress of history and cultural appropriation necessary to lay claim to the entirety of the "history" of these islands under their throne and cultural lineage. The *Roman de Brut* is only playing its part of a master narrative of history that the ascendant Plantagenets are fashioning for themselves for the coming centuries. So, what could the Normans

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[18] Le Saux, *Companion to Wace*, 84.

learn from a people already doomed in what amounts to an authorial *ex eventu* prophecy?

Among other things, they learn courtly manners.

The *Roman de Brut's* Language and Genre Adaptations

There is nothing new in pointing out the transition of the Arthurian story from the realm

of "history" to "romance." Monmouth showed some propensity toward fanciful stories, praising

noble characteristics and mighty deeds, the bases of chivalric values that will continue with

Arthur as their exemplar for centuries. However, the romance as a genre is much more than

recounting the stories of great battle victories and the largesse of young Arthur. The *romans* start

with the transformation into the vernacular, since *romans* was originally a linguistic marker, not

a genre signifier. Wace and Gaimar were the first to transform the *historia* into the vernacular,

but only Wace's remains extant, so it is one of the first examples of a history in a romance

language.[19] The significance of the transformation of the story into the vernacular on a political

level was as profound as the thematic adaptations, changes that impact the stories for centuries.

The original sense of *romans* is in the vernacular but also at this time, in literary circles, it was

coming to mean poetry as well. Monmouth had written his *Vita Merlini* in dactylic hexameter,

the rhyme scheme of epic poetry, which does not suit the *romans*, either linguistically or

generically. The *HRB*, which is somewhat closer to epic in content, is written in prose. The

loquacious Monmouth could expand in prose upon ideas the *Roman* must convey more

compactly. One important aspect of the linguistic changes that Wace made in the *Roman de Brut*

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[19] What constitutes a *roman*, besides vernacular stories in the Middle Ages, has been discussed in great detail to date. Gaston Paris and his contemporaries invented terms like "courtly love," attempted to historicize chivalry, and pursued the magical into the pagan. Subsequent scholarship has differentiated "courtly romance" from "chivalric romance" and other types of medieval and post-medieval romance. I am assuming a familiarity with these themes, genres, and historiography. For a primer see *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Accessed July 25, 2016. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ngEhAwAAQBAJ.

in comparison to his source is the poetry. He not only translates the Latin into Anglo-Norman and even transforms some of the verbiage in key passages for his audience and his patrons' purposes, but he also adapts the prose of the *HRB* into poetry, specifically the octosyllabic line with rhyming couplets. As Bart Besamusca points out, Wace's style was *avante garde* at the time of presentation:

> The proper history of rhyming couplets, favored by many medieval poets in many medieval vernacular languages, started in the Anglo-Norman area...Subsequently, the author of the first romance, the *Roman de Thèbes*, adopted the octosyllabic couplet around 1150, and some years later, Wace showed the appropriateness of this form for long and complex texts in his *Roman de Brut* (1155).[20]

He has not only legitimated Anglo-Norman as a language, but also elevated the rhyming couplet to the realm of historical writing, seen widely as one of his most important adaptations and contributions to poetry and Arthuriana. Wace not only uses the form but moves it from *avante garde* to *en vogue*. In the subsequent generation, Marie de France uses it for her lais, supposedly in imitation of the Breton jongleurs, and Chrétien de Troyes uses it extensively in his romances, and many imitate the *Brut* in verse form. With the conversion of a Latin text into the Anglo-Norman in a new poetic form, he is setting the stage for the next several centuries of writing and songs revolving around Arthur, even if the *Brut* aspect is placed in the background in subsequent retellings. The transformation of the Latin history into vernacular verse is a major innovation of

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[20] Bart Besamusca, "The Prevalence of Verse in Medieval Dutch and English Arthurian Fiction," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 112, no. 4 (2013): 461-74 (462).

his *auctoritas*. Perhaps, like Marie's songs, the *Roman de Brut* was performable, bringing the tales to an even wider oral audience.

This stylistic transformation, combined with the transition to the vernacular language, has implications for several external and internal *agendae* of the author and audience. Charles Foulon says that the total translation of language and form makes Wace "no mere translator: he was a poet as well as a chronicler, and he wrote for a somewhat different public from Geoffrey's. His poem marks a stage between comparative sobriety of his model and the charming extravagances of Arthurian romance."[21] It is certainly a significant adaptive literary act to transform prose into poetry, but it also signals another difference between the two versions of the story of the Britons in terms of the subject matter and internal style, both of which are closely tied to the Arthurian section. Finke and Shichtman tell us that "the writers of vernacular insular history were not simply transcribing Geoffrey of Monmouth, they were creating new forms and new genres of historical writing" through cultural transference to another language community.[22] Wace is beginning the transformation of the history into another form through the dual transformation of his source from Latin to Anglo-Norman and from prose to poetry, an influential phase in the Arthurian tradition. Wace uses the couplets to affect a shift in language, form, and genre that forever alters the course of Arthur's and Merlin's stories. The poetic adaptation lends itself to the genre that Wace is helping to invent, presaging Chrétien de Troyes's contributions. It is the aspects of peace—*amour*, courtesy, and detailed dialogue—that he wishes

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[21] Foulon, "Wace," in *ALMA*: 94.

[22] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 79: "Romance as a popular literary genre was just beginning to emerge at about the same time as vernacular history and it was patronized by the same audiences. It is hardly inconceivable that there might have been some commingling of the two genres, with historians like Wace drawing upon the aesthetic devices of the romance—such as the octosyllabic couplet—to structure their narratives in ways that would entertain as well as edify their aristocratic audiences and legitimate their ambitions."

to emphasize for Henry II. He even uses Arthur's rise and the *Pax Britanniae* episodes to signal the shift in genre and, as he makes the transition from *historia* to *fabula*, he does it while vociferously claiming the authenticity of his material.

In a time of peace, a history of intrafamilial war and conquest might not have resonated with the intended audience. Wace faced the dual challenges of keeping up with his times and exploring every medieval writer's duty to innovate the received material. Dolores Buttry argues that Wace "was not obsessed by civil war, and he was not writing for other clerics. His audience was a new one: the Norman nobility, who wanted to be flattered and entertained. The age of chivalry was at hand, and Wace produced from Geoffrey's moralizing lecture a tale of courtliness, grandeur and amusement."[23] However, it is not simply a matter of inventing new material *ex nihilo*; there is still a strong urge to balance the *ingenium* with the *auctoritas*. Wace relies heavily on the *historia* genre while introducing new elements that transform the tales of Arthur forever. Veronique Zara says that Wace establishes the fantastic in the *Roman* by using "verifiable" methods:

His inclusion of a handful of dates, marking time in a precise and consistent manner, gives the narrative an appearance of truthfulness. In the early years of his narrative, he also intertwines his timeline with that of Church history. His efforts tie Arthur to a realistic history and create a temporal framework for the latter's existence, one that is at

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[23] Dolores Buttry, "Authority Refracted: Personal Principle and Translation in Wace's *Roman de Brut*," in *The Politics of Translation in the Middles Ages and The Renaissance*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Luise von Flotow, and Daniel Russell (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2001): 85-106 (87).

once Christian and historical in nature. This historical context situates Arthur in the realm of the plausible, if not that of real historiography, at least by modern standards.[24]

The text is presented in several ways as fact, a point that Wace emphasizes repeatedly. He emphasizes its authenticity, bases it on a reliable authority, and then transforms it. Wace has created a space within Monmouth's history for ideas that adapt the work's themes to his moment, while projecting the illusion of truth from verifiable source material. Despite its claims to truth, though, Zara suggests that "Wace's text is neither historiography nor fiction" because fiction implies complicity from the audience in fabricating the fiction.[25] The audience's expectation of being told "true" tales because the *Roman* presents itself as true "history" negates the idea of fiction. However, it is the idea that this presentation of truth makes this a history that is consciously being changed by the author, even if received by the audience as history. Zara's statement might be amended to make the *Roman* neither *fully* historiography nor *fully* fiction. It has elements of both, given the audience's expectations and the author's intentions. This is the range of metahistory that creates an illusion of historicity. This is an important point for negotiating genres in the Middle Ages and even postmedieval representations of Arthuriana. If the tension between *historia* and *fabula* is whether the audience believes the story is "true" and if "the most important parameter of historiographical writing is Wace's claim that his account of

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[24] Véronique Zara, "The Historical Figure of Arthur in Wace's 'R*oman de Brut*,'" *Arthuriana* 18, no. 2 (2008): 17-30 (27).

[25] Ibid., 17

past events is truthful," then it would be profitable to examine moments of purported authenticity to see where the fiction lies.[26]

Wace asserts the veracity of his statements often in the *Roman*, from the very first few lines, but it is a tried and true trick in every storyteller's and historian's playbook. The first thing both Geoffrey and Wace do after introducing Arthur is to describe him briefly in similar ways, yet the differences show the adaptations and innovations. The first thing Wace says about the king is "Les thecches Artur vus dirraiz / Neient ne vus en mentirai" ["I will tell you about Arthur's qualities and not lie to you"] (9016-7). The pleasant rhyme between "dirraiz" and "mentirai," between speaking and lying, is repeatedly sounded at one of the most pivotal narrative moments, Arthur's ascension. Wace describes Arthur in similar terms as in the *HRB*, but Monmouth emphasizes that Arthur "displayed his customary openhandedness. Such a crowd of knights flocked to him that he ran out of gifts," yet such a man will "never know lasting poverty," presumably because of help from those to whom he gave the gifts (143.10-13).[27] Monmouth mentions the generosity, but Wace elaborates. Still under the pretense of "I will not lie to you," he says, that Arthur would never refuse anyone if he could help: "S'aider li pout, ne l'escundist" ["If he could help someone in need, he would not refuse them"] (9024). Additionally, Wace chooses to focus on another aspect when he says that Arthur main goals were to be "served with courtesy" and to surpass "all other monarchs in courtesy and nobility,

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[26] Ibid., 27. She continues: "His inclusion of a handful of dates, marking time in a precise and consistent manner, gives the narrative an appearance of truthfulness. In the early years of his narrative, he also intertwines his timeline with that of Church history. His efforts tie Arthur to a realistic history and create a temporal framework for the latter's existence, one that is at once Christian and historical in nature. This historical context situates Arthur in the realm of the plausible, if not that of real historiography, at least by modern standards."

[27] "...in quo tantam gratiam innata bonitas praestiterat ut a cunctis afere populis amaretur. Insigibus itaque regis iniciatus, solitum morem seruans largitati indulsit. Confluebat ad eum tanta multitudo militum ut ei quod dispensaret deficeret."

generosity and power" (9027, 9030-2).[28] His repetition of "curteisie," a word unused by Geoffrey, strongly frames the character and bridges the gap between Wace's source and the emerging genre of *romans*. This is a point that has become a commonplace in Wace scholarship: the insertion of courtesy, chivalry, and amour into the "history," which influences depictions of all characters, Merlin included.

The text is presented as truthful history, but it introduces the basis of the romance genre that will continue to develop in the following centuries. Rupert T. Pickens observes that "[w]hat is especially interesting about the *Brut* is its status as a transitional text" that reinvents his source's thematic direction, and—combined with the versification and vernacularization—its genre.[29] Romance becomes defined by several motifs derived from Wace's version and which is elaborated on in subsequent versions. Romance is "associated with leisure, wealth, witty and elegant conversation, style and fashion, esthetics, love, and the subordination of knightly prowess to the service of love, all of which flourish during the twelve-year period of pax Arthuriana."[30] However, there is still the tension between the version received and the version transmitted because Wace's "narrative[…]is a linear, genealogical, and truthful recounting of past events. Linearity, genealogy, and truthfulness frame many medieval historical narratives[…]and reflect the way that historiography was conceived at this time.[31] Wace's adaptation of his source to the material upon which he wishes to focus is comparable to how

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[28] "Servir se fist curteisement / Si se cuntint mult noblemen. / Tant cum il vesqui e regna / Tuz alters princes surmunta / De curtesie e de noblesce / E de vertu e de largesse."

[29] Rupert T. Pickens, "Arthur's Channel Crossing: Courtesy and the Demonic in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace's 'Brut,'" *Arthuriana* 7, no.3 (Fall 1997): 3-19 (4).

[30] Ibid., 4.

[31] Zara, "Arthur in Wace's '*Roman de Brut*,'" 18.

Geoffrey transformed his sources—Gildas, Bede, Nennius, and the "British book." Geoffrey

expands on his sources in certain areas and invents a space for others, like the extended story of

the rise of the Pendragons and their legendary accomplishments. In the same way, Wace's

donning of the mantle of "history" lends legitimacy to the fables that he will tell and opens the

space for original content, themes, and interpretation by the author and audience. The differences

between Geoffrey and Wace are greatest in their descriptions of peace-time Arthur. It is, not

coincidentally, the time at which romance begins to flourish.

In a major expansion of Monmouth's account, Wace discusses the time of peace. The

twelve-year peace that intervenes between the conquering of Ireland and France passes in a few

sentences of Latin in the *HRB*, but it consumes many lines in the *Roman*. The *Pax Arthuriana* is

centered, literally, around one object that is Wace's most original invention, the Round Table.

Because all of the knights of Western Europe wish to be part of Arthur's court, from as far away

as Spain, there were many great ones. The narrator states, "On account of his noble barons—

each of whom felt he was superior, each considered himself the best, and no one could say who

was the worst—Arthur had the Round Table made" (9748-51).[32] Wace at first tries to source this

invention by saying that it is one "about which the British tell many a tale" ["Dunt Bretun dient

mainte fable"] (9752). Wace attempts to verify the veracity of the Round Table, contrary to past

practice, by invoking an *auctoritas*. He has gone to the level of oral tradition, one that he may

invoke, but with which his writing is rarely associated. His claim to truth through "tales" is at

odds with his presentation of history because it is this very source that he has and will

momentarily discredit. Wace addresses his audience, saying, "I do not know if you have heard of

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[32] "Pur les nobles baruns qu'il out, / Chescuns se teneit al milleur, / Ne nuls n'en saveit le peiur, / Fist Artur la Runde Table."

[the time of peace]" in which adventures were sought and miracles occurred, all of which "have become the stuff of fiction: not all lies, not all truth, neither total folly nor total wisdom, to embellish their tales that they have made it all appear fiction (9788-9798).[33] By casting doubt on whether they have heard of the marvels and adventures, he is implicitly calling his audience to listen. More importantly, he is drawing the distinction between truth and fables, but obviating it at the same time, calling the tales a mix of truth and lies. He does point out that the "*cunteurs*" have told so many tales that it appears to be all fiction now. Wace has always told the truth and here he claims explicitly that the tales that the raconteurs have told are fiction. He is trying to have it both ways. He has discounted as lies the very stories that he uses to establish his authority for The Round Table. Wace references *auctoritas* to establish his inventions as truth, while simultaneously blurring distinctions between truth and lies, *historia* and *fabula*.[34] He is perpetrating a literary legerdemain, a metonymic replacement of authenticity and authority: he claims truth at the very moment of invention. The Round Table signifies many aspects of the chivalry in the emerging game of romance. After further expanding on how all of the knights, lords and vassals sat "egalement" around the table, we are told that "No one was accounted courtly" if they did not go to Arthur's court, in order to achieve "honor and renown…partly to hear of his courtly deeds…rich possessions…to know his barons…to receive his rich gifts" (9774-8).[35] They want fellowship, prizes, honor, and courtly deeds, hence the masculine aspects

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[33] "Ne sai si vus l'avez oï.../ les aventures truvess...tant recuntees / Ke a fable sunt aturnees: / Ne tut mençunge, ne tut veir, / Ne tut folie ne tut saveir. / Tant unt li cunteür cunté / E li fableü tant fablé / Pur les cuntes enbleter, / Que tut unt fait sembler."

[34] Foulon, "Wace," in *ALMA*, 87. On the RT: "The details are Wace's own invention, and, as Rollo suggests, no doubt to celebrate the end of Stephen's anarchy and Henry II's assertion of authority. Indeed, Wace's considerable amplification of the Arthurian part of the *Historia* shows the collapsing of history, with the figures of Arthur and Henry converging, as Rollo and others have pointed out."

[35] "N'esteit pas tenuz pur curteis…Pris e enur.../ Tant pur oïr ses curtesies.../...ses mananties.../pur cunuistre ses baruns.../...pur aveir ses riches duns."

of chivalry are brought to the forefront with the newest adaptation of Arthur's story, one that plays into the other aspects of romance, namely stylistic flourishes.

Foulon continues to note a difference between the *HRB* and the *Roman*: Wace "elaborated considerably" on the *HRB*, and "[t]his expansion was due largely to the fact that one author posed as a sober historian, while the other felt free to exercise some of the privileges of a story-teller and poet, replacing dry, colourless narrative with descriptive scenes."[36] In the Arthurian section that follows, the shift in language from prose into poetry is accompanied by a longer focus on certain aspects of the Arthurian tradition that predict, if not entirely enact, the romance as a genre. The transformation of the language in the feast of Arthur from the *HRB* to the *Roman* is a fruitful moment to compare. Wace follows Geoffrey in praising Caerleon's location on the River Usk, and the city's churches provide an appropriate archbishopric, including a convent, and a college full of astronomers to predict for Arthur. Both describe a near-epic list of princes, kings, and local barons who attend court. Both texts similarly describe the attendees of the king and queen and the ceremonies and even the changing of official garbs to lighter, less formal garments to partake in games and feasting. There are many similarities in the description of the ceremonies and feasting at Caerleon, but the expansions and differences reveal the subject matter and the poetic form suited to the other to lend more vivacity to Arthur's magnificent court, and they add chivalric, amorous, and courtly motives that are less pronounced, if sometimes present, in Geoffrey's work. Wace modifies the major themes, but also the minor details in order to adapt the *HRB* to the *romans* for a vernacular, French audience.

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[36] Foulon, "Wace," in *ALMA*, 97

After the list of guests, Geoffrey says, "They travelled with such ostentation of trappings, mules and horses as defies description" ["…difficile est describere"] (156.351-3).[37] Wace takes up that gauntlet from his predecessor in the description of the scene of the assembled court: "You would have seen the most beautiful assembly / You would have seen the most tumultuous city" (10337-38).[38] Wace brings us into the scene through the readers' own eyes, "you could have seen" [veïssez], in the imperfect subjunctive. Though it is equivalent to the past tense in the literary usage, it still retains the subjunctive's air of possibility for the audience. Geoffrey's infinitive "difficile est describere" becomes the second-person subjunctive, inviting the audience to believe in the possibility of describing the scene in the concise, yet descriptive language of the Anglo-Norman octosyllabic couplet. Many objects are described, from palfreys and warhorses to hotel rooms with tapestries being hung. Several actions like the building, emptying, tethering, and carrying are portrayed. The narrator says, "you would have thought it just like a fair" (10358). Wace may have found it difficult but he describes to his audience the world with their own eyes, which involves them in the action and provides a scene for viewing. Without detracting from Monmouth, Wace the poet is demonstrating that his skills lie in the details and nuances. It feels as though he may have even had some fun inventing that scene, added for the pleasure of his audience, primarily Henry and Eleanor and subsequent literate nobles and storytellers. He is participating in the discourse of history, while adapting it politically, linguistically, generically, and stylistically. Furthermore, his *ingenium* becomes the *auctoritas*

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[37] "Qui tanto apparatu ornamentorum, mularem et uquorum incedebant quantum difficile est describere."

[38] "Mult veïssez bele asemblee / Mult veïssez cité fremir" Weiss translates this as "a fine gathering could be seen and the city was in tumult." This is a fine translation considering the mood and tense, but it is worth noting that the voice is indeed plural second person.

for subsequent readers and writers. Once again, Merlin will become Wace's avatar for performing history, authorship, and prophecy.

Merlin in Wace: Legitimating Romance

The same ideas and practices that have distinguished Wace's text from Geoffrey's hold true for his treatment of Merlin. The poetic vernacular's effects have been discussed, but it is the tension between history and romance, and their respective thematic and elemental composition that once again shows Merlin's close association with the author because he helps to blur the distinction between them. The introduction to Merlin is much the same as in Monmouth's work. Vortigern's tower keeps crumbling and his supposed soothsayers are calling for the blood of a fatherless boy. At the moment they announce their findings, the narrator interrupts them and says, "But perhaps they lied" ["Mais puet cel ester, il unt monti"] (7348). Wace casts doubt on them before they've spoken, a narrative addition that helps turn the audience against them and in favor of the as-yet unnamed boy. The messengers of Vortigern come to "Kermerdin" and overhear the boys quarrelling, but this time the flourishes of the dialogue differ from the *HRB* in phrasing and meaning. This time "Dinabuz's" first words to Merlin are "Teis tei" ["Hold your tongue"] (7373). Monmouth has the analogous Dinabutius ask, "Why are you quarreling with me, fool?" ["Quid mecum contendis, fatue?"] (106.519) Both versions imply that Merlin was speaking before his friend's outburst, but Wace's adaptation silences the magician before he begins, an act that will, in conjunction with other elements, demonstrate a changed attitude toward the seer, even though he remains the author's avatar. Dinabuz also has a more emphatic version of why Merlin should not contend with him. He makes a subtle change, calling Merlin a "*mauvais chose*" ["wicked thing"], rather than the Latin, "*fatue*" ["idiot"]. Wace has pushed Merlin into the realm of "wicked," an indication of a shift in the author's portrayal of Merlin as

specifically evil. Monmouth's character, Dinabutius, says that his lineage includes nobility and that Merlin does not know his lineage since he does not know his father. Wace's character elaborates on the *HRB* in two ways: Dinabuz now claims kings as his ancestors and he insults Merlin repeatedly and emphatically by saying, "If you consider your family, you can never name your father, for you don't know him, nor will you. You never knew your father, nor did you ever have a father" (7380-5).[39] Knowledge of lineage is seen here as being much more highly emphasized, and his paternity is cast further in doubt because he does not and will never know his father, as indicated by the use of several tenses by Dinabuz. Merlin is further detached from time than in Geoffrey's version. It is also an attempt to withhold a future from Merlin, which is a crucial transformation that provides a segue into the next section.

Again, in this version, Merlin and his mother are brought before Vortigern to tell their story and to confront his wise men. Wace's Vortigern commands her to tell the truth, an addition original to the *Roman*, echoing the author's own truth assertions. When she replies in Geoffrey's account, she swears upon her own soul an oath of significant gravitas. But Wace's mother adds, "This I knew and know to be true, and I will admit its truth," that she was visited by an "apparition" (7414, 7418-19).[40] At the moment of greatest improbability, indeed even impossibility, Wace has his mother and Vortigern re-emphasize the veracity of her account. Wace intermingles a slightly more nuanced version of the rape of the young novitiate, but otherwise sticks to Monmouth's blueprint of her version of her seduction. Wace omits the name of the source, *De deo Socratis*, but Vortigern's diviners confirm the possibility that her story

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[39] "Mais sit u parens acuntes, / Ja tun pere ne numeras, / Kart u nel seez, ne savras. / Une tun pere ne ceneüs / Ne tu unche pere n'eüs."

[40] "Se Deus" that "ço soi jo de ver e sai, / E puir veir le regeherai…fantosmerie."

could be "true." The elimination of Apuleius's text continues Wace's discarding of objects and

ideas that are mystical in exchange for what can lend credence to the *Roman*'s account. Merlin

again takes charge and begins to interrogate the magicians and the king, granting him the power

of truth over those whom he calls "menteürs" [liars] (7475). Again, he reveals the truth of the

situation, with the dragons attacking each other. Merlin is as concerned with the truth as Wace is,

which paradoxically leads to the author suppressing the mystical, prophetic aspect of Merlin, for

his own authorial concerns of authenticity, which lead him specifically *not* to include a

translation of the *Prophetiae Merlini*. In the previous chapter, Wace's refusal to include the

Prophetiae and how the compilers of the text ignore his direct wishes are discussed.

With or without the *Prophetiae* interacting with the *Roman*, the shaping of history

through Merlin's predictions still emerges. Véronique Zara points out that the interaction of the

internal predictions with the rest of the text "ties together the entire timeline—past, present, and

future—as the wheel is perceived to keep on turning. Linearity and circularity cohabit and give

meaning and coherence to the historical timeline."[41] Merlin's *PM* may be suppressed, but, as in

Geoffrey, Merlin's internal prophecies for kings in the story are still the key to narrative

cohesion through foreshadowing and fulfillment, an epicyclical typology—a strategy adapted

from Scripture.[42] Merlin's predictions frame the entire Arthurian narrative, much as in the *HRB*,

but with some new effects and meanings. While sitting by the drained pool, watching the

dragons battle, Vortigern "begged Merlin to tell him what the dragons meant" (7532-3).[43] Two

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[41] Zara, "Arthur in Wace's '*Roman de Brut*,'" 20.

[42] Again, Gabrielle Spiegel's article, "Structures of Time in Medieval Historiography" discusses the work of Erich Auerbach and temporalities of the figural. Caroline Dinshaw outlines Saussure's diachronic and synchronic temporalities as they affect her own queer theory reading of medievalisms in *How Soon is Now?* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[43] "Merlin preia qu'il li desist / Que li dragun senefioent."

interesting emendations by Wace turn on "preia" ["prayed, begged"], whereas Geoffrey's Vortigern "praecipit" ["commanded"] Merlin to speak. Royal authority is not enough to make Merlin speak in this text, it must be asked of the prophet. And the felicitous use of "senefoient" ["signified"] in regard to the dragons over the Latin "portendebat" ["portended"] adds a specific hermeneutic inquiry, rather than one predicated on prophecy, making it more immediate, even if it is originally a verb in the past. Vortigern asks about his own death and Merlin again outlines the conquering of Vortigern's holdings by Aurelius and Uther, their respective ascensions and deaths. However, Wace adds to the prediction of Arthur, saying, "His son, from Cornwall, fierce as a boar in battle, will devour the traitors and destroy all your kin. He will be valiant and brave, conquering all his enemies" (7577-82).[44] Merlin is again an interpretive avatar because the author tells us who is meant by the boar, translating Monmouth's "boar of Cornwall" who "devours" Vortigern's offspring and is a "valiant and brave" king who conquers all. Wace portrays Arthur in Merlin's expanded prediction in chivalric terms structuring his history's future, similarly to Geoffrey's but with added flare that indicates the difference in emphasis of this text in theme. Merlin's narrative predictions are still available to the characters in the text, structuring their present and future narrative and his audience's ideas of history. Even though Wace attempts to suppress the *Prophetiae* tradition from his text, Merlin's prophetic abilities, or his silence thereupon, continue to play an elaborate role in the rise of the Pendragons internally, while Merlin is used to play with genre and textual traditions external to the narrative.

After Aurelius and Uther defeat Vortigern and Hengist, the elder brother is, as in the *HRB*, pondering the appropriate memorial to the fallen. Merlin is summoned from his fountain in

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[44] "Sis filz, ki de Cornoaille, / Cume senglers fiers in bataille, / Les traïturs devurera / E tuz tes parents destruira; / Cil sera mult vaillanz e pruz, / Ses enemis conquera tuz."

Wales to advise Aurelius. Wace again signals truth and fable by saying he does not know where the fountain is because "I have not been there" ["Ne sai u est, kar unc n'i fui"] (8015). Geoffrey names the region, Gewessei, and the spring, Galahes, but Wace only says at "Labanes" and that he cannot verify that place. He could have just followed Monmouth's places, but he did not. It seems a minor point, but it is playing on the tension of truth and lies, fable and history. It is his attempt to satisfy the form of history at the moment when his text is at its most fantastic. Once again, Geoffrey's Aurelius "commands" Merlin to predict his future and the king "greatly begs and pleads" with Merlin to prophesy "of the time that is to come" (8021, 8123).[45] Once again, Merlin refuses on the grounds that he will not use his talents frivolously. Wace transforms the Latin from Merlin refusing to prophesy "prophesied for entertainment or without purpose" ["in derisionem siue uanitatem"] into refusing based on "humility," and saying the spirit would abandon him "If I spoke boastfully, in jest, or arrogantly" (8028-30).[46] The aspects of *bon vivance* described in the section of entertainment, boasting, and arrogance are not compatible with prophecy, apparently. Merlin even emphasizes the point further in this version, saying "Let secret divinations alone" (8037).[47] The "secret divinations" are set apart from his prediction to Vortigern by classification: they come from the same spirit as the internal prediction of Arthur, but it is more of a formal reference to the *Prophetiae Merlini*. Wace's Merlin reiterates the author's own reticence, which, though in the source text, is suppressed internally as well as externally. This may be a comment to a king to disregard the *Prophetiae* that were assuredly circulating at the time, at least in Latin. The internal predictions are sacred and come to Merlin,

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[45] "Mult le poreia, mult le request…estait a venir."

[46] "Se jon parloe par vatance / Ne par eschar ne par bobance." In *HRB*: 128.229.

[47] "Lai ester les devins segreiz."

not at his will, as in the *HRB*. However, unlike his source, Wace negates emphatically the sort of secret prophecies that would aptly describe the *Prophetiae*. Furthermore, Merlin refuses Aurelius in the *Roman* as in the *HRB*, an act which has added weight in the absence of the long *Prophecies*. Merlin, in the *Roman*, acts as Wace's avatar and eliminates the external prophecies while limiting the internal one.

Of course, the prophecy to Vortigern comes to pass, Aurelius is made king and poisoned, and the comet prophecy to Uther is much the same as in the Latin, with some added emotional context for the characters. The children, a son and a daughter, are predicted to reign over the same wide swath of Europe and Britain, and Uther is named after the dragon-tailed comet, much as in Wace's source. But while in both versions he takes on the moniker of "Pendragon," Geoffrey says that the word means "Dragon's head in British" and Wace changes it to "dragon head in French" ["Chiés est de dragon en rumanz"] (8406). Once again, Wace demonstrates his linguistic disregard for the Britons. While Geoffrey is writing in Latin, he makes a reference to the language of the Britons, from which he is supposedly translating this portion. This reference adds linguistic sovereignty to the British again, but again Wace robs them of it in favor of his present audience's language, the vernacular "*rumanz*." Weiss interpolates "French" from this, but either way, the language is not British since it is a "romance language" that is cited in Wace's etymology. In either case, Uther's addition to his name, through Merlin's interpretation, no longer gives linguistic sovereignty to the Britons. Wace privileges the vernacular of his patrons over the "authentic" Celtic language, a slight variation whose implications include cultural colonization in the context of the Britons erased at the beginning of the *Roman*. The focus here is how Merlin aids the transition from *historia* to *romans*.

Uther falls in love with Ygerne, who is described as "[t]here was no fairer in all the land, she was courteous, beautiful, and wise" (8573-5).[48] She is described as "the most beautiful woman in Britain" by Geoffrey, as in Wace, but the latter adds the traits of wisdom and courtesy to her repertoire, signifying a move toward the courtly aspects embodied by Arthur's section in the *Roman*. Uther desiring her before even seeing her based on her reputation, and the description of his love pangs are some of the earliest examples in the vernacular of a trope that will be played out in subsequent *romans*. While Geoffrey has Uther say that he is "aflame" with love, Wace's character tells Ulfin, "Love for Ygerne has struck me down, completely defeating me and conquering me: I can neither come nor go, wake nor sleep, arise nor rest, eat nor drink, without thinking of her" (8659-65).[49] This speech is an addition by Wace that will be directly or indirectly imitated by nearly every writer of medieval romance for the next several centuries. The formula of love "conquering" Uther is reiterated in the suffering of Guigemar in Marie de France's lay, a generation after the *Romans* circulates. This motif is disseminated by the next generation of French writers—Marie, Chrétien, and Andreas Capellanus—who, not coincidentally, write for Eleanor of Aquitaine later in her life and for her daughter Marie de Champagne at Troyes.[50] The trope of love sickness, and even madness, plays out from the mid-twelfth century onward in Tristan's and in Lancelot's sufferings in the *Vulgate* cycle. If Wace is not the first, then he is among the first to describe the sleepless fasting associated with *amour* by a protagonist in a romance. That suffering in subsequent tales leads the characters to speculate

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[48] "Ne not plus bele en tut le regne; / Curteise esteit e bele e sage."

[49] "L'amur Ygerne m'ad suspris / Tus m'ad vencu, tut m'ad conquis, / Ne puis aler, ne puis venir, / Ne puis veillier, ne puis dormir, / Ne puis lever, ne puis culchier, ne puis beire, ne puis mangier, / Que d'Ygerne ne me suvienge."

[50] June Hall McCash, "The Role of Women in the Rise of the Vernacular," *Comparative Literature* 60, no. 1 (2008): 45-57. www.jstor.org/stable/40279394.

that they will even die for this unfulfilled love. Merlin makes an internal prediction to Uther that

positions the prophet in the genre of the romance: "You shall have her. You shall never die on

Ygerne's account. I shall make you have all of your desire" (8691-3).[51] This desire is the locus of

medieval romance, a genre known for lustful moments, adultery, rape, and even incest, usually

with a happy ending. It is also not the first time—or the last—that desire has affected the course

of the *Roman*. Zara demonstrates how Wace changed his source in the Locrinus and Estrildis

episode to change love into lust.[52] The fiery passion of the lover is fulfilled by Merlin's ruses: a

forbidden desire is the moment in which Merlin can fulfill his own prophecy. Merlin is now the

servant of the lust, the unchivalric desire for another man's wife, of Uther, rather than his love in

the *HRB*. After he plans the seduction of Igerne through the ruse of disguise, Merlin never speaks

directly again in either the *HRB* or the *Roman*. He fulfills the plan and in both texts the count

Gorlois is killed while Uther is lying with Ygerne. In both texts, the narrator makes an aside to

the audience about how Arthur was conceived that night. The narrator has taken over, subsumed

Merlin's predictive strategies in order to structure the life of Uther and Arthur. Wace waits until

after Uther marries Ygerne to have the narrative voice predict Arthur, whereas Geoffrey has

Arthur twice announced, once on the fateful evening and once after the marriage. Merlin heralds

the era of *roman d'amour* with Wace, who has expanded upon and emphasized more than his

source.

The desire of Uther, borrowed from Geoffrey and fulfilled by Merlin, is a precursor for

innumerable lovelorn *romans* heroes and heroines and the *Pax Arthuriana* mirrors the ideal

chivalric court. But it is Arthur's death and Merlin's prophecies that demonstrate the politics of

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[51] "Tu l'avras, / Ja pur Ygerne ne murras/ Tut t'en ferai aveir tun buen."

[52] Zara, "Arthur in Wace's 'R*oman de Brut*,'" 31.

identity in Wace's *Roman*. Wace hesitates to announce the prediction of Arthur when he is

conceived perhaps because of dynastic, moral, or political reasons. The absence of the prediction

is significant in relation to the last two prophecies of Merlin. Merlin never speaks to them

directly in either text. Following Geoffrey, Wace references king Alanus's investigations into the

predictions of the Sibyl and Merlin about the future of the Britons rising again, the coda to the

HRB and the *Roman*. Wace appropriates Merlin's voice at the end of Arthur's life, a scene that

will be enlarged upon in adaptations for centuries to come. In Wace's version, the scene is

heavily reliant on Merlin. Geoffrey simply states that Arthur was taken to Avalon and later

alludes that in accordance with the prophecy Merlin delivered to Arthur, the Britons would rise

again. The problem is that Merlin never meets Arthur in the *HRB* or the *Roman*. That will change

greatly in the age of *romans*, but Merlin's *Prophetiae* have become their own book in a

metafictional move. Upon the death of Arthur at Mordret's hands, Wace takes the time, once

again, to talk to his audience about "truth," prophecies, and the return of the king.

The space between history and fable is as thin as a veil at the moment of Arthur's death.

After his eulogy for Arthur, Wace says, "If the chronicle is true…he had himself taken to

Avalon" ["[S]i la geste ne ment…En Avalon se fist porter"] (13275, 13277). Perhaps the most

speculative moment in Arthuriana and only the second recorded time that this moment appears,

is, once again, for Wace the site of the struggle between historical legitimacy and romanticized

confabulation, between *auctoritas* and *ingenium*. It is the first time that he refers to his main

source, which he calls the "geste" rather than "histoire" (13275). The moment at which Arthur's

mysterious disappearance occurs is precisely when Wace adds a detail that will become forever a

part of the Arthurian legend. Wace says, "He is still there, awaited by the Britons, as they say

and believe, and will return and may live again" ["Encore I est, Bretun l'atendent, / Si cum il

dient e entendent / De la vendra, encore puet vivre."] (13279-81). Wace has conflated the ending

of the *HRB*, of the new era of the Britons, with a return of Arthur. This is a new adaptation of the

history, without precedent in his source. It is an odd moment for Wace because he has done his

best to treat the British as a "foreign, ancient" people whose cultural sovereignty he has effaced

several times. However, at this moment, Wace seems sympathetic to the Britons and Arthur. And

Merlin announces another prophecy for the author, an adaptation that has affected the myth of

Arthur forever. The *HRB* simply says he went to Avalon to have his wounds tended. And when

Cadualadrus asks Alanus, it is simply said that the Britons would not rule Britain again, "until

the time came which Merlin had foretold to Arthur" (205.565-6).[53] Even if they had met, the

only prophecies of the Britons' return to dominance in Britain in the *HRB* do not involve Arthur,

simply the return of Cadualadrus's bones from Rome. He, not Arthur, will return to Britain but

only as a corpse. And Alanus supposedly consults the *Prophetiae Merlini* and verifies it. This

work—that Wace specifically suppressed in his *Roman*—only says that his "end shall be

unknown" ["et exitus eius dubius erit"] (112.42). The *Prophetiae* internally predicts Arthur

going to Avalon, leaving in doubt his death, but never mentions a return. However, it says that

"Cadualadrus will summon Conanus" and "the foreigners will be slaughtered" and the "island

will be called by Brutus' name" (115.110-114). Again, it is Cadualadrus, not Arthur who returns,

this time alive and victorious. Even the *Vita Merlini* refers only to the disappearance of Arthur,

not a potential return. Indeed, in the *Vita*, when Taliesin proposes calling upon Arthur to quell

the Britons civil strife, Merlin says that the return of Britons will only occur when "Conan

arrives in his chariot from Brittany, and that revered leader of the Welsh, Cadwallader" (968-9).

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[53] "Nolebat enim Deus Britones in insulam Britanniae diutius regnare antequam tempus illud uenisset quod Merlinus Arturo pophetauerat."

Geoffrey's works never mention the return of Arthur and even when it is suggested by Taliesin,

Merlin rejects that course.

Wace is the first author to assert Arthur's return and he explicitly uses Merlin to herald

the return of Arthur and to verify its occurrence. Speaking in the first person, he says,

> Master Wace, who made this book, will say no more of his end than the prophet Merlin
>
> did. Merlin said of Arthur, rightly, that his death would be doubtful. The prophet spoke
>
> truly: ever since, people have always doubted it and always will, I think, doubt whether
>
> he is dead or alive. It is true that he had himself borne away to Avalon after the
>
> Incarnation. (13282-92)[54]

Wace says he will say no more than Merlin, who only said that his death is doubtful. Wace

almost seamlessly uses that "dubious" death to reinvent the return of the Britons. Until this

moment in literary history, Merlin has never prophesied Arthur's return to him or about him to

someone else. Once again, the moment of greatest "doubt" over the veracity of this history is

when the author claims the truth. And when he fervently asserts the truth, even upon authority, it

is surely the moment at which Wace is being the most inventive. This time Merlin is the source

for the truth of the matter, but after the "doubtful death," the rest is Wace's invention. The author

emphasizes twice that the prophet spoke "truly" with his use of "*verité*" and "rightly" ["so ot

dreit"]. Wace uses the authority of "la geste" to verify Merlin, and then utilized Merlin to verify

the poet's own invention. The return of Arthur subsumes the return of the British, and it is done

through the illusion of Wace using Merlin as his avatar, even resembling Merlin, a trick like

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[54] "Maistre Wace, ki fit cest livre, / Ne volt plus dire de sa fin / Qu'en dist li prophetes Merlin; / Merlin dist d'Arthur, so ot dreit, / Que sa mort dutuse serreit. / Li prophetes dist verité; / Tut tens / en ad l'um puis duté, / E dutera, ço crei, tut dis, / Se il est mort u il est vis. / Porter se fist en Avalun / Pur veir, puis l'Incarnation."

Merlin's rendering of Uther as Gorlois. Wace's suppression of the prophecies—because of his lack of interpretive skill, the possibility of them being untrue, and the potential political fallout should they prove unflattering to Henry II—is in truth a maneuver to coopt the prophecies in the employment of a keen strategy: the return of the mythic king is not in opposition to contemporary rulers. Rather, Arthur's return can prefigure the aspects of Henry's court modelled on this section.

The seeming sympathy for the Britons and Arthur, through Merlin, is in service of his patrons. The invented return can be read as an appropriation of the king and Merlin and their British identity in service of projecting Henry as a new Arthur. Remember, Wace called Henry King of the English and the language of the Britons is immediately subsumed by "English" in the beginning of the *Roman* and in naming Stonehenge. The transitive properties of conquering, as in the *HRB*, brings history to the present Norman-Angevin monarchs to whom Wace presents the *Roman de Brut*. Wace makes the *Roman* in support of the "English" identity of the reigning king. This is an immense irony considering that the people who defeated the Britons were the Anglo-Saxons, the progenitors of the English, whom the Normans conquered and are still in the process of assimilating by 1155. And by making Arthur the exemplar of current chivalric ideals, he becomes a precursor to the English king, Henry II. It may even be said that that might mean Henry II is equivalent to Arthur by analogy. Either way, the Britons may tell tales of the return of Arthur, but Wace's master narrative is to affirm the Englishness of the king. Arthur will save this island, not for the French or the British, but for the English. This is the first time, but it will not be the last, that the British have been sublimated by the idea of an "English" Arthur returning in the darkest hour of the island. Indeed, this transformation from British to English hero will begin to take hold in the subsequent generations. There are many French and Anglo-Norman versions

of the *Brut*, but Jane Zatta, says that they are "far from being mere translations," but rather the adaptations "redeploy the Brut myth in order to redefine the respective roles of the monarchy and the nobility."[55] Wace redefines Merlin in subtle ways, too, pointing in different directions. Delores Buttry claims that Wace was moving away from historical concerns of internecine warfare to courtly behavior and egalitarianism: "Wace's source material is refracted through the prism of the translator's own views. The *Brut* is not really 'depoliticized'—it is subtly 'politicized' in a more general and universal way."[56] The egalitarianism of the Round Table is evident, reinforcing Zatta's claim that "At the very time that the Norman and Angevin kings were attempting to extend the power of the monarchs at the expense of the prerogatives of the nobility, we find that the *Brut* chronicles praise those kings whose policies enhance the prestige and well-being of their nobles."[57] Merlin is certainly seen as legitimating and even inventing Arthur, the exemplar of courtly values, egalitarianism, an example of kingship who is both military and courtly. Uther and Aurelius are mostly wartime kings in whose episodes the *amour* of the courtly tradition is witnessed only in Uther. From this passion Merlin predicts and fulfills the existence of Arthur internally, as Wace does externally.

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[55] Jane Zatta, "Translating the 'Historia': The Ideological Transformation 'Historia regum Britannie' in Twelfth-Century Vernacular Chronicles Arthuriana" 8, no.4 (Winter 1998): 148-161 (149).

[56] Buttry, "Authority Refracted," 88.

[57] Zatta, "Translating the 'Historia,'" 148. "The vernacular Brut chronicles changed the social function of Geoffrey's text by appropriating the authorizing strategies of official histories in order to legitimate the status and aspirations of a different social class. Official histories written for Norman and Angevin monarchs promoted the belief that submission and obedience to an idealized monarch who embodies the qualities of noble origins, natural superiority, and divinely favored success resulted in a transfer of those qualities from the ruler to the subject almost in the same way that hereditary traits are passed from father to son" (157).

Laȝamon's Merlin: Commenting from the Margins of Power

Laȝamon supposedly follows Wace's manuscript as his source, as well as several other texts that

he purports to collect in his endeavor to compile his own *Brut*. However, Laȝamon adapts his

source to his time period, especially regarding language and politics. Roger Sherman Loomis

cites J.S.P. Tatlock in dating Laȝamon's *Brut* in the late twelfth century, but the work of F.H.M.

Le Saux has asserted the conservative estimate is closer to the mid-thirteenth century.[58] Finke

and Shichtman suggest that "Laȝamon did not write for the same audiences and under exactly

the same circumstances in the thirteenth century. Changes occurred in the intervening years,"

namely "the loss of Angevin lands in France during the reign of King John (1199-1216)[…]that

make it possible for Laȝamon to write a history of the kings of England in the English

Language" because the tendency was to turn inward toward more "English interests."[59] The

reflection of political ideation at this time has been argued by several scholars because of the

language of Laȝamon's version, supplied in one manuscript that is deemed closer to the original,

the MS Caligula A. IX, and one, rather incomplete reworking and less idiomatic MS Otho C.

XIII. Layamon's use of a vernacular that at least emulates older forms of English may simply

represent a dialect of the time, but it has been described as defiant, marginalized, representing

fashionable forms—a "retro" fad in his day—and as a historical and linguistic intersection with

ironic implications.

Laȝamon's *Brut* is unique because it is not in a francophone dialect or in Latin at a time

when these languages prevail because of either ecclesiastical writing or an appeal to the Norman-

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[58] Roger Sherman Loomis, "Layamon's Brut," in *ALMA*, 104-111 (104). See also F.H.M. Le Saux, *Layamon's Brut and its Sources* (Cambridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 1989).

[59] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 104.

descended aristocracy. While Robert de Boron's French poetry and the prose versions influenced

by him proliferate throughout France, into the rest of Europe, and back across the channel,

Laȝamon's work is a rare exemplar of an early English treatment of Arthur in the *historia*

tradition. Indeed, most other Arthuriana for the next several centuries in English will deal with

translations of the *romans,* or non-*historia*, traditions. Loomis demonstrates that "[t]he

vocabulary is overwhelmingly Saxon; only 150 Romance words occur," but even more

significant is the format in "basically the long line of Old English verse whose two halves are

linked across the medial caesura by the use of alliteration."[60] Yet there are definite differences

between Laȝamon's style and that of the *Beowulf* poet because "[t]he combination of medium

and idiom evokes the native tradition, both Anglo-Saxon poetry and rhythmical alliterative prose

[...]but there can be no question of mere antiquarian imitation: most of Laȝamon's compounds

are original with him; so are his poetic formulas."[61] Gone are the kennings, and he adds rhyming

lines in this alliterative revival because it indicates an imperfect understanding of the past

language or an attempt to modernize it, or both. Perhaps Laȝamon was reinventing the English

epic language, but imperfectly and in the fashionable couplet. He is adapting an entire language,

poetic forms, and a cultural history from the Anglo-Normans, the descendants of the people who

conquered the English. By the early thirteenth century, there are indications that Norman and

Anglo-Saxon were not only just living parallel to each other but had started to become Middle

English with cross-sections of vocabulary pervading the country. However, there is still some

stratification of language between the people ruling and the people ruled. Add to the mix that the

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[60] Loomis, "Layamon," 110.

[61] W. R. J. Barron, "Layamon: Bruttene Deorling: An Arthur for Every Age," in *The Fortunes of King Arthur*, ed. Norris J. Lacy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 47-65 (56).

Brut is ostensibly about the Britons and the complexity of performing these participatory games of rewriting history becomes clear. The common thread is marginalized people who hold the real power, like Merlin in the *Brut*.

Also called the "hystoria Britonum," The *Brut*'s stated aim is "þet he wolde of Engle þa æðelen tellen" ["that he would tell of the princes of the Angles"] (6).[62] Again, the author presents a history of the British people, but addressed, this time much more narrowly and specifically—at a population that is "English." There is no sign of the Britons or their language at the start of the book that is supposedly about them, and it is addressed to the English, the descendants of the people who defeated the Britons. Furthermore, "Ironically, too, it uses the language, the poetic form, and the style of the people it disparages."[63] Laȝamon uses an English that is at least a facsimile of the language spoken by the people who conquered the Britons: the Anglo-Saxons. If Wace sought to silence the British for the "English" king, Laȝamon is writing from the language of those who conquered and occupied the lands once held by the Saxon-identified people. But now the English are ruled by the Normans, and he is receiving an Anglo-Norman text and translating it back into a pseudo-Anglo-Saxon. Some scholars point to it as a voice of resistance from the marginalized Anglo-Saxon natives of the island against their Norman overlords.[64] Others focus on the way that the language mediates power from the margins inward to the central

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[62] Laȝamon, *Brut*, ed. G.L. Brook and R.F. Leslie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963). My translation will be included when necessary only, and line numbers are cited parenthetically. The original is used because it is essentially English; All translations are mine and provided alongside for ease of use.

[63] J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 105.

[64] Jeffrey Rider, "The Fictional Margin: The Merlin of the *Brut*," *Modern Philology* 87, no.1 (1989): 1-12 (12). "In Layamon's reworking of Wace's poem[...]an imaginative space opens up..." one in which Layamon could locate the "celebration of England's past and the English past. It permitted Layamon to recall the English conquest of Britain, to find in the Britons an image of the valiant but doomed English conquest of Britain, to see the Norman's conquest as a divine punishment[...]Layamon could express some of the feelings of defiance and resistance to Norman hegemony that he and other English men and women must have experienced.

spheres.[65] In either case, it is from the margins that the author is working, and it is reflected in the revisions by Laȝamon to Merlin's role and his accessibility to central authority.

Again, Laȝamon must rely upon *auctoritas* tempered with *ingenium*, here heavily reliant upon linguistic influence. Additionally, he names his literary influences. When Laȝamon discusses his sources, Bede and Wace, he is careful to call the latter a "Frenchis clerc" (20). Laȝamon is signaling "English" by distinguishing it from the Latin Bede and a "French" cleric, an emulated other worthy of translation, but nonetheless foreign. Interestingly, there is little indication that Laȝamon used either of his supposed sources, Bede and Alban. He is claiming *auctoritas* where it is not given to him. And, if Laȝamon has travelled from the upper Severn to find books to use, as he claims in his opening, he should have been able to find a copy of the *HRB*. There has also been much speculation and evidence on both sides as to whether Laȝamon knew any Welsh sources because of episodes in neither *HRB* or the *Roman de Brut* and whether he knew the *Vita Merlini*.[66] It seems that Laȝamon was trying to show a diversity of sources, but just as Monmouth, he is leaving more space for representation of all the races that had conquered the island, except the British. Barron suggests that "Layamon appears to use the racial terms interchangeably"—of Britons and English—"[and] at Arthur's departure to Avalon, he replaces Wace's version of Merlin's prophecy "that his death would remain in doubt" with the emphatic promise "that an Arthur should again come to aid the people of England—'corrected' in the later

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[65] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 129. "Layamon attempts to renegotiate the status of the marginalized through his various revisions of Wace's Merlin" (127). But Layamon does not conceive of Merlin as his own alter ego. He possesses neither Merlin's abilities nor his access to the centers of power. His role might more accurately be described as mediating between the centers of power and alternative hegemonies."

[66] This particular discussion has been engaged since the late nineteenth century, with early adherents, like Immelman, Bruce, Madden, and Brown, believing in direct Welsh sources, which is gradually overwhelmed by R. Loomis' view that "there is no indication" back to Le Saux's adamant and convincing arguments that Layamon must have known the *Vita Merlini*, but that there was plenty of evidence to speculate that he knew the stories of the Welsh and incorporated them therein.

manuscript to 'Britain.'"[67] Or as Jeffrey Rider puts it, Laȝamon sees "in him the promise of an English savior. Layamon, that is, found in Wace's poem a rehearsal and denunciation of his ancestors' sins and, in his ancestors' British opponents, an image of his own people's past greatness and the promise of its restoration."[68] As Finke and Shichtman put it: "The hermit's situation, then, most closely parallels Layamon's as mediator—*latimarii*. As a Saxon priest writing for a minor Norman aristocrat, the poet sees himself as most appropriately placed to offer the ruling Normans access to the legitimating power of Celtic prehistory."[69] Laȝamon is not differentiating between the English and British peoples because he is concerned with the country itself, not the people who dwell in it or conquer it. He claims as legitimate those who have been on the island because even though Bede's work is in Latin and written during the Anglo-Saxon period, it deals with much of the British rule. His explicit source material is representative of all the peoples, but, if we are to believe Le Saux, the Welsh sources are implicit. He does mention "tales" a few times, but if he is as inclusive as his source material, it would seem to show that "Layamon's work is not a partisan response to Norman oppression; such an oppositional stance would belie his role as a cultural mediator."[70] However, this mediation is performed from outside the central authorities of language and culture, from the margins of geography and time. And, as always, Merlin is at the margins with Laȝamon, his cultural-mediating avatar.

As always, Merlin, as Rider puts it, "is the linchpin of history[…]he shapes it" and even "exemplifies human greatness creating history," and that his "existence and power are absolutely

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[67] Barron, "Layamon: Bruttene Deorling," 56.

[68] Rider, "Fictional Margin," 12.

[69] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 125.

[70] Ibid., 126.

fundamental for the course of history, which, in a quasi-historical work of this kind, is identical with narrative."[71] However, he has taken on the role of interpreter in this version much more so than in Wace or *HRB*. Merlin's character in the *Brut* is closer to the *Vita Merlini*, regarding the triple-death prophecy and Rhyderch's queen's infidelity. Indeed, several episodes in which Laȝamon's Merlin displays these characteristics have been the very basis of the thinking that he had some Welsh sources that were similar to Archdeacon Walter's gift to Monmouth. Le Saux uses this hypothesis to demonstrate Laȝamon's knowledge of the *Vita Merlini*. The laughing Merlin, the one who correctly interprets a situation with its ironic meaning, seems to be a part of the Myrddin/Silvestris version of Merlin, which is incorporated into the *Brut*. His role as interpreter of the dragons is key to the *HRB* and the *Roman*, but there is a subtler adaptation at play here. Merlin is aware that he has the power to interpret the text itself. Rather than being just the historian, when combined with the characteristics of the interpretive Merlin, the character interacts with the text in the way that marginal *nota bene* figures do. As in the *Prophetiae* commentary by John of Cornwall or other glossers of the prophecies, Merlin now comments on the text and interprets it for his internal and external audiences. He is the pointing finger, the marginal comment, in the "commentator" role again. In other texts, he has been the motivator and fulfiller of history into a future that structures the narrative, with or without the external *Prophetiae*. He has interpreted his own prophecies and been the site of commentary in the *Prophetiae*. For the first time within a vernacular *historia* branch text, Merlin is a commentator on the plot, acting on a metahistorical and metafictional level. It is because he is placed outside the course of history and authority by Laȝamon that he is free to comment on the text as Laȝamon's avatar in the author's self-conscious performance.

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[71] Rider, "Fictional Margin," 2-3.

In the *Brut*, as in *HRB* and the *Roman*, Vortigern sends for a fatherless child's blood. Vortigern's men find him after the usual quarrel, but this time appeal to Eli, the reeve of Carmarthen to take him to Vortigern. This added scene is one that Joseph Parry notes is focused on intermediaries, saying "in his messengers—the knowledge they convey, the power with which they are associated—Lawman [sic] imagines the strategies by which his text authorizes itself as a true narrative brought back, as it were, from the past by someone intimately familiar not only with the history, but more importantly, with the land on which that history occurred."[72] Eli's escorting the boy Merlin and his mother is a further remove from the central authority— Vortigern's men—but also to a reeve who avows allegiance to Vortigern. His officiating on this matter is the first in a pattern of further removals from the central authority in the *Brut*. Later in the *Roman de Brut*, it is Uther's man Ulfin who finds Merlin in order to satisfy Uther's illicit desire. But in the *Brut*, Ulfin must use a further intermediary, he "is required to seek out someone more marginal than himself, a hermit[...]the scene demonstrates the ways in which disseminated networks of interpersonal relationships."[73] And when Merlin is brought out of the margins of geography to the center of authority, he is usually made to perform for his captors, like Vortigern and Rhydderch Hael. In the *Vita Merlini*, these performances include laughing at Ganeida's infidelity and the exasperation at the triple-death ruse. In this case Merlin's interpretation is a skillful lesson, artfully Socratic, even if the subject is silent as is the case for all the diviners in the *HRB* and the *Roman*.

After the initial inquiries, Merlin once again takes charge, but in a much more dramatic scene in which there is an important change in his character: he makes a spectacle of the

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[72] Joseph D. Parry, "Narrators, Messengers, and Lawman's 'Brut,'" *Arthuriana* 8, no. 3 (1998): 46-61 (51).

[73] Finke and Shichtman, *Myth of History*, 127-8

interpretation. This is similar to what happens in Wace's version, but in the English version, Merlin names his accuser before it is revealed to him: "Ioram," who is Merlin's "full ifa" ["foul enemy"] (7912). He sees reality despite his anger at the call for his life. Merlin knows the cause of his arrest and seeks to win his freedom, much as in other versions. But this time he specifically calls attention to the transaction in what amounts to a bet by saying:

> ʒif ich þe sugge soð mine worde
>
> Of þine walle whi [it] adun falleð
>
> And mid soe hit betelle þat heore talen [s]inde lese
>
> ʒef me heore hæfden ʒif ich þi wærc hæle (7917-20)

["If I tell you true with my word / Of why the wall falls down / and with truth told without doubt / Give me [Ioram's] head, if I make your work whole"].

If he can demonstrate the true cause, he gets Ioram's head. Merlin figures if the diviner is after his life, then it is worth a wager against his enemy's. Vortigern offers his hand in agreement on the deal in this version, an oath that is intimate and binding. This passage also shows the more personal side of Merlin, a vengeful man, not just an interpreter. Humanizing the enchanter, with anger and revenge, is more aligned with the *VM* and the narratives that Robert de Boron was producing or had already produced at the time of Laʒamon's writing. Even though Laʒamon does not embrace the language of Wace—both the Anglo-Norman and *roman d'amour* words including "curtesie"—does not mean that some romance elements cannot slip in. So, whereas Merlin is inserted in this moment by Wace and Geoffrey, who portray him at his most serious, prophetic, and even terrifying, Laʒamon has Merlin at his most human, which enables him to interact with the text in a running commentary. In what follows, Merlin is utilized directly by the author to gloss the narrative, much like a commentator.

In the *HRB* Merlin's inquiry into the cause of the faulty tower is two sentences long: a question and silence. In the *Roman*, Merlin asks all his questions at once, and the diviners keep silent. But in the *Brut*, Merlin elaborately interrogates Ioram upon each finer point in a dialogue that has this sage thrice unable to answer. Merlin asks him, "sæi þisse kinge wulches cunnes þinges / under þissen stane staðel habbeoð inumen" ["[T] ell this king, you who understand things, / what has dragged down this stone building"] (7939-40). And Ioram cannot answer. In another question, Merlin goes one step further in his performance for the king, using his royal authority as a judicial inquiry: "æxe me Ioram þe is mi full ifa / umben ane stunde suggen of þan grunde / what wuneð I þan watere wintres and summers" ["Ask me Ioram, who is my dedicated enemy, / to tell of the ground around the tower / and the water that flows in winters and summers."] (7946-8). Merlin is manipulating the king into acting in a judicial capacity by interrogating the witness himself. Simultaneously, it may have the effect of bringing the king to his side. When Ioram is silent, Merlin predicts the finding of the fighting dragons. He is of course proven right and wins the bet, receiving Ioram's head as a prize. It was not just the act of being proven right, but the way in which it is done in the *Brut* that highlights Merlin's role here. There is an almost Socratic feel, rhetorical, dialectic, involving the student in a discourse. Merlin enjoys tearing down his rival with logical refutations and proof in a way that neither Geoffrey's nor Wace's versions of the story do, and certainly not as interactively. Merlin's audience *in* the book, the king and the court, are acting as ciphers for the audience *of* the book, building the drama for us, as it occurs in the court of Vortigern, until the release and vindication provided by the diviner's head. Merlin is a champion interpreter in the characters' and the readers' eyes, emphasizing his access to the "truth" about to be revealed. Instead of the *Prophetiae* or Wace's pointed omission, Vortigern asks Merlin what the dragons "bitacneð" ["betoken"] and asks

"seoð,ðen þu most me ræden hu ich scal me læden" ["since you can best read how I shall be directed"] (7989, 7992). Contrary to the spirits that had possessed Merlin in the other texts and in contrast to his solemn usage of it, Merlin replies that he will predict "bluðliche" ["blithely"] (8007). Merlin is here glad to prophesy Vortigern's demise. He takes some amount of pleasure in discussing the antagonist's death, a marked difference from the stoic, informative structurer of history through prophecy who uses his gift only when necessary. There are no grand *prophetiae* nor even an acknowledgment that they exist. Instead, Laȝamon leaves his audience with a seamless text that only internally links history in an epicycle, without much external focus, so far. The tension between the *Historia* and *Prophetiae* version of Merlin Ambrosius's and his prophecies' reflection of Geoffrey's and Wace's day is deemphasized, instead mixed with the *Vita Merlini*, the Silvestris thread of the story. This version of Merlin is mostly pushed aside by the *romans* in Laȝamon's day. However, it appears that, like Laȝamon, Merlin speaks from the edge of power and the margins of literature.

In the *Brut*, Aurelius must search far and wide to find Merlin in order to counsel him on the matter of Stonehenge. The expansion of the search from the two previous versions and the circumstances of Uther's procural of Merlin further illustrate the transformation of the liminal figure's power in court. Aurelius sends men north, south, east, and west, and some "cumen to Alæban / þat is a wælle inne Wælsce land" ["came to Alaban, / where there is a well in Wales"] (8496-7). Laȝamon embellishes the search but winds up in the same familiar spring in Wales. In both the *HRB* and the *Roman*, Merlin is perfunctorily sought and retrieved, but that is not the case in the *Brut*. In a scene reminiscent of Merlin's character in the *Vita*, Laȝamon inserts a scene with two knights and Merlin. They try to persuade him to come with them, offering on their lord's behalf "lond both seluer and gold / ȝif þu an riche ræde wulle þan kinge" ["both land

and silver and gold / If you will ride through the kingdom at the behest of the king"] (8507-8). The prophet refuses, offended at the offer, showing that this Merlin is not at the beck and call of kings beyond his official arrest and remanding to Vortigern. Merlin's talents cannot be bought; he will only perform out of an act of free will. He emphasizes this fact by saying, after a long contemplation, "ʒurstendæi ær none ich wuste þat ʒe cumen / ʒif ich swa walde ne mihte ʒe me finden" ["Yesterday before noon I knew that you were coming / If I had wished it so, you would not have been able to find me"] (8516-17). He could have avoided the knights if he had wanted to, which means he did not wish to. He holds the power, even at the farthest edges of literature and geography. Here he delineates the space in which the king has power, which is not over Merlin in the wild, similar to Rhyderch's lack of control over the sage in the *Vita*. Here he imitates the commentator again, the marginal voice of the text. He is not just the prophet of large political prophecies or narrative predictive strategies. Rather, he sees and understands the moment of the text, purportedly "predicting" minor details reminiscent of his interpretive skills in the *Vita*. The "Welsh well" here represents the fountain in the woods of the Merlinus Silvestris tradition, the place and character that is here appended to the *Historia* tradition much more emphatically than in the *HRB* and the *Roman.* But the fusing of the two Merlins is brought back into the narrative when he tells the men, "Ich cneou his cnihtes ær he come to londe / ich icneou þerne oðer Vther his broðer / ic icneou beien ær heo iboren weoren" ["I knew his knights ere [Aurelius] came to land / I knew the other, Uther, his brother, / I knew them both ere they were born"] (8519-21). Indeed, he did predict to Vortigern Aurelius's and Uther's coming to England, but he never predicted their births to anyone in the text. It would also make him much older than both, a logical disconnect if he is a child when the brothers invade England, presumably as young men. We see here perhaps the beginnings of the Merlin who will know all things, as he

does in the Vulgate Cycle and other *romans*. That he knew them before they were born moves

Merlin toward the authorial and divine, a small push in both directions, but a notable one. One

paradox—which is routine for all versions of this character—of his marginal status is a

commensurate amplification of his knowledge, just as poets and prophets have always critiqued

contemporary regimes from the margins. The degree to which he stands outside authority and the

text also helps him to become insightful in dealing with all manners of power.

In Laȝamon's *Brut*, Merlin moves Stonehenge with the customary "skill" ["liste"], rather

than strength (8590). He is close to Uther when the comet reveals the death of Aurelius. Jeffrey

Rider places greater emphasis on this version of the interpretation, when he suggests that "Wace

downplays the comet, but Laȝamon magnifies Merlin's position…It is his interpretative power

that is, once again on display" when "Uther says: prove yourself and tell us about the token that

we have seen...unless you can advise us we must ride back."[74] The dire circumstances of the sign

from the heavens would mean not fighting the Saxons and altering the fortunes of the newly

made king. It certainly highlights the performance in which Merlin predicts the usual son and

daughter who rule over many lands. Additionally, the scene of the making of the golden dragons

is much more indicative of Merlin's coeval liminality and centrality. After his victory, Uther

searches for Merlin "widen and siden" for Merlin but "ne herde he him nawhit of" ["Far and

wide /…but heard not a whit of him"] (9074, 9077). At the moment of the forging of the dragons

and the naming of the Pendragon line, Merlin is not present. Instead, Uther "þohte of þan tacnen

þe Merlin him tahte" ["thought of the meaning that Merlin had taught him"] and makes the

dragons "for Mærlines luue" ["for Merlin's love"] (9081, 9086). Merlin is physically absent, but

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[74] Rider, "Fictional Margin," 7.

his interpretation remains in the story. This simultaneous absence and interpretive presence is implied in Wace's and Monmouth's versions, and even explained on the narrative level in the *HRB*, whereas Wace glosses that the golden statues were made "pur remembrance del dragun" ["in remembrance of the dragon"] (Weiss, 8394). In Laȝamon's *Brut*, Merlin is sought but not found at the signifying moment, that of Merlin's interpretation of a sign becoming a solidified monument to his prophecies of the rise of the Pendragons. Also, Merlin is conspicuously difficult to find when Uther decides to seduce Igærne.

Uther's "love" this time—deemphasizing the desire of Wace's *romans* version—for Igærne prompts the king to call for Merlin to be sought. This king also offers Ulfin land in exchange for finding him and bringing him back. Ulfin remembers "Ȝursten-dæi me com to an ærmite wel idon / swor bi his chinne þat he wuste Merlin / Whar he ælche nihte resteð under lufte" ["Yesterday I came upon a hermit who / swore by his chin that he knew Merlin / Where he slept each night under the sky"] (9362-5). Ulfin has to search for the hermit in order to help him find Merlin. He must promise the hermit, a further marginalized character, to find the most powerful man in the land. The remoteness of this Merlin, both geographically and socially, emphasizes the tension between the margins and the center of society. It also calls to mind the Welsh Kentigern and Lailoken legends that form the basis for this Merlin who is an adaptation of the Merlin of both the *Vita* and *HRB*. It is through the divine intercession of Kentigern that Lailoken is brought from the fringes where he lives naked as a beast into the society of men. And Merlin in the *Vita* is found by the king's man in the woods under the sky. Once again, when the hermit finds him, Merlin is the mixture of the interpreter of the present and the predictor of the future. He tells the hermit, "Ah ful ȝare hit wuste anan swa ich þe miste / þat þu icumen weore to Vðer kinge" ["A full year before I knew, and so I missed you, / that you were come from king

Uther"] (9390-1). Again, Merlin knew he was coming, but let himself be found. He also knows about the deal between Ulfin and Uther and the subsequent outsourcing, for less land, to the hermit. These are all details of the *VM* tradition: past predictions that give insight into the moment of the text. He is found at the margins with his playful game of hide and seek, unknown in Wace and Geoffrey, but from this space he wields even more literary power than the Merlin of the *HRB* or the *Roman*.

He has shown his insight into the moment, but that aspect of his character is brought back to the *historia* tradition by his next prediction. In an extended expostulation to the hermit, Merlin performs a soliloquy of exactly why he *chooses* to help Uther. Merlin knows the entire situation, reiterating it for the hermit—and his audience in case they forgot—about how Uther is trying to seduces Gorlois's wife. Because there "nis na wimmon treowere in þissere world-riche" ["there is no woman truer in this world"] than Ygærne, Uther needs "mine ginne" ["my skill"] to achieve his goal (9401-2). Here, in the wilderness, Laʒamon's Merlin makes his most dramatic prediction in the *Brut* since his prophecy for Vortigern. In neither Geoffrey's nor Wace's narrations does the audience preview Arthur. His name is not mentioned until the act is completed in the *HRB* and not until the marriage of Uther and Igraine in the *Roman*. But in Laʒamon's *Brut*, Merlin predicts that Uther "on her scal streonen" ["shall beget on her"]—a verb repeated twice—the prodigy of Britain. He continues to say that the predicted "monne" shall "Long beoð æuere dæd ne bið he næuere" ["long be averred dead but never be he"] (9404, 9406). It seems the author may be trying to justify rape by predicting the great king, but in any case, Merlin makes a prediction within a prediction. Not only is Arthur neither born nor grown, but he has not yet even been conceived. Despite that, Merlin predicts that Arthur shall never die either. The entirety of Arthur's existence is written in a "meta-prophetical" moment. By

embedding the Christological reading into Arthur's predicted conception and unending life, the author is reaching backwards to the Hebrew testaments and the Christian Gospels and John's *Apocalypse* while moving the narrative in a forward direction. Merlin, and thus Laȝamon, predicts the end in the beginning again, as in the *HRB*, and then makes certain that his prophecy occurs, once again metaphorically authoring Arthur. He is encompassing all times—past, present, and future in an epicycle of narrative. At the end of the entire prediction of Arthur, Laȝamon's Merlin invokes the "Lauered," ["Lord"] signaling a religious-based prophecy. The author's intended audience would hear the implication of a reference to a great man to come who will never die. This hearkening back to a Hebraic model of messianic prophecy resonates throughout this otherwise wholly original vaticination. Merlin continues to prophesy to the hermit, saying that not only will Arthur conquer Rome, as in previous iterations, but also "Of him scullen gleomen godliche singen / of his breosten scullen æten aðele scopes / scullen of his blode beornes beon drunke" ["Minstrels shall sing in praise of him / The noble poets shall eat of his breast / and they shall be drunk off his noble blood"] (9410-12). Poets shall eat of his breast and drink his blood as they sing his praises. This cannot be a coincidental series of lines by Laȝamon. He is invoking a thousand years of a two-fold tradition of the relationship of the Church as the body of Christ and the Eucharist as the physical body of Christ. In this Christological interpretation, Arthur is the Christ of the Britons, but specifically of poets. Laȝamon is having Merlin wryly comment in the author's place upon the relationship between Arthur and the poets he inspires. In a moment of what could be termed bathos, the messiah of Briton is the savior of poets, for it is they who shall drink of his blood and eat of his body. However, if the Christological reading were further applied, it is a moment of sublime metafiction by Laȝamon. If the people of the Christian faith are the mystic body of Christ and

they eat of Him to participate in the Christian community body, then the poets are the mystic body of Arthur and must partake of him to gain life. And the only way that Arthur lives is through poetry. Partaking of Arthur means singing about him through fables or histories such as Laȝamon's. Poets, like Wace, Geoffrey, and now Layamon, can attach their names to Arthur and win fame and payment. And his fame lasts as long as they sing. Laȝamon is commenting on his own function through Merlin. He is a poet who shall—the verb is in the simple future—profit from Arthur. The once and future king is not even conceived yet, but he has already come a first and a second time in the mind of the author and the audience by way of Merlin's prediction, demonstrating that Merlin's role is the same as Laȝamon's: author and commentator. As always, Merlin is the vehicle—the metaphor—for Arthur's conception and here he also represents the author's function. Merlin is also a part of the literary process of producing the future king. Merlin has become omnipotent: he produces the idea of Arthur and holds the metaphorical position as the poetic progenitor of Arthur. Merlin even ends his prediction with "Ah Lauerd[…]nu hit is iwille þin," ["Oh Lord[…]now it is thy will"], words spoken by Christ during his Passion (9424). Merlin chooses to go with the hermit to Uther because otherwise Arthur will never live, and it is the will of the Lord that he does. Merlin is the instrument of God and the author, both of whom—in a logocentric Christian universe—are mirrors for each other. Yes, Merlin is commenting from the margins of the geography, but Laȝamon invest Merlin with poetic and dynastic powers, again making Merlin closely aligned with the authorial function.

The number of lines from this moment in the text until Arthur's departure to Avalon amount to around five thousand lines out of the sixteen thousand-plus of the total. This is about the same number as in Wace. However, this section represents a significantly larger *percentage* of Laȝamon's entire work than in the *Roman de Brut*. Merlin frames Arthur's time with the

prediction and the intervention necessary to fulfill his role as producer of God's will. Merlin

helps Uther achieve his desire, and the narrator again announces Arthur at his conception, as in

the previous iterations, but this time he arranges the marriage of Uther and Ygaerne to produce a

legitimate heir and compelling protagonist. Merlin once again is only present in Arthur's life

from the words of others, either characters' or the narrator's. When Arthur is preparing to leave

to conquer the Roman forces under "Luces" [Lucius], the people say, "þa wes hit itimed þere þat

Mærlin saide while" ["that it came to pass as Merlin said"] (13965). And when, at the end of the

Brut, the Britons are defeated and Cadwalladr may not return from Rome, the last king holds out

the hope of the return of the Britons because "Merlin þe wiser hit seide mid worde" ["Merlin the

wiser said it with words"] (16064). He has kept his *Historia* persona for much of the rest of the

Brut and Laȝamon has not revised much in the way of the narrator's invocations of Merlin's

words to provide an internal logic and structure to the story. However, these invocations come

moments before the cruelest losses for the British. Just after the characters invoke Merlin's

prediction of Arthur conquering the Romans, the audience is introduced to the king's steward,

Mordred, his nephew and nemesis. And Cadwalladr is prohibited from returning from Rome to

reconquer Britain because the angel tells him it will not happen again until Merlin's and the

Sibyl's words come to fruition. Laȝamon also makes an adaptation to the most dolorous

moment, the death of Arthur.

Geoffrey's narrator tells us that Arthur was taken to Avalon. Wace hedges his bets on

Arthur's death, saying if the "geste" [the *HRB*] and Merlin verify it, then Arthur's death is

doubtful and thus his return is potentially imminent. But in the *Brut*, Merlin is only peripherally

invoked by the narrator after Arthur himself predicts for Constantin, who is at the dying Arthur's

side, that "ich wulle uaren to Aualun... / to Argante þere quene… / and heo scal mine wunden

makien all isunde… / And seoe ich cumen wulle to mine kineriche / and wunnien mid Brutten mid muchelere wunne." ["I will be borne to Avalon / to Argante their queen / and she shall my wounds sound / And then I will come to my kingdom / to fight with the Britons with great struggle"] (14277-82). Arthur predicts his own return and avers it without question or doubt. Merlin is said to have predicted this long ago, which is partially true. Merlin said he would never die. And the audience is shown the boats with "alues" that come to take Arthur away. The Britons, according to Laȝamon, "ileueð ȝet þat he bon on liue" ["believe yet that he is on life"] (14290). The Britons believe it, present tense. The people in the author's day still expect their cultural messiah's return. This somehow is supposed to lend credence to the second coming of Arthur. Laȝamon, like Wace, is trying to claim the truth at the most fantastical moment. The Britons "lokieð euere[…]ȝete whan Arður cumen liðe" ["look ever[…]Yet when Arthur shall come striding"] (14290, 14294). Merlin's *Prophetiae*, which is mostly stricken in this text, is used as the final piece of proof to the truth because "he bodede mid worde his quiðes weoren soðe / þat an Arður sculde ȝete cum Anglen to fulste" ["he boded with words his prophecies were true / that an Arthur should yet come to the aid of the Angles"] (14296-7). In this passage, Arthur is said to come again to help the "Anglen." This seems to be an indicator, among other considerations, that Laȝamon is calling for Arthur to save the "English," with the use of the plural of "Angle." And it may not have been the author's intent because the Otho is changed to "Bruttus." "Anglen" might have been an insertion by a scribe who did not work under the author or even during his life, based on the previously discussed dating of the manscripts. But if we assume Laȝamon refers to the English, that fact runs parallel to his appropriation of the Britons' story in the language of their conquerors. As stated above, he erases the language of the Britons almost immediately. Yet Laȝamon has not suppressed the British identity or language within the

text. Laȝamon translates the surname of Uther into British first and then English. His characters are always looking for Merlin in Wales and finding the wildman of the Britons. However, he does claim to tell the story of "Engle lond" in the prologue.

The equivocating of "Angle" and "Bruttus" could mean that Laȝamon equinamanimously calls all people by that name or calling anyone on the island "English" inasmuch as they were on the actual island of England. And Laȝamon knows the difference between the two peoples as witnessed by the previous lines and the end of the *Brut*. Arthur is becoming Anglicized under Wace and Laȝamon, and will continue to be assimilated further by the dominant discourse. However, this version of the Middle English *Brut* is an aberration in language because it is a dialect that reflects the language in transition. Merlin is still the cipher for Laȝamon's position within the narrative and the textual tradition, a cultural mediator and a linguistic and political outisder. The Britons and Angles are now both defunct, but their legacies and languages continue to live. Perhaps Laȝamon feels sympathy for the Britons and their lost heritage and culture. If so, Merlin and Laȝamon write from the margins of signification in their respective times but borrow from *auctoritas* and use their *ingenium* to refashion Arthur as the once and future king. The *Brut* is also one of a few texts that shows Silvestris and Ambrosius in close relationship to each other in a *historia* genre. Merlin predicts Arthur's birth and death and fame even before visiting Uther for the first time to help him with Ygaerne. And again, Merlin structures the entire story of the birth and return of the king, representing Laȝamon directly. And Merlin calls Arthur the meat and drink of the poets, like Laȝamon. Thus, this version of Merlin reaches into the author's moment and predicts not dynastic succession, as in Monmouth's, but rather foretells the return of Arthur and retelling of the *fabulae* that will occur forever.

Romancing Merlin: Robert de Boron, the Vulgate, and Prose Merlin

After Wace and parallel to Laȝamon, the *Roman de Brut* becomes the authority for a

literature that proliferates, producing many more versions of Merlin, each competing among

overlapping categories of language, genre, and significance. Diana Tyson points out that in the

twelfth and early thirteenth century "Latin was the language most men were used to reading,

French was preferred by women, so that the use of French brought history into the reach of the

Anglo-Norman female aristocracy" (185).[75] Eleanor's later patronage of the arts is famous and is

especially renowned for her fondness for Chrétien de Troyes's romances. Some of the courtlier

aspects appealed to both audiences, but perhaps more so the female aristocracy. It is an aspect of

the texts in which they could participate and perhaps feel empowered in some way. Also, there

are more female characters in Wace and certainly in the subsequent romances—though they vary

in agency.[76] And it is the house of Aquitaine that is responsible, as McCash points out, for the

dissemination of romances throughout Western Europe because her daughters were responsible

for bringing vernacular Arthuriana to the other courts. Marie de Champagne married Louis VII

in France, Matilda of Saxony brought vernacular poetry to Germany, and Eleanor of Castile,

another of her daughters by Henry II brought them to Spain.[77] By removing the *Prophetiae*,

Wace has shifted the focus of the *Roman* away from specific politics and to courtly manners,

chivalry, and love. The *Roman* disguises itself as history to legitimate its authenticity and

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[75] Quoted in June Hall McCash, "The Role of Women in the Rise of the Vernacular," *Comparative Literature* 60, no. 1 (2008): 45-57 (48). http://www.jstor.org/stable/40279394.

[76] Ibid., 48. "Indeed, the inclusion of women at many places in the text where they are not included in Geoffrey's suggests that women were a significant part of this new audience reading or listening to works in the vernacular."

[77] Ibid., 48-9.

simultaneously subverts the genre of history with Merlin's help. His pandering to the desire of

Uther produces Arthur, and his prophecies changed him into a messianic savior. Merlin is at the

center of Wace's adaptations to Arthur, just as he was there at Geoffrey's narrative center,

helping both frame the main themes and highlight the innovations. Wace's *Roman* also predicts

the newest genre of Arthuriana, one that will be adapted many times over. It is established as

Foulon says, that "[t]he French authors of the *Vulgate Merlin*[...]drew information[...]and" that

Chrétien "lighted his torch at the flames of Wace."[78] And Bart Besamusca demonstrates the

power of Wace's transformation of style, saying, "[f]rom the twelfth century onward, rhyming

octosyllabic couplets, used by authors of romances, lays, chronicles, lives of saints, didactic

texts, scientific texts, and so forth, experienced a brilliant career."[79] The adaptations of style and

genre continue throughout the Middle Ages, and subsequent authors make many adaptations to

Merlin that produce a protagonist, as in the *Vita*, even more closely linked to the author than

before.

Merlin becomes his own protagonist, more central than Arthur, in many romances

beginning with Robert de Boron who irrevocably changes the context of the Arthurian tradition

and Merlin's role within that framework. Just as in the *Vita Merlini*, Merlin as protagonist is

much more rounded and multivalenced than when he is relegated to prophet of the Pendragons in

the *HRB*. The Arthurian materials from Nennius and Bede through Laȝamon had been framed in

either the history of Troy and/or Judeo-Christian history. Robert produces Arthurian materials

almost exclusively about the Christian mythos with *Joseph of Arimathea*, the "prequel" to the

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[78] Foulon, "Wace," in *ALMA*, 102.

[79] Bart Besamusca, "The Prevalence of Verse in Medieval Dutch and English Arthurian Fiction," 463.

Roman de Merlin. In this case, Merlin is the co-author of God's will, including the quest for the Grail, Arthur's ascendancy, and the battle between good and evil. Subsequently, many versions of Merlin's life now even add closure to his character by giving him his own tragedy rather than having him exit stage left. Often his words reverberate throughout the text and into the authors' contemporary periods. Appropriately, the romances depict this character writing his own story in a metafictional trick that would have us believe that the audience is reading Merlin's very words. And, even more signifcantly, these versions will come to dominate much of the next seven hundred years of Arthuriana, well into the age of medievalism.

Robert's two positively confirmed works are the verse *Joseph* and *Merlin*, but the *Merlin* is only a fragment of some 500 lines.[80] Its origins in the Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus are posited, but no exact source has ever been located, suggesting that Robert's imagination has reinvented much more than just the Arthuriana. In *Merlin*, Robert has removed all the aspects of the *historia* genre prior to Merlin's section. He has retained—though dramatically changed—this material from sources unknown, though it has been indicated that he may have read Wace's version.[81] Robert is deliberately moving away from *historia* toward the *romans* that Wace's version begins. *Joseph* is the story of the cup that Christ used at the Last Supper. Joseph uses it on Good Friday to preserve Jesus's blood and transports the chalice across the seas to Britain for safe keeping. In a now-famous adaptation, this version of the Grail has supplanted Chrétien de Troyes's *graal* in his incomplete *Perceval*. In Chrétien's poem, it is a serving dish for the Fisher King, which, in turn, has been proven to be a remnant of ancient Celtic, specifically Welsh,

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[80] Nigel Bryant, *Merlin* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2001), 1-2.

[81] Edward Donald Kennedy, "Visions of History: Robert de Boron and English Arthurian Chroniclers," in *Arthurian Studies LXIV*, edited by Norris J. Lacey (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2005), 29-42 (30).

mythology appropriated by Christian authors.[82] Robert's agenda is clear: transforming his

received material into a Christian lineage for the Grail, Arthur, and Merlin. The prose renderings

of *Merlin* and *Perceval* are sufficient to establish the entirety of the religious significance that

changes Merlin. These aspects are transferred into the prose editions and later adapted into the

Vulgate Cycle, the authoritative French prose Arthurian cycle that includes the *Joseph* (or

"History of the Grail"), *Merlin*, *Livre Artus*, *Lancelot*, *Grail*, and *Mort Artus*.[83] It is from this

received tradition that the stories come back into England as the *Prose Merlin* version, of which

there is a fifteenth-century manuscript.[84] This aspect plays a dominant role in Merlin's character

and Arthurian literature in general from the thirteenth to the late fifteenth century, making the

Prose Merlin an acceptable exemplar of the romance of Merlin. Because of the rather direct

translation of the *Prose Merlin* from the *Vulgate*—as well as some from the *Suite de Merlin*, an

addition to the French *Vulgate*—references will be to the Middle English version, with

annotations pointing toward the French *Merlin*.

Robert, and his subsequent redactors and adaptors, places Merlin at the center of a cosmic

battle precipitated by Christ harrowing Hell in, according to Aileen Ann McDonald, "a plot

hatched by an infernal assembly of demons to wreak havoc in the human world" by creating a

man who will be part devil and part man, a sort of anti-Christ.[85] Geoffrey's and Wace's version

of Merlin's genealogy is here adapted from pagan sources that cite a lone incubus to become a

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[82] See Philippe Walter, *Merlin ou le savoir du monde* (Paris: Imago, 2010); and Jean Frappier's work, as condensed in the introduction to his edition of *Le roman breton: Perceval; ou, le Conte du Graal*.

[83] *Vulgate Cycle*, Vol. 1, ed. H. Oskar Sommer (Washington, D.C: Riverside Press, 1903), vii. Accessed July 29, 2016. https://books.google.com/books?id=INY4AQAAMAAJ. See also, *Merlin*, ed Alexandre Micha (Paris: Droz, 2000).

[84] *Prose Merlin*, ed. John Conlee (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), 11.
[85] Aileen Ann MacDonald, *The Figure of Merlin in Thirteenth-Century French Romance* (Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellon, 1990), 40-41.

conspiracy to combat Christ's redemption of mortals. In a grotesque reflection of Christ, the

devils say they will impregnate a virgin with demon seed in order to produce "a man of oure

kynde that might speke and have our connyge and maystrie worke, and have the

knowleche[…]of thynges that be past."[86] Merlin's knowledge as historian is preserved but

transformed into a diabolic attribute; his role as historian up to this moment had several aspects:

he was framed as a cipher for the author of the history because he foreshadows the future of the

narrative that becomes "history" later in the story, as in the *HRB*, and the *Roman*. His other link

to history is to external history, the contemporary author's moment, through the commentary on

history in the *Prophetiae*. The *Prose Merlin* and its antecedents offer new explanations for old

characteristics of Merlin. His knowledge of the past is a gift from the demons, who believe they

are thwarting God, but—just as the serpent thinks he is tricking God by precipitating Adam and

Eve's Fall—God allows the devil's plan in *Merlin* for the redemption of humans. Indeed, the

narrator calls them "full grete foles," who think that God does not know what they are up to and

how to contradict them (Conlee, 20).

The will of God is fulfilled through Merlin's conception, though His dictates seems

tragic. The demon assaults a rich man in a Job-like story in which he tries to destroy the man by

killing his livestock, wife, and son. The demon then turns his sights to the virtue of the daughter,

who valiantly resists temptation for two years with the help of her confessor. This expansion on

Geoffrey's and Wace's character, giving Merlin's mother a backstory and other characters who

are ruined by the devil is part of the larger move by the writers of *romans* to make Merlin the

central character. Not only does it begin and end with Merlin, but his family history provides

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[86] Conlee, 20; Sommer, 3, for the French. Nigel Bryant's English translation of the Modena manuscript is also an invaluable bridge between the Old French and Modern English.

insight into how he became a force for God in the world. This addition establishes the parallels to Christ himself. Even though Merlin is conceived by a demon, he becomes God's vehicle through his mother's virtue. Merlin's mother's story is parallel to, but a dark reflection of, Jesus's conception. Mary willingly receives the Word from the Holy Spirit, but the mother of Merlin is seduced by a demon, and she and Merlin are saved only by her submission to God's will. It is only through the human weakness, against which the confessor warns, of "ire or wrath, for in that feende repaire the moste" that Merlin is conceived. It is when the young woman "stode owte of Goddes grace" that her soul is troubled by anger toward her sister that the incubus can penetrate her virtuous defenses, for which the woman invokes the intercession of "Seynt Marie" (23).[87] Through God's foreknowledge, the virgin seduced by the incubus is confessed, thus saving her soul and the soul of her unborn child, Merlin. Also, Merlin gains the knowledge of the future from God's grace to balance out the diabolical knowledge of the past. The demonstration of Merlin as one of "God's elect" in the *roman* is a significant difference between the *historia* and the *romans*. The romancer makes Merlin holy by constructing his visionary experiences as "a gift from God and based on his mother's sincere confession and repentance."[88] Indeed, after confessing she "ledde full holy lyf" and the "devell[…]he was wroth and angry" (25). Merlin's mother comes back to the same place that Mary occupies the entire time, that of holy woman. Because of her holiness God "ordeyned that childe to have his art and witte to know alle thynges don and seide, both that were paste and that were to come" (25). Robert's design, followed faithfully by his prose redactors and translators, authorizes Merlin's prophetic abilities in the

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[87] Sommer, 122-13.

[88] Kathryn Marie Talarico, "The Sounds of Silence: Rewriting, Rereading, and Retelling the Arthurian Legend," in *Satura*, ed. Nancy M. Reale and Ruth E. Sternglantz (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2001): 48-73 (62).

name of God. This adaptation is a significant change from Robert's sources in which Merlin's

prophetic abilities are only explained by a spirit who overcomes him, one that is supernatural but

not necessarily divine in the *HRB, Roman de Brut*, or the *Vita*. This change does not just

Christianize the character, but also gives the author the ability to have Merlin, throughout the rest

of the text, refer to the *Joseph* or Grail history, in order to help the author structure the *Vulgate*

and *Prose Merlin* into an overarching whole.

Not only is Merlin's confessor his and his mother's savior, but he also becomes crucial to

what appears to be the romancers' idea of history, authorship, and prophecy. After Merlin's

defiance of the judges, the confessor is later named: Blaise. Through Merlin's visits to the

hermit, Boron is the first, according to Stephen Maddux, to "unif[y] and [give] direction to the

whole" and "never have hero and story been more completely one."[89] The infant Merlin defends

his mother's virtue against a judge who is looking to kill her for the sin of fornication made

evident by her pregnancy. This extended scene is a derivative of Wace's and Geoffrey's episode

with Vortigern, in which Merlin has to defend himself against having his blood mixed into

mortar. But in an odd adaptation, Robert combines the interrogation of Merlin with his mother's

to determine his parentage. In this version, the *infant* Merlin utters his first interpretive acts.

Merlin bets the judge that if the child can prove that "I know better my fader than thou doste

thyn," then his mother should go free (31).[90] Blaise is a witness and counsellor to the woman in

this scene. When the judge's mother confirms that it is her priest who was the judge's father,

Merlin predicts that the priest will drown himself. When the priest does, it is reported to all, and

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[89] Stephen Maddux, "The Fiction of the 'Livre' in Robert de Boron's *Merlin*," *Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 6 (1985): 41-56 (42).

[90] Sommer, 25.

the confessor is first named when Merlin laughs and says, "tellith Blaise, my moder's confessor" (32).[91] From this moment forth in this particular adaptation, Blaise becomes Merlin's scribe even though he has his doubts about Merlin's motivations. He even questions the provenance of his knowledge, and calls Merlin "the sone of the devell," before the child convinces Blaise that it is God's will that he knows all things past and present so that "the devell sholde lese his part in me" (31-32). He then conjures Blaise to "make a boke[…]Gete ynke and parchemyn and all that longeth to writynge," after which Merlin dictates to his scribe the tale of Joseph of Arimathea, the devils' counsel, and the story of his own birth.[92] In the *Prose Merlin* variations, Merlin is not only the main character, he is also the author of his own narrative as well as those of the Holy Grail. The logical conclusion is a metafictional moment in which the audience is led to believe that they are reading the very book that Merlin dictated to Blaise. Merlin is the author and protagonist and Blaise represents the scribal function, one of Bonaventure's four roles of authorship.

The prose romancers reinvent the *Historia* and the *Roman de Brut* in order to portray Merlin as author, historian, and prophet. The link between the author and his avatar is extremely close because Merlin's knowledge transcends times, like God's and the author's. Just as authors use their memory, sight, and expectation to receive, interact, and innovate the stories, so Merlin, with Blaise's help performs the same functions. Maddux suggests that "Merlin is[…]the driving force (under God) that insures [sic] that the entire history reaches its goal…he makes sure it gets recorded[…]He is thus the 'source'[…]its 'authority'" (33).[93] This self-reflexive maneuver by

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[91] Sommer, 30.

[92] Sommer, 31.

[93] Maddux, "The Fiction of the 'Livre,'" 43.

the romancers makes Merlin not just a symbol or a representation of the author whose concern is adapting the past in the present to affect the future. Merlin is the author and tells his story to Blaise and to us almost simultaneously, thus collapsing history into a timeless narrative that is then retold to the scribe for the audience's consumption. Merlin is the author of the story that we are reading, but he is not actually the writer himself. The character Blaise comes into play as a sort of scribal associate of Merlin's author function. Blaise is the metaphor through whom the story of the vehicle for the story, that is Merlin, is told. Blaise is the pen to Merlin's role as the hand that writes history. The romancers' versions utilize Blaise to add the specific act of authorship to Merlin's roles, demonstrating how narrative is formed: Merlin lives the story that he has predicted, tacitly or explicitly, then has it written down for future transmittal. Toward the end of the romance, the narrator tells us that after Merlin rehearses the story for Blaise before his death, the scribe "hadde hem alle written oon after another in ordre," and it is "by his boke have we the knowinge therof" (319). Merlin's roles are now united not only within the narrative, but also outside its purview. The innovation produces an analogy by which other authors can more explicitly evince their relationship with time and writing, and negotiate the several roles of the author, compiler, commentator, and scribe. Their concomitant functions make the narrative disappear behind an illusion of a verifiable history and even material provenance for the audience's codex. As Kathryn Talarico says, "The new history and timeframe appear to give to the story a logical chronology[…]but it is a *semblance* of historical reality only, since we are aware from the very beginning of the tales that this is Merlin's story—as dictated to his scribe, Blaise. As well as foretelling all that will happen, Merlin's god-like hand helps to shape the events."[94] Merlin is prophet, author, and historian in the *Vulgate* and *Prose Merlin* because he

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[94] Talarico, 72.

predicts an event, makes certain that it happens, and then has it recorded for the sake of an audience that is both after the narrative and at any point in history after Merlin's life. Blaise even asks, "What wilt thow that I shalle do of this boke?" Merlin replies with his grand narrative scheme, which will include the future King Arthur and that the boke "shal bi cleped while the worlde endureth the *Boke of the Seynt Graal*."[95] Merlin repeatedly makes trips to the woods of Northumberland to tell Blaise about everything that has just happened in the plot. The authors have combined metahistory with metafiction in the romances in order to have Merlin comment on the history as well as record it.

Blaise helps define Merlin as a metahistorical and metafictional avatar, who tells and then deconstructs his own story, as well as religious prophet, author, and historian. The link between the prophet and the historian—the future and the past forged in the present moment in the act of writing—is symbolized by Blaise. Just as the *Prophetiae* served as commentary on the *Historia's* plot, and Merlin serves as the first author of the *Vulgate Merlin*, so Blaise is the first reader and interpreter of the seer's vaticinations and history. He is the first interactive character in the history of Merlin and Arthur stories because Blaise represents so many of the figures inside and outside the narrative. He hears the stories and reacts to them like a reader before any other narrative or historical personage can. He is the scribe to whom the composer reiterates a story that has already happened within the narrative, writing history in the moment. He is Merlin's connection to God, to whom the prophet reveals the meaning of the predictions: there is no meaning until the prophecies come true. In other words, Blaise knows that the present must catch up with the future in order for it to make sense and therefore be interpreted in the historical past. With the addition of Blaise, the character of Merlin is now the complete figure of the historian,

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[95] Conlee 37-8; Sommer, 31-2.

author, and prophet, the character who receives stories, interacts with them, and innovates new variations. Blaise is part of the participatory transformation of the received material of history.

The romancers expand on the interaction of Merlin with his own narrative. The French *Vulgate* and Middle English *Prose Merlin* versions embellish even further on Merlin's narrative interactions and his narrative predictions. Merlin's predictions structure the story in front of his audience. The various officials, including Pendragon and Uther, use his predictions to prove to themselves and others that Merlin is a reliable source and say that "A grete fole he is that will not leve that Merlyn seith."[96] This internal "evidence" stands in place of Wace's judgments on the veracity of Merlin's predictions. The reader/listener of the text is not given an authorial confirmation, but rather an internal one. The audience is led to believe that if these predictions are true and if Merlin is the author of these books, then the book must be true. This means that if anyone, even the audience, doubts the accounts therein or their veracity, then they are great fools. This exhortation to the audience is an unsubtle change from authorial confirmation that would have been lost on anyone who did not have the source texts available for comparison, namely, almost everyone at the time. The audience is indirectly, rather than directly by Wace, exhorted to suspend their disbelief because the characters do. This is part of the metafictional legerdemain that the author perpetrates in order to create the verisimilitude necessary for any story's believability. This plausibility lends the supposed author credibility that seems much more incontrovertible than Wace's authorial intervention. The predictions of the laughing Merlin are part of the authorial agenda of legitimizing fiction as a "historically accurate" account. However, one aspect of Merlin's prophecies is specifically erased by the author.

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[96] *Merlin, or, the Early History of King Arthur: A Prose Romance*, vol. IV, ed. Henry B. Wheatley (London: Trübner & Co., 1865), 53. Conlee glosses this episode.

In an indication of the continued tension among the many extant traditions involving

Merlin during the Middle Ages, Blaise and Merlin define entire genres of literature. After

Merlin's triple-death prophecy is confirmed, Pendragon and Uther "seiden fro thens-forth all that

might hier hum speke or sey they wolde lete it be wreten. And so, began the boke of prophecies

of Merlin, that spake of the kynges that sholde be in Englonde."[97] This is a direct

acknowledgment of the *Post-Historia*, the *Prophetiae*, tradition that was very much active in

England and France throughout the Middle Ages, in which Merlin's name is used for real-life

political purposes. But the *Prophetiae* are given a provenance heretofore unrecorded: the

Pendragon kings had them written down. This changes the character of the prophecies: they are

officially sanctioned by the rulers of the narrative, rather than derived from some outside spirit of

Merlin. And they are no longer delivered to Vortigern, perhaps because he is so widely

discredited in this text. The prophecies are now seen as arising organically and collected by the

literary kings who are then and always "sanctioning" the actual kings in their own future who

will use the *Prophetiae* and later adaptations and interpretations to legitimize their own

successions. In the narrative, Merlin visits Blaise and tells him of the prophecies that are being

written and Blaise "axed Merlin yef thei sholde make soche a-nother boke ass he dide."[98] Merlin

replies, "Nay; for they shull write not ells but soche thinges as no man shall undirstonde till it be

fallen and passed."[99] This is a specific discrediting of the other tradition of commentaries and

redactions of the *Prophetiae*. No one can understand those prophecies and therefore they are

almost useless until they have already happened. This may also highlight how history is read

backwards by anyone who attempts to interpret the *Prophecies*. The prophecies are only

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[97] Wheatley, 53; Sommer, 85.

[99] Wheatley, 53-4; Sommer, 86.

understood by reading them *post facto*. Also, they were written *ex eventu*, a fact unexamined in the narrative. This commentary on the commentaries on the prophecies is a subtle jab at the supposed veracity of anyone who tries to interpret them in the present, any present. However, it verifies Merlin's authorship of the predictions, straight from the fountainhead of the current text, which keeps the narrative and historical time flowing together in a cyclical fashion. The addition of this question by Blaise does not discredit the *Prophetiae* themselves, but interpretation. The romance of Merlin, on the other hand, is verifiable because of the fictional provenance. Merlin's prophecies that are external to this narrative are supplanted by the internal predictions, much like the *Roman de Brut*. In the *Prose Merlin* a change allows Merlin to once again predict and write an adaptation to the story that changes the entire tenor of the Pendragon saga.

In Wace's and Geoffrey's texts, the brothers who defeat Vortigern are Aurelius and Uther. The prose romances name Moine, Pendragon, and Uther. Moine is killed by Vortigern, and Pendragon is equivalent to Aurelius's role in the *Prose Merlin*. Some have sought answers to how and why the patronym becomes a given name, but it matters little, except when Pendragon dies.[100] Instead of refusing to predict the death of the new king, as Wace and Geoffrey write when Aurelius asks him, Merlin obliges in the *Prose*. He says to Pendragon and Uther, "oon of yow two moste need passe in this bataile" with the Saxons forthcoming at Salisbury.[101] Gone is Aurelius's ignoble death by poisoning, as in the *HRB*. Instead either Pendragon or Uther will die a hero on the morning, and they will have to choose which of them must perish for the Britons to attain victory. Perhaps more significantly, Merlin is no longer reluctant to use his prophetic

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[100] Some have thought that he only heard the original stories and thus mixed up some points. There can be no definitive explanation, though.

[101] Conlee, 48.

abilities as in the *HRB* and Wace's *Roman*. The predictions, along with the omission of the

Prophetiae, are now used in almost every aspect of the narrative to structure the plot through

Merlin's abilities. Merlin's tripartite authorial role is embraced in the romances because he

prophesies, structures, and records nearly everything in his romance. The narrative predictions

are fulfilled through another innovation to Merlin's role that will continue throughout the

narrative; Merlin dispenses advice on the forthcoming battle, devising how they will win and

telling them how to accomplish it. He's a marshal, a strategist, and fulfills his own prophecies

regularly in this text. The romancers change the comet section significantly by making it a sign

in the sky that will be a signal for Merlin's battle plan. Because Pendragon does not die by

poison while Uther is at war, a departure from the sources, the dragon "all reade fleyinge up in

the ayre" means that the second of the two halves of their force shall then "boldly fight with" the

Saxons.[102] Merlin fulfills his own prediction by advising them to fight in a particular way and at

a certain time, basically causing Pendragon's death, but ensuring victory for the Britons. This

example enhances the character's participation in the text by showing that he fulfills his own

predictions many more times than just Arthur's conception. Also changed is the fact that the

dragon does not project beams of light, signifying Arthur and his sister, as in the previous texts.

Arthur will still exist in the future of the narrative, but the dragon's significance is reduced

greatly only by being a marker for when to attack. Further reducing its significance, Uther has

only one dragon statue made and makes it his battle standard, but there is no second one given to

the church of Winchester. Moreover, "Pendragon" no longer means "Dragon's Head." Merlin

simply tells Uther to take "the surnonn of thi brother" (57). The British, the language, is being

forgotten in favor of other elements. The romancers also greatly de-emphasize the episode of

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[102] Wheatley, 56.

Stonehenge, not only abbreviating it, but reducing Merlin's skill by not showing the movement

as the "skill over strength" theme. It is simply a work of God that he performs rather

perfunctorily without any battle with the Irish. These changes to the art of Merlin's remove

political and historical import but involve him ever further with structuring and fulfilling every

plot point. Merlin is more of an author, a romancer maybe, than an historian at these moments in

the *Prose Merlin*. Merlin is structuring and writing the story to suit the ends of the romancers:

truncating the historical predictions and the guise of history for a more believable fiction whose

internal logic Merlin manipulates even more than in the *HRB*. These adaptations will be the basis

for almost all versions of Merlin in the future centuries of literature and medievalism. History,

with its conquest for the sake of their audience's dreams of empire are almost erased. However,

one monument's history is elongated, bringing about a dramatic change to Merlin's function

within the romances.

In the *Prose Merlin*, Merlin builds Stonehenge and then he urges Uther to build the

Round Table. Previously, Wace invented the table so that Arthur could ensure civility and

equality in the kingdom and Laʒamon adapts this theme and circumstance. But the romancers

use their avatar Merlin to link him irrevocably to the Grail—and thus God and religious motifs—

through the Round Table. Boron and the subsequent prose versions tell of Joseph of Arimathea

and his acquisition of the cup of Christ, saving some blood from the Messiah upon taking him

down, and of Joseph's establishment of a second table in the desert at God's command. This

table becomes the "Grail table." Merlin relates this story again to Uther, just as he has already to

Blaise. Merlin continues, "yef ye do my counseile, ye shall establisshe a thirde table in the name

of the trinite" and "ther-by shall come to yow grete honour and grete profite of youre soule."[103]

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[103] Wheatley, 59; Conlee, 53; Sommer, 95.

The Round Table is not established for a political purpose, but rather for the fulfillment of

religious needs and "God's will." Merlin also counsels the king as to who gets to sit there and

chooses fifty knights, but leaves one place open, the place that will become the "siege perilous."

Merlin also tells of the "voyde place that betokyneth Iudas," the betrayer of Jesus, and Mathias

(Mathieu), who took Judas' place at the second table.[104] The famous siege perilous starts off as

Judas's seat, though by the time Malory writes, it does not have that significance. Obviously, this

is part of the plan to bring Merlin, Arthur, and the romances into the Christian mythos. It also

foreshadows the prose versions of the Perceval story and the quest for the Holy Grail, a story

included in many medieval and post-medieval Arthurian legends. More significantly, Merlin is

now directly linked to the authors of the romances because Merlin is the link in the chain of

books envisioned as the "Grail trilogy." The French and English prose redactors make *Merlin* the

central point linking Christ to Arthur, both of whom shall have life after death—at least

metaphorically, if not literally—according to the prophecies and Christian mythos. Merlin is no

longer just structuring a book or its narrative. Rather, he is an author of the "grand narrative" of

Christian history and Arthur's knights' eventual fulfilment of the Grail in some stories. This role

is on a much larger scale than seen in other texts: he orchestrates the books and storylines

converging in the Round Table. He performs God's will to construct a timeless history that

stretches backwards and forwards simultaneously. From a Christian perspective, Merlin is now

aligned fully with the ultimate Author's narrative for the redemption of humans, Christ's main

mission, and the quest that Uther's and Igaerne's son will attempt. The political purposes of the

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[104] Wheatley, 59; Conlee, 52.

previous authors seem less significant than Merlin's current role as author, Christian historian, and prophet of God's will.

The fulfillment of Arthur's conception in the romances is modelled on the sources very closely, except for several meaningful and lasting ways. After Uther sees Ygerne, he seeks Merlin's help. After a much more elongated romantic courtship between Uther and Ygerne, Ulfin is sent to find Merlin. After playing the disguise games with Ulfin and Uther, Merlin agrees to help. The first significant adaptation is when Merlin only promises to help if Uther grants that Ygerne relinquish the male infant to be fostered elsewhere.[105] This point seems like a motif of the fostered child rising to greatness, but it is accompanied by the noticeable side effect of making Arthur seem illegitimate to the other characters. Wace and Geoffrey pointedly ensure that Arthur is legitimate through an immediate marriage and revealing of the father's real identity. In the *Prose Merlin*, after they are married Uther points out to Ygerne that she could not be pregnant with his or the duke's child because they had not been married long enough and it had been too long for the duke to have impregnated her. He knows the truth and lies to shame her, and she relates "a wonder thinge" that she laid with her lord on the night he died.[106] This eases her mind when Uther orders her to give up the newborn Arthur. Arthur's fostering with Antor and his wife sets up the second major change to Merlin's role in Arthur's fulfillment: the sword in the stone. In all of the previous stories, Merlin virtually disappears after the conception of Arthur, but Robert de Boron and the romancers retain Merlin for much longer than the *HRB* and the two *Bruts*. Because Merlin has Antor and his wife foster Arthur and the child is considered a bastard, the succession is much more complicated than in the *Brut* tradition. The

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[105] Wheatley, 77. Conlee glosses much of this episode.

[106] Wheatley, 86; Sommer, 103.

authors needed a way to have the characters prove that the boy Arthur is king. It is also one of

the key aspects of Arthur that will last in perpetuity and give rise to many versions of this

moment in all subsequent medieval romances and many medievalisms. The romancers make a

major departure from the histories by having Merlin appear after the birth of Arthur. Everything

from this moment on in the romances is complete invention by Robert and the subsequent prose

versions. The romances have established their version through the use of *auctoritas*, but Merlin

as main character and the three roles of author, historian, and prophet, means that the name

leaves room to be filled by *ingenium*.

After Uther's death, the kingdom is left without a king, a disaster in almost any story of

the Middle Ages. However, Merlin has been planning the trial of Arthur since he had had the

infant fostered. It is the barons and clergy who immediately beg for Merlin's help to find a new

king. Merlin counsels patience among the nobility, telling the barons to wait until Christmas to

make their election. All of the lords of the land are assembled at Logres, and after having heard

Mass, they discover "befor the cherche dore a grete ston four square[…]and above, in the

myddill place of this ston, ther stode a styth [anvil] of iren[…]and thourgh this stithi was a

swerde ficchid [stuck] into the ston" (Conlee, 74). Merlin has an archbishop examine the

miraculous blade that appears after Uther's death. Once the people have prayed at Mass on

Christmas, they come out to find the sword inscribed with the words: "Who taketh this swerde

out of this ston sholde be kynge by the eleccion of Ihesu criste" (74). Merlin, with his knowledge

of all things to come granted by God, must have seen this circumstance. He must have known

because he has engineered the entire ascension of the fostered prince, but also because he

declares to Uther before the king dies that "this one Arthur shall be kynge nexte of thy reame

after the, be the vertu of Ihe*su* criste."[107] This is not a request but rather a declarative statement. Merlin predicts, and works to produce, the ascendancy of Arthur through the sword's appearance in the churchyard. Merlin must know that a certain scene will transpire in the yard that will assure Arthur's fate. In the entirety of the scene leading to Arthur's ascendancy, Robert de Boron and the subsequent *Prose* versions of Merlin's story have taken the received material and transformed the tale by adding a piece of personal history for Arthur, a paternal linkage to the past ruler, Uther Pendragon. Arthur becomes part of the narrative through a material relation between him and the many previous kings. It is only after Arthur has proved his election by drawing the sword several times and the coronation has been delayed until Pentecost that Merlin returns to explain the young king's provenance. He confirms the boy's parentage, retelling the secret story, and says that God sent the sword in the stone as proof. Merlin is here rounding out his own machinations, bringing a close to the predictions that he made in Uther's life. Merlin is again as closely linked to the author as in any version. Merlin's involvement in the rest of Arthur's reign spans many roles, from advisor to standard-bearer, but there is one last important change to Merlin's character that makes him a protagonist, as well as the historian, author, and prophet. Merlin endures his own tragedy.

Merlin's demise is rooted in magic, an aspect of his character that has been either underemphasized or nonexistent in other versions. Most of Merlin's literary roles have been in the service of God, but paradoxically, he is given the powers of magic, which would have been antithetical to the ideals of medieval Christianity. In the romances, he does not kill Vortigern's diviners, but rather has them give up their false prophecies as punishment. Merlin's magical abilities, which fall outside his previous tripartite role, begin with the "herbs" that Geoffrey

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[107] Wheatley, 95.

records as being the cause of Uther's transformation into Gorlois, and the "enchantment" that Wace uses to explain the same episode's success. The romances tell us that Merlin must atone for the sin of corrupting Ygerne, even if it is to conceive Arthur, God's chosen. He must repent for using magic in the Christianized version. No such compunction plagues the magician in later versions of the tale, and his magical powers are expanded even further throughout future versions of him, especially in various medievalisms. But with the magic comes a price, which is linked to his relationship to women in many other subsequent adaptations. Geoffrey only portrays Merlin's relationship with women in the *Vita*. The women in his life hold powerful sway over him: he is angry enough at his former wife to kill her new husband, and his sister Ganeida takes over as prophetess for Merlin. It is the lust of Rydderch's queen in the *VM* that elicits Merlin's laughter and scorn. It is the Myrddin tradition from which the weakness for women springs; as it spills into the *romans*, it leads to his demise. As his supernatural powers are transformed into magic, his relations with female characters become much more contentious. Anne Berthelot comprehensively outlines the many medieval texts in which Merlin alternately loves and wars with "Morgue" or Morgiana and the sources in which he is seduced by Nivienne/Niniane/Nimue to his demise.[108] It is almost always linked with the women's desire to learn magic from him. Knowledge and desire in the romances are Merlin's undoing. The protagonist of these romances needs a flaw, in the romance, lust is the greatest. Merlin is still a prophet and author of his own demise.

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[108] Anne Berthelot, "Merlin and the Ladies of the Lake," *Arthuriana* 10, no.1 (2000), 55-81. See also her "From Niniane to Nimuë: Demonizing the Lady of the Lake," in *On Arthurian Women*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2001), 89-102.

In the *Prose Merlin*, before he departs Logres, Merlin tells Arthur and Blaise that he will never come back. Blaise offers the obvious suggestion that has plagued prophesy in European and Judeo-Christian literature since its inceptions: "seth it is so that ye may not departe, cometh not ther."[109] If he knows what will happen, then do not go. Merlin replies, "I am so surprised with hir love that I may not withdrawen." There is nothing more "romantic" than love being the doom of the hero. It would seem to be a force too powerful to resist. He teaches his young prodigy, Nimiane in the Middle English *Prose*, "how[…]might oon set in a tour withouten license" and when she asks, he sighs. He knows that she will trap him with the power, but she convinces with promises of intimacy.[110] She argues, "[S]eth that I love you and also ye love me, is [it] not right than that ye do my volunté and I yours?" (320) This sentiment is one of the most common in the tradition of courtly love, doing the will of your lover, especially out of desire. The tales of lovers performing the wishes of their lovers out of desire in the romances, lays, and associated stories are innumerable. In one last act of authorship, Merlin speaks his own doom when he "began to devise crafte unto hir" (320-21). It is his "craft," a word close to *ingenium* or skill, that is desirable and dooms him. In this version, he is placed in a tower in the forest of "Brochelonde," but it does not—as in later versions—seem as though his prodigy means him ill will; she just wants Merlin available whenever she desires him. He has predicted his own fate and he must author it, despite the foreknowledge. He is given free will by God at the beginning of the book, and here he uses it to choose his own tragedy for love. But this time it is Nimiane who "wrote all that he seide," not Blaise. By not recording this with his confessor, the internal

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[109] (Conlee, 320)

[110] Wheatley, 678. Conlee accidentally glosses her name. Of course, her name changes in various languages and versions. See Anne Berthelot, "Merlin and the Ladies of the Lake," *Arthuriana* 10, no.1 (2000), 55-81. See also her "From Niniane to Nimuë: Demonizing the Lady of the Lake," in *On Arthurian Women*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2001): 89-102.

logic of how we acquired this portion of the book is disrupted. He does not dictate this portion of

the "boke" to Blaise, thereby making this episode's transmittal to future audiences problematic.

At the moment of his imprisonment, Merlin's role as historian breaks down leaving Arthur's

kingdom with unanswered questions. Merlin has returned to a space out of time, outside history,

returning to a place in which all times are collapsed into an eternal present. The transformation

from supporting role to protagonist comes with tragedy, but also with the promise of return for

Merlin as well because he is locked away for future generations of writers to liberate and utilize.

Malory: Merlin's Absence as Presence

The book known as *Le Morte Darthur* was roughly contemporary with the *Prose Merlin*,

though Malory's work was edited and published by William Caxton many years after the

author's death. Though they are both adaptations of French sources and have many similarities,

the *Prose Merlin* and the work of Thomas Malory treat Merlin completely differently.

Nonetheless, even Malory's changes portray Merlin as a historian, author, and prophet.

Published in 1485 by Caxton, the *Morte* is one of the most famous Arthurian works by a single

author in English. Indeed, Caxton's version shapes the history and legends of Arthur well into

the modern era. There has been some debate as to who Sir Thomas Malory may have been, but

Eugene Vinaver's identification seems to prevail still.[111] The knight who in 1445 became "a

member of Parliament for Warwickshire" was later often imprisoned on charges ranging from

theft to rape.[112] It is during his lengthiest and last imprisonment that he wrote all of his works,

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[111] Eugene Vinaver, "Sir Thomas Malory," in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 540-52. He cites Kittredge's identification and bemoans the accuracy of allegations brought against the "man and his work" (541).

[112] Introduction, *Works of Malory,* ed. Eugene Vinaver (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1971): v. This edition is based on the Winchester Manuscript. It is the most widely accepted version for scholarly use, considered closer to the author's original work. Caxton filled in many lacunae in the manuscript, hence I will discuss

which were unified and made into a mostly cohesive whole by Caxton some decade and a half after his death. This version is often cited as an example of late medieval English romance because of the Tristan and Isolde and Launcelot and Guinevere section. There are elements of *historia*, but most of the discussion of competing genres is completely erased, especially the *Prophetiae* and *Vita* versions of Merlin. What compelled Malory to compile stories is as yet only speculation, but Caxton's motives are clear. Through the publisher and the Winchester manuscript, Malory's version becomes as much intertwined in the interplay of *auctoritas* and *ingenium* as any other adaptation, and just as concerned with the "truth" as they are.

Caxton prefaces his edition by saying that his patrons had asked for stories on King Arthur in print, the newest medium for storytelling. When he protests to the anonymous noblemen that he could not be one of the nine worthies because "there was no suche Arthur and that alle suche books as been maad of hym ben but fayned and fables" (xiii-xiv). However, his alleged audience "and one in special sayd" that those who disbelieve in Arthur that in them "myght wel be aretted grete folye and blyndenesse," pointing toward several graves, monuments, and books in which Arthur appears as evidence of the fabled king's existence. He cites "at Wynchestre, the Round Table," the famous forgery of the fourteenth century.[113] His authority is fictional, but believed by his audience, which may be all that matters. Among the sources Caxton lists is "Galfrydus, in hys Brutysshe book" and in many other languages, stories from which episodes "Malorye dyd take out of certain books of Frensshe and reduced [them] into Englysshe" for Caxton's "enpryntinge" (xiv-xv). Like previous authors, Caxton asserts the proof of the

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both versions. The criminal charges could have been politically motivated, but there is no way to defend him from now, despite attempts.

[113] See Martin Biddle, *King Arthur's Round Table* (Rochester, NY: Boydell, 2000), especially the radiocarbon dating in chapter six.

legends at the moment of most doubt. Monmouth uses a fictional source to obscure his *ingenium* in writing about Merlin and his version of the Pendragon story. That supposed *auctoritas* leaves him enough space to inscribe his own tales. Wace claims truth repeatedly and precisely when he is at his most inventive, as with the Round Table. Caxton says to his audience that "ye be at your lyberté" to decide on their veracity (xv). Again, the compiler and editor of this version expresses the concerns of the vernacular French genre not being taken seriously as authentic history and takes pains to express its veracity.

Caxton is not the only one who uses strategies of sourcing to attempt to prove the truth of *Le Morte Darthur*. Malory's sources are many and varied and the different versions of the *Le Morte* show some differences in episodes.[114] Nevertheless, the author tries to convince us that he had only one source, an unnamed French book. Far from merely being "reduced" or "translated" from his sources, as Caxton would have us believe, Bonnie Wheeler says, "Malory effects the imaginary notion that there is a grand pre-existing French original, a Book of King Arthur into which he delves, rather than a host of disparate texts from which he shapes his history."[115] The act of referring so often to his sources produces the illusion of a cohesive whole, but also makes his "writing of the vernacular Arthurian corpus, a metaliterary dialogue with his literary past."[116] By calling our attention to his sources repeatedly, Malory is simultaneously disguising them and inviting his audience to engage in a comparison between the works. At the very least, his

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[114] *Malory*: *Texts and Sources*, *Arthurian Studies XL*, ed. P.J.C. Fields (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998) is one of the more authoritative set of articles on this subject. Because his sources are so numerous and interspliced, the scope of this project does not allow a full consideration here. The discovery of the Winchester Manuscript forever changed the discussion of Malory's adaptation of his sources since it was largely outside the editorial interference of Caxton.

[115] Bonnie Wheeler, "'As the French book Seyeth': Malory's *Morte Darthur* and Acts of Reading," *Cahiers de Recherches Médiéval et Humanistes* 14 (2007): 116-25 (117). Wheeler cites thirty-nine instances of "the French Book" and ninety-eight references to his sources or "the books."

[116] Ibid., 117.

audience is encouraged to see him as a reader and writer in the interactive tradition of *translatio studii* in which he claims authority from his "source" while using his *ingenium* to rewrite and rearrange his sources into an episodic format. This monolithic French source is as much a fiction as Walter Archdeacon's "British book" given to Monmouth, which established a fictional *auctoritas* that is reflected in Merlin character traits in *Le Morte Darthur*.

Even though Caxton claims the work to be historical, the book is placed immediately out of any contextual timeframe. D. Thomas Hanks and others have studied Malory's use of Christianity, but Merlin no longer connects the Grail with Arthur, nor is his birth influenced by the divine.[117] Malory no longer contextualizes Arthur in religious history, and it is not in the Trojan tradition because he removes the entire *historia* background from Brutus's exile to the ascendancy of Uther. The "Merlin" section of the *Morte* eliminates everything prior to Uther's infatuation with Igrayne. Immediately, the author signals a lack of concern with political succession, British identity, or the vicissitudes of the island's many different peoples, as in the *historia* tradition. Merlin plays the familiar role of facilitator of Arthur's birth, structuring the entire work through his craft, but the story is much more abbreviated than in the French prose renditions. Merlin is at hand, there is no searching for him, the deed is performed, and Uther married to Igrayne in a matter of a few pages, rather than the lengthy negotiations carried out in the *Vulgate Merlin*. The infant is fostered by "Sir Ector," but the boy is acknowledged by Uther on his deathbed, unlike the French versions in which the king goes to his grave with the secret. In almost no time, Uther dies after an illness, bringing us to the sword and the stone, an episode that demonstrates many adaptations of Merlin, the story, and the role of authorship.

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[117] D. Thomas Hanks, Jr. and Janet Jesmok, *Malory and Christianity: Essays on Sir Thomas Malory's Morte Darthur* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013). https://muse.jhu.edu/.

The sword in the anvil on the stone appears in much the same way as it does in the other prose romances, at Christmas outside a church. However, that city is not Caerleon in *Le Morte*, it is London. The text says that "Merlyn" councils the Archbishop of Canterbury to tell all the lords of the land that they "shold to London come by Cristmas upon payne of cursynge" (*Works* 7). This simple change realigns the entirety of the story toward a different audience. The intervening centuries between Robert de Boron and Malory's version have changed the political landscape. Malory's language, and thus audience, is vastly different. He is writing for a strictly English audience, not French, not Welsh, not Anglo-Norman. This one change indicates more about Malory's connections between his past and his present within and outside the narrative. Furthermore, Malory suggests a familiar scene for his audience, though hedging, "whether it were Powlis or not the frensshe booke maketh no mencyon" (7). The mere mention of Saint Paul's throws our time out of joint. Unlike Geoffrey's and the French prose romances' placement of Arthur in a distant Welsh time and place, Malory makes his narrative more recognizable to his audience. Even though there have been "Saint Paul's" churches in London since 604 CE, the first of several iterations is probably not the church to which Malory is referring. He probably is thinking of the one in his lifetime, the cathedral begun by William the Conqueror that lasted until the Great Fire of 1666. Even though it is unlikely that the supposedly historical Arthur would have lived during a time when a church named after Saint Paul existed in London, the reinvention of the place and the church allows Malory to place his world in the context of the Arthurian past and vice versa—that is to say, made the past look like his own—in order to bring the narrative and Malory's own moment closer together. The collapsing of times and space in this moment at Saint Paul's is representative of Malory's nostalgia for ideals that no longer existed in his own time. In what Terence McCarthy calls "the wrong book at the wrong time," he

shows that the *Morte Darthur* is "marking the end of an age rather than the beginning of a new

one" and Malory is trying to revive the chivalry of the Arthurian legends and the medieval ideal

when "the Middle Ages were already over."[118] It might even be said that Caxton's version is the

first true "medievalism"—a modern facsimile of the Middle Ages in a postmedieval time—of

Arthur and his story, especially since it first appeared for public consumption in print, not

manuscript. However, Caxton speaks of the "copye unto me delyverd," the last handwritten

manuscript of Arthuriana, adapted to its new medium that forever changes how all information

travels (xiii). Though he did not know that it would be printed, Malory, like Merlin, uses hand-

written text to celebrate the past and promise the future of Arthur and Merlin into the modern

era.

Malory shows us Merlin as author, prophet, and historian in ways mostly pertaining to

the structure of the story, but sometime the implications reach the real world. Merlin is the author

of the miracle of the sword in the stone in both the *Prose* and *Morte*. He predicts God's will, and,

directly or indirectly, places the sword where all will find it. The writing on the sword, etched in

the blade, structures the next section of the story. Just as in the *Prose Merlin*, the sword in the

Morte has gold letters on it. In the *Prose* it reads "Who taketh this swerd out of the ston sholde

be kynge by the eleccion of Jhesu Criste."[119] Malory tells us that "lettres there were wryten in

gold aboute the swerd that saiden thus: Whoso pulleth oute this swerd of this stone and anuyld is

rightwys kinge borne of all Englond."[120] There is no mention of which land Arthur shall rule in

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[118] Terence McCarthy, "Old World, New Worlds: King Arthur in England," in *The Social and Literary Contexts of Malory's Morte Darthur*, ed. Dorrel Thomas Hanks, Jr. and Jessica Gentry (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2000), 5-23 (5).

[119] Conlee 74.

[120] *Works* 7.

the *Prose Merlin*. This author is much more specific in his political landscape than any of the other romances prior to him. Not only that, but he has removed any reference to the election by Jesus Christ. The birth is what matters, not the choice of God, in this tale. These few details make this sword's significance less Christian and more nationalistic. Perhaps the dynamics of the War of the Roses, a conflict in which Malory is thought to have played his part, looms in the backdrop of Arthur's London in the *Morte*. However, because there is no external prophecy, Malory seems disinterested in making Merlin speak about the author's own *milieu*.[121] Arthur is transformed into the English, not Welsh or Britons, monarch that he has remained throughout much of the literature of the modern era. The British identity has vanished because it no longer matters. Neither Malory nor his audience consider the Welsh anything except part of England and the transformation of Arthur into the savior of the "English"—begun by Wace and Laȝamon—is completed in total disregard of any other identity. Malory transforms his sources' use of the sword and the stone, an iconic monument and plot point, in order to carry out his agenda of aligning Arthur with England, rather than Wales, Brittany, or France. And it is Merlin's writing that codifies Malory's politics and his innovation of Arthur. In the *Prose Merlin*, the sword in the "stithi" on the stone is never identified except as a miracle created by God that Merlin knew would happen but did not author himself. Malory adjusts his sources by making the writing in gold attributable to Merlin and in this way, Merlin becomes the author's cipher once again, who structures the tale with prophecies and records it as history.

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[121] See Edward Donald Kennedy, "Malory's *Morte Darthur:* A Politically Neutral English Adaptation of the Arthurian Story," in *Arthurian Studies XX*, ed. Keith Busby (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 145-169 for a complete explanation of how there are thirty-six surviving manuscripts of chronicles and prophecies contemporary with Malory's work that involve Merlin "predicting" Edward VI's reign.

In the *Morte*, Merlin records the stories after they happen. As in the *Prose*, "Merlion toke hys leve of kynge Arthure…for to go se hys mayster Bloyse that dwelled in Northumbirlonde" (*Works* 25). The device of Blaise is common to medieval romance, but in Malory there is no backstory: he is not Merlin's mother's confessor, disassociating Merlin further from the Christian tradition. Blaise is also robbed of the crucial question as to the genre of the work; there is no mention of the *Prophecies* and no concern about whether Blaise should make such a book or if his is competing with it. And while Merlin tells him of all the adventures that King Arthur has had, the audience is not told by Merlin or the narrator that this is the very book from which they are reading. Blaise is simply making a book, not the one we are reading necessarily, unlike the explicit illusion perpetrated by the *Prose Merlin* author(s). Merlin's authorship is significantly reduced in his dealings with this character, but they are heightened by the gold letters. In several places in the first book of the Winchester MS, Merlin prophesies events that occur later in the book with these letters. One of his first prophetic actions of major significance is when he comes to the tomb of Lady Columbe and her lover and declares that "in this same place the grettist bateyle between two [knyghtes] that ever was or shall be, and the trewest lovers; and yette none of hem shall slee other" and he writes their names: "Launcelot du Lake and Trystrams" (45). Of course, this action takes place several books later and happens just as described. This internal prophecy is also linked to the Grail because Merlin predicts Balyn's "most dolorous stroke," the one he delivers to the Fisher King, which causes the "twelve yere" of misery for Arthur and "three kingdoms" (45). Again, when the brothers kill each other, unaware of the other's identity, Merlin "lete wryte Balyns name on the tombe with letters of gold that 'here lyeth Balyn le Saveage that was the knight with the two swerdes and he that smote the dolorous stroke'" (58). In the most famous golden letterings, the knights of the Round Table

have their names engraved upon their seats. Malory might have had the Winchester Round Table

in mind when Merlin is painting these golden letters, if the reconstruction is accurate. That

would be a Though "Merlion founde in every sege" rather than writing them. Much later,

Launcelot and other knights find the same lettering on the seats of the Round Table, but at the

Sege Perelous, they find an inscription: "Four hondred wyntir and four and fifty acomplysshed

aftir the Passion of Oure Lorde Jesu Cryst oughte thys sege to be fulfilled" (517). Merlin's

writing litters the landscape long after he has departed, predicting the most significant events in

the whole of the *Morte Darthur*. This writing, as well as the other manifestations of gold, black,

and blood-colored letters that Merlin produces are unique in one way: they merely appear on the

object, fully formed in their significance. Kathy Cawsey writes that "[b]ecause the writing is

apparently unauthored, it paradoxically contains ultimate authority."[122] Merlin is the author's

hand, structuring Malory's stories and tying them together, even though they derive from

different sources. He is the thread connecting several pieces together in what Murray Evans calls

"Malory's *Ordinatio*."[123] Merlin is laying out the text, and, like initials in a manuscript, writing

the story with gold letters. The predictions come true and, as in other iterations of the Arthurian

section, reaffirm the legitimacy of the tale and text.

     Merlin does retain other forms of internal prophecy, but they are changed in many

regards. According to Donald Hoffman, Merlin's main prophecies about the fall of Camelot in

the beginning of the book go completely unnoticed by the characters.[124] No one even responds to

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[122] Kathleen Cawsey, "Merlin's Magical Writing: Writing and the Written Word in *Le Morte Darthur* and the English Prose *Merlin*," *Arthuriana* 11.3 (2001): 89-101 (90).

[123] Murray J. Evans, "Ordinatio and Narrative Links: The Impact of Malory's Tales as a 'hoole book,'" in *Studies in Malory*, ed. James W. Spisak (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1985): 30.

[124] See Rachel Kapelle, "Merlin's Prophecies, Malory's Lacunae," *Arthuriana* 19, no. 2 (2009): 58-81. Kapelle's study raises the difference between contingent and categorical prophecies in Malory. The former are ones

either prophecy of the end given to Arthur in which the narrator tells us that "Merlion tolde unto

kynge Arthure of the prophecy that there sholde be a grete batayle besides Salysbiry, and

Mordred hys owne sonne sholde be agaynste hym" and that "Gwenyver was not holsom for hym

to take to wyff" because she would love Lancelot, thus causing the fall of Camelot (*Works* 49,

59). Hoffman argues that the ineffectiveness of prophecies has two functions. First, they serve as

a "thematic overture" as in the case of the inscriptions and, secondly, the "far more important

function of Merlin's prophecies is not simply to announce themes but to position

them[…]Malory's Merlin inserts the end in the beginning."[125] This seeming paradox leads to a

"fragile moment of recuperated history" as "Merlin and the reader" attempt to read the

"Arthurian history backwards, attempting to recover the ideal origins of chivalry after the

fall."[126] In other words, the fall of Camelot is already recalled at the beginning of the book, and

thus all are tragically doomed to follow the fate set out for them, no matter what Merlin says.

This creates a temporal position reminiscent of the Merlin who is traversing time in a manner

unlike most humans, but it is an oddly authorial view of the story. Many writers think of where

they must end the story before they begin it because the ending is the most important or resonant

note upon which an author leaves his audience. Malory's ending is the epitome of his book since

the tragedy of Merlin's love prefigures Lancelot's and Arthur's tragic demise. And because

Merlin is creating the kingdom whose doom he foresees, he is to be considered the author of his

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that are dependent on action being fulfilled or not, creating possible future. Categorical prophecies are the ones that narratologically must and do come true. The present study did not wish to cloud the discussion with this tantalizing idea. In either case, Merlin's prophecies gone unremarked upon when they occur, highlighting their unimportance and/or the fragmentary nature of the original.

[125] Donald L. Hoffman, "Malory's Tragic Merlin," in *Merlin: A Casebook*, ed. Peter H. Goodrich and Raymond H. Thompson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 332-41 (334).

[126] Ibid., 334.

own tragic drama. This example demonstrates the connections within the individual books and throughout the several works of Malory. However, Merlin does retain some authorship of his book.

Indeed, Merlin's downfall is a prelude to the suffering of Arthur and Lancelot. And once again his doom is an inevitable side effect of his magic and lust, and, unfortunately, not preventable, even though he is able to predict everything in the story. Nineve, a Lady of the Lake, "made Merlion good chere tylle sche had lerned of hym all maner of thynges sche desired; and he was assotted upon hir" (*Works* 76). He tells Arthur that he is leaving Camelot, as in other prose versions, never coming back and in this adaptation Arthur asks the question that always comes to mind when a character knows of his own demise: "syn ye knowe of youre evil adventure, purvey for hit, and putt hit away by your craftes, that mysseadventure" (76). Blaise speaks the same sentiment in the *Prose Merlin*, but it is more poignant in this moment because Merlin tells the king that he will want the magician back more than all his lands at his end. Again, the future is written by Merlin, and Arthur's tragedy is reflected in Merlin's. The last prediction Merlin makes before being sealed in a cave in "Cornuayle" (rather than a tower in Broceliand as in the *Prose*) is to predict the fate of Lancelot, saying that he shall avenge Ban and his wife, Elayne, the injuries done to them by King Claudas, and "this same chylde shall be the moste man of worship in the worlde" (76). Merlin declines to tell Lancelot's mother his whole fate. One can only speculate that Merlin did not want to break completely his mother's heart. Merlin's demise this time is not quite so nice: he is always after Nyneve, the Lady of the Lake, to "have hir maydynhode" like some old lecherous man and she is "aferde of hym for cause he was the devyls son" (77). She imprisons him, not to possess him—as Nimiane does in the *Prose Merlin*—but because he is licentious and devilish. Merlin never takes up Arthur's banner to fight

alongside the king and his knights; he never advises him on campaigns from France to Rome; he never returns to Blaise again, leaving that strand dangling. But his gilded words reverberate throughout the text even unto Arthur's last battle.

In the post-Monmouth medieval genres of literature, Merlin combines and differentiates the roles of the author, prophet, and historian. He becomes the protagonist of his own tragedy and a prophet whose word is used to justify the rule of realms. He and Blaise record the history the audience is reading, and he inscribes upon Camelot shimmering prophetic letters. He links the Gospels, the Grail, and Arthur. All the authors use him to describe their own craft, the art of making a potential adaptation to an existing narrative. He even represents many different aspects of the production of books as well as the structuring or a compelling tale. Just as Geoffrey innovated his sources, so did these authors, and they all centered the stories around Merlin as their avatar within the narrative. There is no originary, absolute source, yet in as many versions, genres, and manuscripts in which he is portrayed, Merlin has consistent characteristics: he represents the author's multiple roles. The combination of protean malleability and legitimating power makes Merlin the inspiration for Arthurian medievalisms. Modernity has re-represented these characters in print, film, and electronic media, and all of them adapt their sources to their moment, medium, and genre. Contemporary depictions apply the same idea of authorship as those mentioned above when dealing in a received tradition. The liberties taken with Merlin, Arthur, and so many associated characters over the last several centuries have been immense, and many claim the "authentic" version, often to the derision or delight of academics. Merlin bridges the schism of medieval studies and medievalism because there never was a real Merlin or Arthur, only what can be made to seem like history, a trick learned from medieval writers.

Chapter 5:

Merlin and Neomedievalism: Re-Playing the Middle Ages

It should be fairly obvious by now that the "authentic" Merlin, if he or even they ever existed, has long been obscured by legend. That point has been discussed *ad infinitum* since Giraldus Cambrensis, but that part of the discourse did not deter any medieval authors from modifying the name Merlin into many different types of characters and a "real" prophet. These Merlins have, as close as any character *is able to*, mimicked an author's manipulations of him and the roles the author plays in and outside the narrative. And each of these versions of Merlin was in some way based upon a previous version, from Monmouth throughout the Middle Ages. Geoffrey of Monmouth explicitly mentions the process of recreating his sources to produce a past that looks like the present. Wace, Layamon, Boron, and Malory adapt the past and recreate the process of balancing *auctoritas* and *ingenium*. After Monmouth's seminal adaptations, the proliferation of genres meant that there are even competing discourses—different games—as well as many players, that is authors. The innovations enacted upon Merlin and Arthur throughout the Middle Ages constitute participation in a tension between *historia* and *fabula*, among competing versions of the same story, and among different genres and languages. Medieval authors played with Merlin and Britain's past in many ways. However, unlike every other character, the authors such as those cited above did not just *play with* him, they *played* Merlin as he represented the multifaceted writing roles of historian, author, and prophet. Merlin was their avatar in the process of recreating the past, present, and future, while recapitulating an epicyclical conception of time.

Merlin's authenticity then becomes "textual provenance[…] [t]racing a text, along with its earlier versions, back to an authentic original to the creation of an authoritative text," showing that the motives of authorship are similar to definitions of medievalism, which is "concerned with process, rather than product."[1] Medievalisms are on the same spectrum of authenticity, with direct and indirect links to previous transformations of received materials. Creative Arthuriana declined in popularity throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only to be revived again by the same generations that sought the academic truth of the Middle Ages.[2] The Romantics rebelled against the science of the Enlightenment, and the (pre)-Industrial Age's nostalgia for "simpler times" and the luddite-like tendencies brought us the creative anachronisms that survive today as the "medieval fair," or "Renaissance festivals." Simultaneously, originality in characters and plot in contemporary writing represent a "denigration of adapters and adaptations."[3] The proliferation of Arthurian films, texts, and games is an exception. As always, the heroic past fulfills a need for the modern moment, literarily and historically. And again, in these post-medieval adaptations, Merlin is the author's avatar, constructing an Arthur for its own time. All of the writers who have mimicked medieval authorship methods in the modern era join in a game begun in writing by Monmouth, which in the case of Arthuriana is the same process that has spanned nine hundred years. The process and Merlin's roles are the same in a "participatory medievalism," like *Dungeons and Dragons* or the Arthurian video games discussed below, in which "medieval role-players demonstrate a trans-

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[1] Pam Clements, "Authenticity," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 19-26 (20).

[2] For expansive studies of post-medieval depictions of Merlin in these eras see, *Merlin: A Casebook* and Christopher Dean, *The Devil's Son: A Study of Merlin in English Literature from the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Lampeter, UK: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

[3] Daniel T. Kline, Introduction, "All Your History Belong to Us," [sic] in *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (New York: Routledge), 1-11 (4), Kindle.

temporal affinity to a Middle Ages that is somehow like our own and to medieval people who are somehow like us – and yet different."[4] If the word "role-players" were exchanged for "writer," and "Middle Ages" replaced by "the past," the sentence could apply to any of the medieval authors previously noted in this study. Modern genres and media are often called neomedievalisms. However, unlike other medievalisms, neomedievalism does not simply describe the same process of adaptive authorship, it is also the method of studying the process.

The "game of interpretation" is the one "in which all medievalists engage as they attempt to make the medieval real for the audience."[5] Play is the role of scholars in medieval studies, demonstrating Verduin's claim that "if 'medievalism'…denotes the whole range of postmedieval engagement with the Middle Ages, then 'medieval studies' themselves must be considered a facet of medievalism rather than the other way around."[6] The self-reflexivity of neomedievalism can enable an approach to medieval studies in a way that accounts for our own metahistorical perceptions. David Matthews's categories of medievalisms are useful in the analysis of approaches to the Middle Ages, especially Arthuriana, whose tradition can be traced back to Monmouth and his sources.[7] No matter the depiction, the Middle Ages is portrayed as it "might have been," as it "never was," or as it "was," the ideal toward which medieval studies strives. The taxonomies of medievalism label medieval studies as a sub-category on a spectrum of authenticity. The discourse among scholars attempting to represent the Middle Ages "as it was"

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[4] Daniel T. Kline, "Participatory medievalism, role-playing, gaming," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medievalisms* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 75-88 (87).

[5] Kevin Moberly and Brent Moberly, "Play," in *Medievalism: Key Critical Terms*, ed. Elizabeth Emery and Richard Utz (Cambridge, U.K.: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), 73-80 (176).

[6] Richard Utz, *Medievalism: A Manifesto* (Kalamazoo: Arc Humanities Press, 2017), 82.

[7] David Matthews, *Medievalism: A Critical History* (D.S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2015), 37-40.

is a participatory medievalism that builds upon authority mixed with innovation in order to affect current perceptions of the subject. The self-awareness of a neomedievalist produces a crossroads as how to approach effectively medieval authorship and medievalism upon an equal playing field when the former has been privileged in scholarship since the nineteenth century. In that regard, Merlin once again represents the contemporary difficulties of approaching and discussing the past.

Merlin has almost always been the avatar for the author. In video games, films, and television shows of the last century, and in the literature that deals with Arthurian material, Merlin's role may have become even more pronounced because of the reliance on the character as a prophet, narrator, and protagonist. And many authors invest Merlin with many authorial functions in order to produce a past that looks like the present, even if it is signified as past. Every adaptation of Merlin and Arthur that looks back to some sort of "authentic" original is enacting medievalism. Medievalisms privilege the "true story," a perspective learned from the medieval authors while blended with modern notions of originality. Merlin was Geoffrey's avatar for the process of textual and significatory production. He shapes the story through his actions, foreshadows the story through his prophecies, and comments on the history and the present simultaneously. Thereafter, he is seen as dictating the historical and literary past through his recitations to Blaise, while retaining many of his other values in the romances. Many instances of medieval Arthurian adaptation—as well as the means and sites of every sort of personally, culturally, and literarily productive discourse—have been linked to Merlin as their avatar of literary production. He is the vehicle, the metaphor for, and even the site of game itself. Many medievalisms use him as a cipher for their own representations of the past while concomitantly commenting on the present of production and the difficulties of accessing the past

and the future. The interaction with every other medievalism and medieval representation before it becomes a discursive language game in which accessing the process of authenticating that version —and thus profiting by selling access to the text—is the only goal. If scholars examine the neomedievalisms and their provenances, we imitate T. H. White's version of Merlin, who is born in the future and lives backward into the past. Thus, this chapter will start in the present and move into the past—that is progressing backward in time— because it seems like a workable methodology for both medieval literary practices and for neomedievalism's approach to those traditions. The scope of backward analyses will only extend to other medievalisms and cursorily to medieval texts. Just as Monmouth and others have investigated and formulated the past, an Arthurian neomedievalist approaches the Middle Ages by playing Merlin.

As Merlin Might Have Been: Un-Romancing the Sword in the Stone

Filmic criticism of "medieval movies" have long struggled with issues of authenticity and historicity. Andrew R. B. Elliot proposes a system of analysis that eschews the traditional views of film criticism, in which a movie is judged by its authenticity and its fidelity to a medieval story, focusing rather on the semiotic "signs of" what Elliot calls "Medieval-ness," by which "we *are* trying to fabricate the Middle Ages, at least a version of them," from empty signifiers, which "more often reveal the 'untraversable abyss' between then and now."[8] Elliot says that all films about the Middle Ages are reconstructions, and that in the process of highlighting its inaccessibility, we bring "forward the signified to identify it with paradigms which are more familiar from our own era."[9] In other words, while films construct the medieval world on screen,

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[8] Andrew Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Ages: The Methods of Cinema and History in Portraying the Medieval World* (New York: McFarland, 2014),43-4.

[9] Elliott, *Remaking the Middle Age*, 47.

they fill those empty signifiers with meaning from our own time, while projecting it into and

onto the past. The process is filling signifiers with the "medieval by employing guided images,"

"symbolic tropes," "manners of speech," and "conventions and systems of representation," all

borrowed from the Middles Ages or a previous medievalism.[10] The dirty peasant, the chivalrous

knight, using "thee" or "thou," and magical impossibilities all signify the "medievalness" of the

film. Because video games employ the same visual, audio, and often pseudo-textual elements as

film, they reproduce the Middle Ages in much the same manner. The difference is that the

player, or gamer, has control of the interaction of the avatar with the surroundings, the

characters, and the quest. Gamers play the text toward some goal instead of simply "reading" and

interpreting the author's meaning, as in a book or a film. Most games have some sort of

introduction, usually a predetermined audio and visual sequence or "cinematic" to establish its

"medievalness." They range in style and quality from realism to more cartoonish graphical

depictions. Arthurian computers games use many signifiers of Arthuriana to establish their

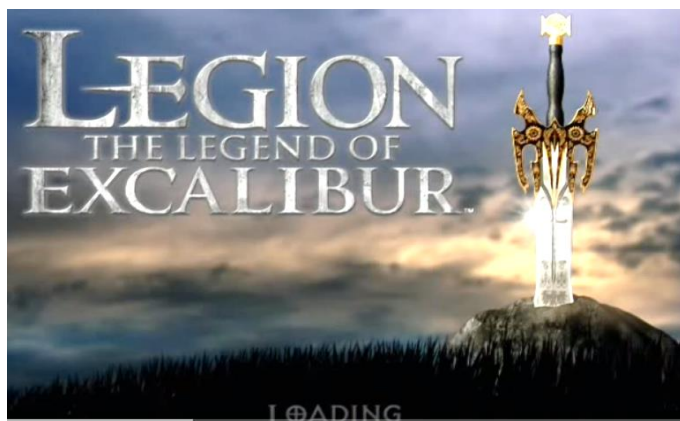medievalism, including Merlin himself.

Figure 1. Opening Screen to *Legion*: *The Legend of Excalibur*

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[10] Elliot, *Remaking the Middle Ages*, 193.

In *Legion: The Legend of Excalibur* for example, after engaging the game and moving through the credits, the loading screen shows the first image of the game with the title and a sword in the ground, presumably "Excalibur" itself (fig. 1). Just as a word or a painting of a sword is not the thing itself, how much more so is a simulacrum that is graphically represented through an unseen language: computer code. The player sees what looks like a sword because the program's hidden written language produces a visual, textual, and audio signification. The marker of the "medieval" in this neomedievalism is further from the authentic thing than a film sword, a prop, because not only is it fake, but the image of it is intangible. Excalibur probably would not have looked like this, and Thomas Malory is very specific that Excalibur is not the sword in the stone, but that is not the point. The meaning of this "sword" is produced by trading upon our knowledge of the Arthurian legend, as vague or as thorough as that may be. The image is highlighting the tension between the present and the past: a new medium of representation of an old symbol of an era that has long passed into myth and history. Monmouth and every Arthurian author thereafter used similar devices, names, and objects to signify a recognizable past in new ways. *Legion* draws from a recognizable tradition to give the impression of the medieval legend of Excalibur. Moving backward through previous representations, it becomes apparent that this game signals a tradition that runs through Boorman's *Excalibur* and the *Sword in the Stone*, toward *The Once and Future King*, all the way back to texts like Malory's or the *Prose Merlin*'s type of a sword that needs to be drawn. The process does not depend on *Legion*'s authors having read or seen any or all of the previous texts as long as they can deploy the proper sign and make it recognizably "Excalibur." Merlin is also involved in an establishing image of the game, signaling his coming roles as authors' and the players' avatars.

Figure 2. Menu of *Legion*: Merlin in His Cave.

Legion establishes its "medievalness" through Merlin from the second image of the mage

in a cave with crystals, a bookshelf in the background and a cauldron foregrounded with candles

in skulls scattered throughout. The menu shows Merlin reading a large tome on a lectern, while

holding a staff next to a cauldron (fig. 2). The fact that Merlin is the first character depicted is

not a mistake because the game establishes the structure of the narrative by introducing him

early. The image functions in several ways to signify the medievalness of this game, and we may

trace its provenance—its typological inheritances from other medievalisms. Merlin in this still

image is based on John Boorman's adaptation of Merlin (Nicol Williamson) in *Excalibur* (1981).

The mage is of an indeterminant age, though not old, and is black bearded in a robe with a hood

and a metal skullcap, surrounded by skulls that recall the necromantic appearance of Merlin in

the film. *Legion*'s Merlin appears remarkably like the "Dark Ages" version who rises from the

"mists" of legend to reality in the first scene.[11] Nicol Williamson's character comes into focus

with a goateed face of a man of a certain age, wearing a dark robe and cowl, holding a staff.

Michael Torregrossa points out that old age and "a preference for facial hair do not appear to

have become fixed features of Merlin's iconography until at least the second half of the

nineteenth century."[12] But these versions of Merlin are far from the benevolent, blundering, long-

bearded Merlin of T. H. White's or Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*. Boorman's Merlin is

foreboding as he watches a battle unfold, his gaze seemingly directing the cameras, approaching,

but not exactly a first-person point of view. Here, as always, Merlin is outside the course of

mortal events. This depiction portrays Merlin as an observer and an agent in his role as author in

the medieval *romans* and of the prophet of Geoffrey's *HRB, PM,* and *VM.* As in *Excalibur*,

Merlin structures the plot from inside the narrative, though in *Legion* he structures the narrative

both from within and outside the game.

In *Legion*, Merlin immediately becomes the avatar for the writers, both of the plot and the

programmers. The second image of the game appears on the "options menu," which is like the

table of contents from which the player may choose different options, such as to play the game or

adjust audio and visual preferences. In this screen the writers of the program hand the player a

virtual table of contents for interacting with the game. Merlin is visually associated with the

place where writers and readers interact. The visual connection is the beginning of making the

player a co-author, an adaptor and innovator of the text, through playing. The necromancer on

the menu screen reads the codex, linking him visually to the master controls presented by the

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[11] For an informative discussion on the "iconography of mist," as a "sign of the medieval," see Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman *Cinematic Illuminations*: *The Middle Ages of Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 50-1.

[12] Michael Torregrossa, "The Way of the Wizard: Reflections of Merlin on Film," in *The Medieval Hero on Screen*, ed. Martha Driver and Sid Ray (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2004): 167-91 (170).

programmers to the player. At this moment the reader, the player, becomes a writer, an adaptor. Just as Geoffrey was a reader first of his sources, then an innovator, the player is here presented with a text with which he or she will interact and change according to their goal. Michelle DiPietro discusses the importance of textuality to establishing the "medievalness" in medievalisms, saying that "[t]he books' physical features steers the player's imagination toward a pseudohistorical milieu" in the several games in *The Elder Scrolls* series.[13] The book as a sign of the medieval has been used often in film, especially in animation, a comparable medium to *Legion*'s style of graphics.
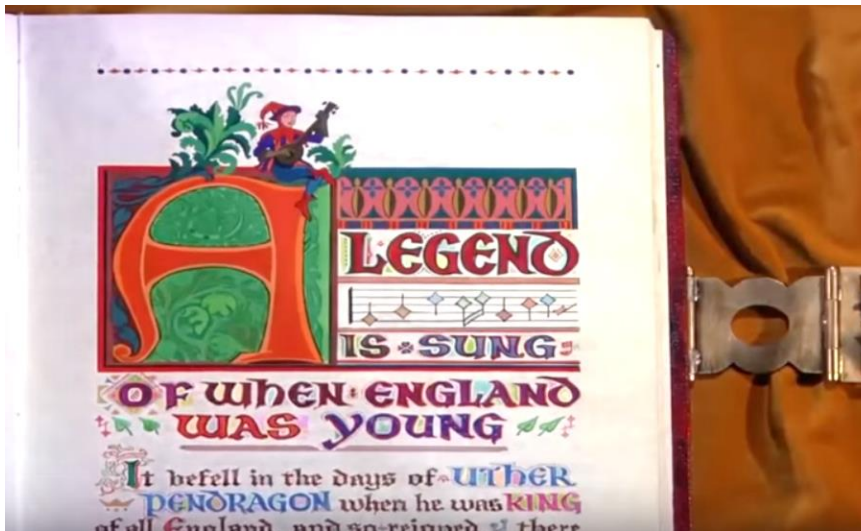
Figure 3: The Opening of *The Sword in the Stone* Depicts the Film as a "Book."

Many films have based their "medievalness" on textuality with a facsimile of an illuminated manuscript, as in the Disney cartoon *The Sword in the Stone*. After the opening, the audience hears a bugle and low drums and views a stop-action animated image of a bound codex with a metal latch, decorated in rudimentary heraldry, entitled "The Sword in the Stone." The

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[13] Michelle DiPietro, "Author, Text, and Medievalism in *The Elder Scrolls*," in *Digital Gaming Reimagines the Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (New York: Routledge, 2014): 202-13 (203).

book "opens," revealing what appears to be an illuminated initial with a minstrel sitting atop the words of the text, which are also the lyrics of the song that the herald sings to introduce the story (fig. 3). The song is reflected by words and images in this simulacrum of a manuscript, with hand-drawn celluloid imitations of illuminations that are not the right style of drawing and coloring for actual medieval manuscripts but conjure images of knights and crowns and thrones. The pages of the animated manuscript self-flip until a "miracle appeared in Londontown," the sword in the anvil on the stone. Upon the sword are written Malory's words, though the spelling is modernized: "Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone is rightwise king born of all England." The film uses "whoso pulleth," the ending of the verb marking even the language as "medieval." The introduction has signaled its medievalness in several visual, audio, and now textual ways, acting as a bridge from our moment, in a uniquely twentieth-century medium, to an authentic time, codified in pseudo-Middle English. The voiceover tells and the images show, in still frames, knights trying to pull the sword and failing, and "in time the marvelous sword was forgotten," as vines overgrow an immobile sword in the anvil. It declares, "This was a dark age without law and without order." The pastiche exemplifies several of David Matthews's categories of medievalisms: the second "as it might have been," in which "the Middle Ages is depicted through or as legend." Indeed, it is doing both in this instance because it is invoking the myth under the guise of history, though in a medium—like the printed *Morte D'Arthur* or *The Once and Future King*—that is patently non-medieval. The film adds layers of medievalism over its predecessors. The introductory animation is meant to collapse time in our minds, erasing temporal difference, to encourage players to suspend disbelief long enough to enter a world "that never was" in electronic form. In *Legion*, Merlin is reading a codex on the menu screen because once again he is the narrator.

After the player chooses to play *Legion*, the game's authors, the programmers, establish

the lineage of this game as a hybrid between its received medievalisms, medieval antecedents,

and patently new depictions, ideas, and scenarios. The introductory scene—a computer-

generated animation cinematic that begins before the gamer even starts to interact with the

narrative—reveals the background story of the game and of the sword. It begins with a narrated

voiceover, which the player only later discovers is Merlin's. He says, "Chaos reigns[…]the

house of Pendragon is falling." All the while a hauberked and helmeted knight fights monsters to

reach a stone building that could be a castle or a church. The voiceover continues, "Morgan le

Fay, sorceress of the underworld, has taken up arms against her father, Uther, King of England."

Morgan le Fay is an antagonist, as she is in Malory and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. She

is often depicted as the child of Uther, a paternity first established with Geoffrey's "Anna" in the

HRB.[14] However, this plot is an adaptation that blends several elements of medievalisms with

medieval literature. After an exchange of dialogue, Morgan and Uther battle and when he has her

beaten, he shows compassion for her; instead of killing Morgan, Uther plunges Excalibur into a

purple glowing sphere. She kills him for his mercy and his last words, "Arthur[...]my son," are

spoken as the stone building collapses around him. The voiceover says, "Just as the future is

present in the past, even in the darkness, there is light." Merlin utters a seeming platitude to

round out the scene, but it can be applied to this medievalism. Merlin is once again structuring

the text in his own words, just as he visits Blaise, who recorded Merlin's stories in the *Prose

Merlin* and the *Morte D'Arthur*. Moreover, the neomedievalism has come full circle, using

Merlin self-reflexively: The gamer *is* the future playing with a text about the past in the present

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[14] Anne Berthelot, "Merlin and the Ladies of the Lake," *Arthuriana* 10, no.1 (2000), 55-81. See also her "From Niniane to Nimuë: Demonizing the Lady of the Lake," in *On Arthurian Women*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler and Fiona Tolhurst (Dallas: Scriptorium Press, 2001): 89-102.

moment, making the player a participant in the author's role: adapting received materials, using

Merlin as an avatar. The player is about to reach back in time to a past that never was through a

means unavailable to the characters in the text in a language they would not recognize.

Innovation involving Merlin and Arthur reaches back almost a millennium, a tradition in which

little is constant about the characters except mutability. Recognizability and the currency thereof

is the only motive in the reconstruction of medieval literature. Electronic interactive games

participate in the long history of Arthurian texts balancing *auctoritas* and *ingenium*, a process

that always begins at the end of time, which is now. Just as metahistorical narratives depict the

past with the present in mind, so the player enters into the past structured by Merlin with the

present moment's interaction in mind. This is also a metaphor for neomedievalisms best

explained through Merlin's unique timeframe in recent versions, in which anachronisms are not

seen as detracting from authenticity, but as an essential element thereof. Indeed, the difference

approaches a vanishing point.

In *The Sword and the Stone*, anachronisms are embraced. The first scene is Merlin

struggling to pull water from a well and complaining about "a dark age indeed, an age of

inconvenience. No plumbing, no electricity, no nothing!" and declaring it a "big medieval mess."

The medievalism is drawing attention to the contradistinction in technologies of the premodern

past. Merlin has a long white beard, wears blue robes with signs on it with a matching conical

hat. Disney's wizard is modified from *The Once and Future King*, the first book of T. H. White's

tetralogy, which describes him as having "a long white beard and long white moustaches which

hung down on either side of it," and as being dressed "in a flowing gown with fur tippets which

had the sign of the zodiac embroidered over it[…][h]e had a pointed hat" and "a wand of lignum

vitae."[15] While Michael Salda explains that "Disney's wizard is considerably cleaner than White's unkempt original," this persona becomes associated with the dominant image of magicians for much of the twentieth century: Gandalf, Saruman, and Albus Dumbledore are all old with flowing white beards and have flowing robes and either wands or staves.[16] The most significant use of *ingenium* used by White on Merlin is his explanation of the character's ability to see the future. Geoffrey's prophet is turned upside-down, giving the character our perspective on history.

White has made Merlin into a character who lives his life backwards, and who thus remembers events and tidbits of knowledge that have happened in the future, such as "a thing about Time and Space which the philosopher Einstein is going to find out about. Some people call it destiny."[17] Einstein's special and general theories of relativity have no relationship to any medieval ideas of time, but they are related to medievalisms: time is relative to the vector of every object (read: text) simultaneously. Merlin's simplification of Einstein is comical but underlies the temporality of this version of Merlin. His vector is relative to the readers' viewpoint, the Middle Ages', and Wart's, all concomitantly. The neomedievalist author must write similarly to make sense of time and our relationship to the "real" Middle Ages. White chooses to highlight the futility of knowing the past except through our own perspective or as an artifact. Merlin is the avatar of the hand that writes a fictional construct of the past from a future

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[15] T. H. White, *The Once and Future King* (New York: Ace Books, 1987), 28-9.

[16] *The Sword in the Stone*, The. Dir. Wolfgang Reitherman. Perf. Rickie Sorenson, Karl Swenson. Walt Disney, 1963. Michael N. Salda's work, *Arthurian Animation* is an excellent source for many types of medievalism portrayals in cartoons. They range from more traditional reworkings of Arthuriana to vaguely related mixtures of the names involved and non-Arthurian cartoons as diverse as *Scooby Doo*, *Mr. Magoo*, and more recent depictions in *Thundercats* and *Transformers*.

[17] White, 286.

perspective. The narrator is constantly interjecting anachronisms into the story that are indicative

of a contemporary point of view. Several passages demonstrate this maneuver, such as when

Merlyn says, "[M]y Victorian friends used to go in for foxhunting" (335). A casual remark, but

one that subtly points toward White's anti-Romance revision. White's depiction of the tragedy of

Camelot targets Alfred Lord Tennyson's flowery *Idylls of the King*, a version as antiquated as

fox-hunting in post-World War England. *The Once and Future King* reflects the author's

political beliefs, especially in the ants who teach Wart about dictatorial Communism. White's

work once again projects his present onto the past, just as Geoffrey's three works did, making

contemporary politics the basis for King Arthur's court.

There are numerous ways in which the narrator and Merlyn are always looking back to

the past and musing about the future of Arthur and Camelot. None of these ways is more

poignant than when the narrator tells us about the critical moment in Merlyn's career, "the

moment towards which he had been living backwards for heaven knows how many centuries,"

the moment at which he introduces the idea of justice to Wart, of might *not* being right.[18] Living

in a post-war Britain, White has seen the destructive use of might for a cause that deems itself

superior. The author plants a retroactive seed in the historical past in order to express his hope

for the future. He heightens the connection in *The Book of Merlyn*, in which Merlyn expounds an

ideological diatribe on government, claiming that "I am an anarchist, like any other sensible

person[…]capitalists and communists modify themselves so much during the ages that they end

by being indistinguishable as democrats."[19] Merlyn is the voice of the author, the character in

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[18] White, 246.

[19] T.H. White, *The Book of Merlyn* (New York: Ace, 1987), 173.

whom the author has invested himself, his skills, and his opinions. This originally expunged portrait ultimately tempers the hope at the end of *The Once and Future King* and portrays a wizard and a king who are, as John Crane observes, "impotent to reverse what is pre-ordained" and that "Fate to which even the greatest men are subjugated" is at play against such ideals as individual perspective and freedom.[20] By writing the subject of his book into the past, White has, as many authors before him, brought the confluences of time together in a character who spans all times. Merlyn's more modern perspective injects the historical present into the historical past in the narrative now. White receives and interacts with his sources to craft a world vision that while bleak is just another adaptation of the past to conform to present politics. *Legion* plays with its contemporary politics through the adaptation of Morgan as linked bandits who are called "terrorists" by King Arthur in the game, which was published soon after September 11, 2001. Perhaps King Arthur and Merlin were resurrected once again as a means by which to fight a prevalent evil in the twenty-first century. However, the focus here is on the other forms of invoking medieval signs to declare authenticity.

The first interaction of time in *Legion*'s narration is that the story is drawing from the reserve of textual and cinematic material in reproducing the story of Arthur as squire to Kay at a tournament to determine the right to remove Excalibur from the stone. The game is positioning itself within the romance branch of the Arthurian tradition. Analogous material obviously includes the *Prose Merlin*, Malory's version in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, T. H. White's representation in *The Once and Future King*, and the animated film, *The Sword in the Stone*. However, there are no clear indicators that the dialogue or scenery are drawn from any version before it. The game's initial scene is depicted in a verdant time of year, but Malory describes the event as taking place

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[20] John K. Crane, *T. H. White* (New York: Twayne, 1974), 96.

on New Year's Day. The *Vulgate* has Arthur initially pull the sword on Christmas, but the barons

force Arthur to pull it repeatedly, and he is only crowned at Pentecost. The recapitulation of the

sword-pulling trope is an indication that the plot writers were at least aware of this section of the

material, and they adapt it. Once again, *auctoritas* is honored and innovated. *Legion* recapitulates

the Sword in the Stone motif in both similar and different methods from its sources. The player

controls a young squire Arthur as an avatar and finds her/himself in an encampment somewhere

in an unknown forest. Kay and Arthur are now animated in cartoonish, isometric third-person,

meaning the player looks at them from the top down, but at an angle by which the face and body

of the avatar may be seen. After learning how to use the controls, the player must first talk to

some soldiers around a campfire before Arthur can pull the sword from the stone himself. If the

player does not complete the first task, the second one cannot be achieved. If the player attempts

to pull the sword before talking to the soldiers, the player does not "unlock" the signal that

allows Arthur to grab the sword. If the person playing does not trip the signal, then Merlin tells

the player—via a static dialogue box that features his portrait—that it is not the right time. The

player must figure out how to activate the scene with the soldiers who tell Arthur of the legend

that whomever draws Excalibur will be king. After this revelation, Morgan le Fay attacks and

Kay, who is in a destroyed tent, is killed. Just at the moment of despair, Merlin—this time a

speaking Non-Player Character (NPC) present in the game—tells Arthur that it is now time to

"Go meet your Destiny[…]claim Excalibur" (fig. 4). Merlin is once again used to predict a

narrative future that must come to pass in order for the structure of the plot to be fulfilled. This

function was first occupied by Merlinus Ambrosius in his prophecies to Vortigern in the *HRB*,

which framed the entirety of the Pendragon section of the history. Other authors utilized the

narrative predictions in other medieval texts. In the game, the moment when Arthur must pull

Excalibur to prove his birthright is also the point at which Merlin and the Middle Ages converge, thus producing yet another medievalism

Figure 4: Merlin Depicted as an NPC Telling Arthur about his "Destiny."

Figure 5 and Figure 6: Arthur Fulfills the prophecy by Going from Squire to King.

The attentive player hears that the voice of Merlin is the same as the narrative voiceover. Merlin has been telling the story with the characters playing their parts; he is orchestrating history and legend once again. The declaration of claiming his destiny implies a similar epicyclical movement of time for Merlin, the author, and the narrative. The game's narrative comment in the opening, "Just as the future is present in the past," here comes to signify several

things: Medievalisms are the future of the historical Middle Ages depicting the remote past in the present moment; the end of time is in the beginning, and the present is when history and the future converge. Furthermore, Merlin unifies all three times, as an avatar for the author's adaptation, a statement that is true of nearly every written depiction since Monmouth's *HRB*. Merlin again predicts and manipulates events to produce the coronation of Arthur within the plot of the game. The removal of Excalibur should be a legitimizing test for the player if the writers and programmers rely on *auctoritas*, even modern versions as deployed in *The Sword in the Stone*. In T. H. White's adaptation, Kay forgets his sword and Wart runs through the streets of London looking for one. Instead of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London as in the *Prose Merlin*, he comes upon "a quiet churchyard" with what he thinks is a sword in "a war memorial." Instead of pulling it "lightly and fiercely," Wart struggles with the weapon until the animals from whom he has learned the ways of the animal world give him encouragement. A merlin—a small black bird, not the mage, though the coincidence is not entirely lost on several characters—asks, "'I thought I once heard something about never letting go,'" referring to the "first law of the foot," and a goose tells him to "'[f]old your powers together, with the spirit of the mind, and it will come out like butter.'"[21] It was Merlin who turned Wart into all the animals in order to teach him the necessary lessons to become king. And the moment of clarity that Wart has is directly replacing the religious view of the previous incarnations of this story. Divine right, as in the *Prose Merlin*, and primogeniture, as in the *Morte Darthur*, are both supplanted as the primary reasons for Arthur's succession. He has the strength lent by an education that could only be achieved through nebulous magic that is incanted in Merlin's questionable Latin. The drawing of the sword in the book is areligious and yet supernatural. Regardless of what it means, like all

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[21] White, *Once and Future King*, 203.

depictions before this scene demonstrates Wart's right to be king. *Legion* can replicate it, but there is no moral, historical, or regnal significance in the moment.

When the player's Arthur avatar arrives at a semi-circle of stones, the player is forced to watch a cut scene—a cinematic that explains or develops the plot. Merlin explains that he is Uther's son and Excalibur is his birthright, and Arthur goes from zero to golden armor-clad hero in a momentary flash of light (figs. 5, 6). In this scene, the entirety of the Arthurian romance tradition and medievalisms from which this game is drawn are entirely forgotten. It takes no effort on the part of the player, no skill in real or played combat, no multiple drawings before skeptical crowds in London, no adventures as a fish or an ant, no battle with the barons aligned against the boy king. Even Malory's thoroughly truncated characterization of the Pendragons and the ease with which Arthur removes the sword and becomes king is complicated by the revolt of the barons. *Legion*'s break from its *auctoritas* in this scene is a result in the change of narrative point of view propounded by both twentieth- and twenty-first-century films and books. Participatory medievalisms are based on a first-person interaction of the player, acting as the reader, with a limited third-person perspective, similar to *The Sword in the Stone*, which focuses on Wart throughout the book and film. The book and the film orient the audience in the world of this boy's life just as *Legion* focuses our attention on the avatar. White fashioned the received stories of Arthur's ascendency into a *bildungsroman*, highlighting the boy's point of view. Role-playing games make the player a character, a third-person viewer, and even co-writer because they potentially re-write the story in new ways every time they play. *Legion* empowers every player to manipulate the story of the sword in the stone, but it robs it of any significance because it can be performed by anyone. We can now all be Arthur and author of the story.

Disney's version of White's novel sanitizes the messages but emphasizes the perspective of the child and "the chosen one," a literary trope entangled in Arthur's many revisions. There is no tragedy of the fall of Camelot even hinted at, but the twentieth-century child is encouraged to identify with Wart, just as other children have identified with the adopted-son-becomes-famous trope. Participatory medievalisms unify the player with the writers and the characters. Merlin aligns the player with the author for now, but the avatar of Arthur in *Legion* makes the pulling the sword accessible to the player. Historicity is set aside for pure entertainment directed toward the first-person player character, thus democratizing the rise of Arthur through participatory fantasy. Instead of being the work of one author's vision, anyone can become Arthur or Merlin in the twenty-first century neomedievalism. Again, this is nothing new, but the number of participants is much higher because one does not have to understand any tradition to play.

I, Merlin: As He is Now

The sword in the anvil on the stone is preserved in the "Magic Kingdom" outside of Cinderella's Castle in Walt Disney World in central Florida. The prop resides there for all visitors to attempt to draw the sword out, making it accessible to the guests of Disney resorts. The sword actually has become a "memorial" to the film itself by which people can participate in the "election" of Arthur to the throne. The guest at Walt Disney World plays at being the potential king by being able to participate in the most recognizable moment, but only if they are a child. Adults are discouraged from trying so that children can mimic the cartoon's hero. The ritual removing of the sword is enacted every day in the Magic Kingdom and is the "official" starting of the opening of this amusement park. Having witnessed such an example once, the ceremony occurs roughly as follows: a king and some knights form a procession and showily ascend the platform. They choose several children, and each tries to pull the sword out of the

anvil. Only the third child is able to "draw" it, even though it only comes half-way out and is actually being raised by some sort of machinery inside the anvil or below the platform. Many cheers are raised for the new prince or princess, accordingly entitled with his or her own proper name. The implication is the democratization of the monarchy, which is an oxymoron, of course. This may be in accordance with the sentiments of the film but not the novel or with the medieval endorsement of primogeniture and the ascension of kings through divine right. Disney has introduced a version of the story that democratizes authority previously reserved for a unique individual who has divine right and heritage on his or her side. The medieval markers are subverted by the fake relic in Orlando and by participatory medievalisms because players can become King Arthur through the one act that only he is ever supposed to be capable of performing. Disney ritualized their own version of the story, which was adapted from a novel that was simultaneously a reaction against Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and Malory's nostalgia. Every innovation modifies the tradition and further influences the future of Arthurian legend. There is no longer a "grand narrative" in place because of the extension of the right to try the sword to the general public. The more people involved in the story, the more discursive moves in the interpretive game, and thus video games, like participatory medievalisms of all kinds, allow access to the past that is simultaneously false and legitimating our own sense of authenticity because it is acquired through participation. Merlin's participation on behalf of the authors' is consistent throughout the history of Arthuriana, but there is one more role he must play to fully unite the avatar and the player: Merlin becomes a playable avatar in games.

Throughout *Legion*, Merlin again performs his role as instructor and internal narrative prophet, giving the player clues on what quest to perform or how to succeed. Once the player's avatar, Arthur, pulls Excalibur, then Merlin gives directions to vanquish Morgan Le Fay's army

of the undead and living enemies. Merlin gives vital information and background to the player,

much like a narrator. He also tells the player how to use important abilities for winning battles or

achieving the quest. He foreshadows each individual quest, which usually consists of killing lots

of "bad guys," and suggests strategies to kill bosses or circumvent problems. If a player cannot

fulfill the continuous narrative, then s/he has not fulfilled a future pointed out by Merlin. Merlin

has made prophecies in many of the previous texts and films, and they come true. Participatory

medievalisms mean that Arthur, the player, may fail. Yet if we assume success at each quest,

Merlin continues to give more hints toward the end goals of the mission and the game. He unifies

the present of the game, the narrative, with the player's "real" time, while speaking from a

position of being a character in the "past." In this game Merlin is narrator, programmer, prophet,

and advisor. Eventually, he becomes a playable avatar as well, further unifying the player and the

character. Similarly, Merlin is the protagonist in disparate texts from the Latin *Vita Merlini* to the

Prose Merlin in French and Middle English. In electronic role-playing games (RPGs), as in their

table-top analogue forms, becoming the characters is the point. In most Arthurian video games,

the player usually becomes and remains Arthur. In *Legion*, the player can become any number of

recognizable characters with several different types of abilities. The player can choose to operate

one character in each squad, effectively making the other characters NPCs—non-player

characters, ones run by the computer, either friendly or hostile—who attack as much as possible.

The blending of several medieval literary traditions and medievalisms with a game controlled by

the player allows him or her to choose certain characters for specific quests in order to maximize

chances for success. They both reflect the tradition and revise it. This game, like other Arthurian

books, films, and games, trades off received material's recognizability in order to innovate it.

Again, Merlin demonstrates the balance between *auctoritas* and *ingenium*, making the old tale

new for its current audience. Twenty-first century digital culture is entirely focused on the first-person, who interacts with the plot and becomes a co-author. Electronic entertainment propagates interactive discourse with the medievalisms and medieval texts by employing the first-person point of view within a third-person narrative, which is somewhat of a textual anomaly. The writer usually chooses one way or the other, not both, unless recent fantasy novels are considered.

Merlin, like several Arthurian characters, becomes playable as the gamer completes new missions in *Legion*. Gwenevere is a pointedly independent woman who scorns Arthur's clumsy advances and rejects the damsel-in-distress motif to defend her home, "Lord de Grance's" castle from Morgan's army. In a cut scene during the game battle, Arthur meets Gwenevere, and she asks him for help to defend the north wall. He responds with the chauvinistic, "You just find some cover and I'll defend the north wall" [sic]. She replies that she doesn't have time "to argue with knuckle-dragging Neanderthals." This character is a world apart from the portrayal of "Gwenhwyfar" in Marion Zimmer-Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* who has anxiety attacks and only ever feels at home in "the dear convent where she had felt as snug as a mouse in her hole, and never, never, having to go out of doors at all except into the enclosed cloister garden."[22] However, *Legion*'s Gwen at least echoes the spirit of *Mists*, whose focus on the powerful women of the Arthurian world is an attempt to combat the traditional Arthurian discourse with a nature-goddess form of feminism. Zimmer-Bradley quotes Malory's dismissive description of Morgan le Fay to show the exact depiction and source she juxtaposes with her own work. She obviously rejects what Maureen Fries calls the link between Morgain's "magic powers and even her beauty

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[22] Marion Zimmer-Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (New York: Del Rey, 1982), 252.

that coincides with the virulent growth of woman-hatred in both religious and lay society and in all kinds of literature documented by historians as a feature of the Middle Ages."[23] Zimmer-Bradley revises the female characters of Arthuriana in very personal ways, as every author does.

Marion Zimmer-Bradley's sister-in-law, Diana L. Paxson discusses the personal circumstances of the author's life to show how closely aligned her portrayal of Morgaine is with her own thoughts. Paxson points out that she became involved in a group that worshipped the Triple Goddess and "As Darkmoon Circle developed, Bradley attended workshops put on by others involved in the emerging Neo-Pagan and Women's Spirituality movement and explored the history of the Goddess religion. Some of these influences are listed in the introduction."[24] In the novel, the three ancient Celtic roles become apparent, but a fourth, previously unheralded face of the goddess, makes itself known, and "Morgaine moves through all four phases of the feminine, embracing in turn all of those roles, maiden, mother, wise-woman, and warrior."[25] Zimmer-Bradley's novel pushes back on the misogyny of previous depictions in the romance tradition by highlighting Morgaine's and women's perspectives throughout the novel, beginning with the first-person prologue, in which she declares "there is no such thing as a true tale[…][b]ut this is my truth" (x-xi). She discovers that her truth by the end, that "*I have called on the Goddess and found her in myself*" (803). The italics indicate her internal monologue, a voice heard throughout the novel and meant to bring the audience into her point-of-view. Presumably, every woman has this power and Morgaine is the exemplar. Unfortunately, *Legion*

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[23] Quoted in Victoria Sharpe, "The Goddess Restored," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 9, no. 1 (1998) 36-45 (33). https://www.jstor.org/stable/43308346.

[24] Diana L. Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and the Mists of 'Avalon,'" *Arthuriana* 9, no. 1 (1999): 110-26 (114). Accessed March 8, 2018. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27869424

[25] Charlotte Spivak, "Morgan Le Fay: Goddess or Witch," in *Popular Arthurian Traditions* (Bowling Green, OH: BGSU Popular Press,1992): 18-23 (21).

perpetuates Morgan's antagonism through evil magic, upholding the hypermasculinity of video games and of medieval romances. The NPC character Gwenevere is a participant in the violence of a male-dominated genre, making her a caricature of a "feminist" in this game, even when she puts Arthur in his place. Yet when Gwen becomes a playable avatar, she potentially becomes a female protagonist who embodies a form of feminism that fractures the masculinist master narrative of Arthuriana. More importantly, the connection here is that no matter what kind of ideology the incarnations propound, the modern fantasy novel preceded video games by portraying the characters as first-person avatars for both reader and writer. Each fantasy first-person adaptation fractures the previously third-person master narratives, both medieval and medievalisms. The *auctoritas* of canonical works is being outweighed by the *ingenium* of innovative adaptation and many voices make a discourse of perspectives possible. These perspectives meet in Merlin in *Legion* when he becomes the player's avatar.

Figure 7: In-Game Menu: Merlin (left) and Lancelot Sitting at the Round Table

In *Legion*, Merlin the character sits at the Round Table between missions (fig. 7). In almost all versions after Monmouth, this table becomes the meeting place for the player, a ruler him or herself, who surrounds himself with the best knights of the land. Once the de Grance

castle is defended it becomes Arthur's temporary base, and the Round Table becomes the in-

game main menu screen between missions in which the player may choose heroes and equipment

for each. The Round Table is the hub of Caerleon once again, the site of the player's choices and

information. Just as Wace and Layamon say that Arthur constructed the table for equality, the

Round Table in this game democratizes the legends, the characters, and even Excalibur by

making them available to any player. No longer is the table associated with the Grail, the game

follows in Malory and Tennyson who highlight De Grance's palace as the site of Arthur's first

victory. This artifact of the sources is adapted for contemporary textual needs. The player

chooses items and which storyline to choose next, which quest to perform. The weapons and

different armor give the avatars better abilities in order to enhance damage in combat. Lastly, the

player selects from a growing list of heroes. Eventually, the player unlocks the use of Merlin as a

playable character, who is, as with all RPG wizards, indebted to *Dungeons & Dragons*. Merlin's

magic spells are offensive in nature, employing fire, ice, poison, or lightning to attack enemies.

He has a limited amount of magic, indicated by a meter next to another that tracks life. As with

all the avatars, Merlin can die, and if all of the player's characters die, the gamer fails the

mission and must begin again at the start of the level. A quest can go unfulfilled, and it pains

every gamer to admit that sometimes he or she must play a level more than once to complete it.

There are very few elements of medieval depictions in this avatar, but plenty of

contemporaneous portrayals of his use of magic. The medievalisms are influencing other

medieval depictions in the twenty-first century. The character has come full circle again on the

epicycle of received traditions forging new roles for Merlin while revising the connection

between the reader and the character. The player of *Legion* can become any of the available

heroes, including Merlin. As with Morgaine, fantasy novels are the origin of Merlin's first-person perspective in video games like *Legion*.

The focus on the life of Merlin in medieval literature has ranged from the poetry of Monmouth to the prose romances. Merlin has been likened to the authorial voice or makes internal prophecies structuring the tales, but only in some cases is he the main character, as in the *Vulgate Merlin*. Mary Stewart's Merlin trilogy adapts his story in a most modern and medieval way, making Merlin the protagonist, but this time in the first person. The fantasy genre adapts many Arthurian tales into the *bildungsroman*, expounding on the stories of children becoming heroes, which appeals to the "young adult" reader. This is unsurprising since Merlin is usually introduced as a child in his romances. The age of Merlinus Ambrosius in the *HRB* is indeterminant, but in the Middle English *Prose Merlin*, the successful conspiracy to conceive a demon child begins the tale. He is "twelves months of age" when he mounts the legal battle against the judge to defend his mother.[26] And when he is merely two-and-a-half, Merlin charges his mother's confessor Blaise with writing down the stories, making the scribe "merveylede gretely where-of his grete wytte might come."[27] Even though Merlin is the author of the romance, Merlin constructs the narrative and himself in the third person in the *Prose Merlin*, and consequently uses "I" when he describes dialogue to Blaise. Mary Stewart bridges the psychological gap in her rendition of Merlin's story by making him the first-person narrator, who, like Morgaine in *Mists*, tells us about his life when he is already old. He "dreams of pictures in the fire," saying "it is one of the simplest magics," a "trick," not a power, by which he

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[26] *Prose Merlin*, ed. John Conlee (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), 28.

[27] *Merlin, or, The early history of King Arthur: A Prose Romance*, vol. IV, ed. Henry B. Wheatley (London: Trübner & Co., 1865), 46.

sees things that are not his own memories.[28] The trick is analogous to learning all of history

from the devils, and it provides for a most interesting beginning to a fictional autobiography, his

own conception. Anonymous paramours, one a prince, meet at a cave's entrance. After the need

for the prince to flee is made apparent through dialogue with a young maid, Merlin narrates what

most would never contemplate: his parents having sex. It is only alluded to, but he does narrate it

in Stewart's novel. If Merlin dictates the *Prose Merlin* to Blaise, then he would be narrating the

scene of his mother harassed by an incubus. The main difference is that Stewart's first-person

perspective makes the story even more intimate. The scene feels more like the opening to a

twentieth-century romance, with passionate, consensual adults, than a medieval romance with

demonic raptures. Like White before her, Stewart rationalizes the conception and birth of Merlin:

he is human yet special, the incubus just a rumor.[29]

In her Author's Note, Stewart questions the veracity of her own medievalism as she calls

attention to certain aspects of it. She calls *The Crystal Cave* "a work of imagination[…]not a

work of scholarship, and can obviously make no claim to serious history," noting her main

source: "Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*…whose name is, to serious

historians, mud."[30] And yet she acknowledges she owes him her "greatest debt" as the "master of

romance."[31] She acknowledges that her genre and Geoffrey's are more closely akin than not:

both works are not history, according to her. That she feels the need to distinguish it from

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[28] Mary Stewart, *The Crystal Cave* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 3-4.

[29] Christopher Dean calls her the only modern fantasy novelist to make him purely human. Zimmer-Bradley's "Merlin" is a title for the humans Taliesin and Kevin. "The Many Faces of Merlin in Modern Fiction," *Arthurian Interpretations* 3, no. 1 (1988): 61-78 (71-2). https://www.jstor.org/stable/27868651.

[30] Stewart, *Crystal Cave,* 491-2.

[31] Ibid., 494.

"literary" history points again to the balance that Monmouth struck: how to make the received story recognizable and simultaneously innovate it. She adds the layer of an academic understanding of "authentic" to the medievalism and distinguishes *historia* from *fabula*, privileging the former's "truth." This is a typical distinction to make, between "serious" medievalist work and "imaginative" medievalisms. Geoffrey claimed truth about his history, while fabricating the past. Stewart takes the opposite tack, asserting the falsity of her tale. However, she is still concerned with the "authenticity" of her work in relation to its heritage, an anxiety shared by many medieval authors. She extends this concern for the "anachronisms" that she says come through in her language and naming. She proudly claims the adaptation of making Merlinus Ambrosius the son of Aurelius Ambrosius, the prince in the opening scene. The audience does not know the father's identity in *Crystal Cave* until Merlin discovers it, aligning the audience with his first-person narrative, a common element of fiction. Stewart calls Merlin "a composite of at least four people—prince, prophet, poet, and engineer," all roles in Monmouth's work.[32] But she makes him much more than that: she produces a combination or conflation of many aspects of Merlin, not just of Geoffrey's *HRB*.

Stewart conflates several originary stories simultaneously. She begins the novel when Merlin is a six-years-old, being harassed by his grandfather, a king under Vortigern. He is berating Merlin's mother, Niniane, calling the child a "bastard" who has "[b]lack hair, black eyes, and [is] as scared of cold iron as a changeling from the hollow hills," calling attention to the associations with the Otherworld of legend, but also conjuring Geoffrey and the *Prose Merlin* explicitly when Merlin's grandfather says, "You tell me the devil himself got that one, and I'll

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[32] Ibid., 492.

believe you," before undercutting the incubus story as "old wives' tales of devils coming in the night to lie with young maids."[33] Merlin's infernal paternity was simply the cover story for a romantic tryst with Aurelius, one that Niniane faithfully hides and the other women cover for. When asked his name, he replies "Myrddin Emrys…They call me Merlinus…It's a Roman name for a falcon, the *corwalch*."[34] Stewart has conflated several originary stories, making one his "real" Welsh name and one a public nickname based on the supposed association with a falcon, one that T. H. White's Wart becomes to honor his mentor. The third is an invented connection to the prince, but a semiotic nod to the Latin name in the Welsh "Emrys," ironically linking this novel back to Nennius's Ambrosius. In one page, the author openly imitates what Geoffrey attempted to obfuscate: adapting the Welsh character Myrddin to Merlinus. She obviates the many different significances of Monmouth's translation by making them all synonymous, while adding some dramatically ironic innovation when the audience learns that Merlin is actually a Pendragon himself. This conflation of Myrddin and Ambrosius are indicative of her approach to the rest of her adaptations.

While mixing or separating Myrddin with Merlin is as old as Monmouth's two Merlins, Ambrosius and Caledonis/Silvestris, Stewart originates a new circumlocution, connecting him to Myrddin, the god, whom she portrays as a Britonization of "Mithras." The town is called "Caer-Myrddin" ("Maridunum" in the novel) "after the god who is worshiped in high places," though the "name of the town has been publicly changed in my honour, but the god was there first."[35] Merlin is conceived inside the cave on Bryn Myrddin, a mountain near Caer-Myrddin in which

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[33] Ibid., 14.

[34] Ibid., 14.

[35] Ibid., 22.

Merlin later takes residence, becoming a priest of the god Myrddin. The symbol of the cave

persists throughout the series and is associated with the motif of absent fathers and step-fathers.

Jeanie Watson points out all of the illegitimate characters in this series and demonstrates it as

basis for Merlin's bond with Arthur, saying, "The search for legitimacy is an overriding one for

Merlin and for Arthur, and the two cases have many parallels. Neither is conceived in wedlock,

but each is finally proclaimed the legitimate heir by a father who is king."[36] In *The Hollow Hills*

Excalibur is found in a hole below a Mithraic altar and hidden in one in the stone under the lake

near Galava, Sir Ector's realm, here equivalent to Malory's and White's Forest Sauvage. Merlin

placed the sword in the underground cavern for safekeeping while he plays tutor to Arthur. The

prince is named "Emrys" to protect his identity, a name that Merlin calls "common" to defer the

connection to himself. During their first meeting Arthur asks, "Then you're a magician? Or a

prophet?" and Merlin replies, "A little of both."[37] In Stewart's novels, Merlin is a composite

figure of many medieval and post-medieval portrayals of Merlin. He lives in another cave called

the Green Chapel near Sir Ector's castle after the Mithraic priest, masquerading as a Christian

hermit, dies within days of Merlin's arrival. Uther has hidden Arthur (Merlin's idea again)

because of the king's many enemies, and the boy knows only that he is adopted, not his

paternity. Eventually "the young king not only relies upon his advice, but also loves him like a

father."[38] On the day of Uther's death, Arthur is told the truth of his lineage, some of his first

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[36] "There are a good number of bastard children in the novels: Merlin, Morgause, Modred, and, for much of his life, Arthur." Jeanie Watson, "Mary Stewart's Merlin; Word of Power," *Arthurian Interpretations* 1, no. 2 (1987): 70-83 (79). https://www.jstor.org/stable/27868623.

[37] Mary Stewart, *The Hollow Hills* (New York: Harper Collins, 1973), 304.

[38] Raymond H. Thompson, "Rationalizing the Irrational: Merlin and His Prophecies in the Modern Historical Novel," *Arthuriana* 10, no. 1 (2000): 117. Accessed July 24, 2018. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27869524.

words are to Merlin: "I'm as much yours as the King's—more."[39] From the cave, Merlin

becomes a father, Myrddin, or Merlin, depending on the person with whom he is speaking. He is

publicly the new "Myrddin," especially to the "Old people," the Britons who retreated into the

woods from Roman and Saxon encroachment. But the conspirators, Ralf and Ector, know him as

Merlin, a warrior-magician, sage, prophet, and an engineer, all roles he plays in the *HRB*.

Monmouth repeatedly uses the word "ingenium" to describe Merlin's ability to move the

Giants' Ring from Ireland to Britain (*HRB* 128.235, 129.253). The *Prose Merlin* actually

truncates the episode and conflates "Uterpendragon" with Aurelius Ambrosius as the king who

requests the move. But even this brief reference says that "Merlin by crafte of his arte" brings the

stones to Stonehenge.[40] Stewart continues to follow this rationalization of Merlin's abilities as

artifice. Aurelius asks Merlin if he can move the stones, saying, "they say it was not men who

raised them, but magic," and Merlin replies in a metafictional moment, "[N]o doubt they will say

so again."[41] Finally, Aurelius asks, "[I]f I don't possess a magician, at least I possess a competent

engineer?"[42] It is a feat of engineering in the novel, not magic. In Stewart's version, he only

takes the one "King stone" from Ireland and re-constructs the rest of the Giants' Ring, which

already lies near "Amesbury." Stewart demystifies the process, just as Monmouth had, calling

for brains over brawn. She shows that artifice would be mistaken for magic by the rest of the

population as a way of bridging the gap to a twentieth-century reader, while paying *homage* to

her medieval sources. Stewart resists the "magician" or "wizard" depicted in the previous

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[39] Stewart, *Hollow Hills*, 405.

[40] Wheatley, 58.

[41] *Crystal Cave*, 395.

[42] Ibid., 395

century of literature and film. T. H. White's Merlin only has his prophetic powers rationalized, and the rest is magic. However, even a modern rendition of the story cannot reason away every facet of Merlin, as seen in the prophetic aspects of this character.

The episode of Vortigern's Tower once again highlights Mary Stewart's mash-up of fragments of the legend and the roles of Merlin. Having received a prophetic dream about the situation, the teenage Merlin says, "I would certainly be able to tell them why their foundation would not stand. It was an engineer's answer, not a magician's," but "if it was a magician's answer they wanted, they should have it."[43] Stewart is willing to trade the magician's role once again for the more logical, informed answers to problems with seemingly mystical sources. In the *HRB*, Merlin has an engineer's savvy by having the hill channeled and the lake under the tower drained to reveal the two fighting dragons. In the *Crystal Cave*, Merlin performs the part of a diviner, but he knows the location of the cave under the tower because he had already explored it as a child. He acts as though he does not know in order to seem like he was given divine insight. The show is to heighten his own status for the benefit of his audience. Merlin is the author's avatar again because Stewart adopts practical reasons for many aspects rendered supernatural in the *HRB* and other sources. Yet she maintains the mystical aspect of his prophecies, even if Raymond Thompson argues that "historical novelists strain credulity when they preserve" and highlight prophecy.[44] He discusses the supposed "inappropriateness to the genre," but concludes that it is a core role to Merlin because "prophets inspire us to believe in ourselves, to dream of a brighter world, and to try to build it, and we all, characters and readers

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[43] Ibid., 286.

[44] Thompson, "Rationalizing the Irrational," 119.

alike, have need of them."[45] As in T. H. White's portrayal of the mage, Stewart's Merlin is the site of the tension between more plausible explanations and the fantastic aspects of the medievalism's supposed "Middle Ages." A similar tension unfolds between the received material and innovation in Geoffrey, Wace, and Malory, who all rely on their supposed sources to aid their claims to authenticity. So, Stewart adds rational explanation to her literary forebearers in order for the story to seem more authentic to a contemporary reader. She is revealing "the truth" behind the legend, just as much as each of the medieval writers claimed. Stewart's Merlin finds a stone shaped like a dragon in the water, rather than actual dragons, portraying a "practical" reason for the myths. Contradicting her rationalizations, eventually Merlin feels the power of the god, Mithras/Myrddin, and speaks the beginning of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Prophetiae Merlini*. The prophecy is interpreted within the text by the characters, which provides a metafictional moment that both unites and divides history from fiction using Merlin in the medieval role of commentator.

Merlin not only delivers but interprets many of the internal narrative prophecies in the *HRB*, commenting on current and future plot points. Compilers had to make decisions to include just the narrative prophecies and/or the political, historical ones, adding a layer of commentary that Merlin does not interpret himself. Just as the *Prophetiae Merlini*, when inserted into the manuscript of the *HRB*, provides a key to interpreting the book, which can then be employed to interpret *ex eventu* "prophecies" about the author's present moment. Wace rejects them, and romances explicitly eschew the political predictions through Blaise's anxieties, but retain Merlin's reading of the two dragons. Whether separate or contained in the plot, Merlin usually only interprets the predictions most immediate to the narrative in the romance texts. The details

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[45] Ibid., 119, 123.

are sometimes changed, such as in the *Prose Merlin*, when Merlin calls Vortigern the red dragon and the "sones of Constance" the white, reversing the symbolism of Monmouth.[46] Just so, Mary Stewart retains some details and changes others. She has the characters interpret the prophecies, but limits Merlin's role as poet and interpreter. Instead, she transfers the words and interpretation to a character named Cadal because Merlin does not remember. His prophecies come in fits, as in the *HRB*. His prophecy becomes the site of interpretation, of political and temporal discourse by which the characters analyze their own present. Stewart has Cadal relate the vision: "All wrapped up, it was, with eagles and wolves and lions and boars and as many other beasts," including "dragons and such—and going hundreds of years forward—which is safe enough."[47] The political commentary is incomprehensible to both Cadal or the poet, Berric, who hears and delivers the prophecy of Merlin to the people, making them "safe." Certainly, medieval commentators fashioned meaning out of Monmouth's *Prophetiae*, often tailoring it to their patrons or the current monarch. Wace recognized the danger of the politics of prophecy and avoided them. On the other hand, it is their very incomprehensibility that leaves the space for interpretation, to align it with the agenda of whomever glosses the text. Cadal reasons it away as the machinations of a brilliant political mind: do not say anything too specific, lest it cause trouble for the prophet. He believes Merlin was faking the prophecies and that calculated political motivation will be, from the perspective of the novel, the basis for hundreds of medieval political interpretations. Once again, Stewart emphasizes the tension between rational explanations and mystical events and adds internal interpretation by characters, while

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[46] Wheatley, 40-41.

[47] *Crystal Cave*, 308.

acknowledging her external source, Monmouth, and again using Merlin to highlight

metahistorical interpretations of the prophecies.

Mary Stewart's revision reenacts the continuous adaptation of her multiple sources, but

especially Monmouth, while simultaneously replacing it with different meanings. Merlin sees the

white and red dragon fighting, and, as always, Vortigern will lose. After him, according to Cadal,

will come "a bear coming out of Cornwall."[48] When Merlin contradicts him, saying that the

Heraldry of Cornwall is a boar, Cadal points out that "*Artos* was the word." The Greek *arktos*

and Latin *Arcturus* mean "bear," providing a potentially false etymology for Arthur. However,

the most interesting part is that Merlin interprets incorrectly, implying Monmouth's version is an

incorrect interpolation. This medievalism deliberately attempts to replace its medieval source in

a process that reveals a supposed new "truth" about both Merlin and Monmouth. Geoffrey

performs the same replacement of his sources with a more "accurate" version when he laments

the absence of Arthur in his own authorities and introduces Walter's British book. Medievalism

replaces the medieval, by calling into question the *Prophetiae*'s interpretability. Ironically, by

commenting on interpretation, Stewart at once affirms that tradition of glossing political

prophecy and erases its foundation by having Merlin fail at the first interpretation. Stewart's

medievalism portrays Merlin as a human in order replace the medieval legends. He is a human

commentator on his own predictions when, later in *Crystal Caves*, Merlin sees Vortigern's white

dragon banner fall and a fiery comet streak the sky. Real objects metonymically replace the

mythical aspects, but he still invokes the supernatural reading: "I, Merlin, tell you[…]You have

seen the Red Dragon come tonight, and the White Dragon lie beneath him."[49] Simultaneously,

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[48] Ibid., 308.

[49] Ibid., 317.

Geoffrey's divine omens are adapted by Stewart in order to legitimate and replace the original, a process that has applied to Merlin's story since his originator. The epicycle of replacement of the sign with an innovation is a commentary on the past as well as the continuous flow of revisions. Stewart's work replaces its source by relinquishing "an authentic past." Instead, fantasy pretends to be more historical than history, prophecy, thereby undermining present interpretation. The omniscient character is replaced by the flawed, subjective "I, Merlin." Neomedievalisms are the extension of this novelistic idea of the *bildungsroman* because modern genres and media are focused around the subjective gaze, reinventing the past through Merlin once again. The subjectivity of neomedievalisms means that everyone may now enter the discourse of Arthuriana, not just an "author." The more voices, the more Merlins, all of them claiming authenticity, but none signifying historicity.

Merlin as He Never Was

Contemporary medievalisms that purport to depict Arthuriana "as it might have been," like novels, film, and now computer games, have moved toward the subjective, individualistic perspective, producing almost innumerable revisions of the story. Each of the revisions has spawned another adaptation, including unrecognizable transformations. Paradoxically, the further from the received tradition, the more the authorial presence of a medievalism argues for its own veracity. The authenticity is either predicated on history or upon subjective verification, sometimes both. Many Arthurian films and texts have claimed "the real story" and deliberately revised it to be unlike other iterations, begging the question, at what point does a neomedievalism diverge from the received narrative too far to be considered authentic, even in the process of revision? Film's proliferation in the last century has produced so many competing narratives, that the master narrative of Camelot is lost in transition in the twentieth-century. The

subjectivity of the new media and the fervent need of Hollywood to foster constant consumption

of entertainment by the public lead to many Arthurian films. Simultaneously, film involves a

multitude of people at every level of production to produce the illusion of subjectivity. And as

technology advanced, video games have allowed players to interact with the text and with other

players, multiplying the perspective of the text from one author to many. The more participants,

the more adaptations. As more voices participate, adapting the received material becomes

predicated even further upon discursive interactions among different versions, all vying to

occupy the signs "Merlin" and "Arthur" for whatever financial, symbolic, or political profit that

the names may muster. These names become empty "brands," signifiers, that can be fashioned to

any shape, all while reiterating the claim to the true version.

Even if the claim is not explicit in the tagline or the trailer, other methods imply the

claims of authenticity. Such is the case in *Merlin* (1998), a Hallmark channel miniseries. When

writers once again make Merlin the narrator, telling his own life's story, much as in Stewart's

novel or as the character must have recited it to Blaise in the *Prose Merlin*. The opening scene

portrays a young horseback riding Merlin who then fades into wizened mage, saying, into the

camera, thus involving the individual audience member: "Once upon a time[…]no, that's not the

way to start. Make you think this is a fairy tale. But it's not."[50] The trite first line is replaced by a

claim to truth. The film propagates a vaguely traditional plot with many modern motifs replacing

the medieval ones while simultaneously satisfying a modern audience's desire for signifiers of

the medieval. Film, like Mary Stewart's novels, seeks to replace the Middle Ages with modern

ideas while still signifying the past. And yet, the adaptation reflects medieval practices of

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[50] *Merlin*, David Stevens, directed by Steve Barron (Hallmark Entertainment, 1998).

authorial innovation to plot, character, and theme. The process of revision continues within the story and in the collaborative nature of film. The different material jobs in the production of a film are comparable to the various manuscript jobs, like illuminating, ruling, and transcribing. They also imitate the collaborative nature of multi-player games that metonymically replace authentic medieval tropes with medievalisms, while imitating medieval authorship, including collaborative play. While excoriating many aspects of Steve Barron's *Merlin*, including "dialogue" that "plunges to the depths of banality" and a "ridiculous dragon flapping its wings," Muriel Whitaker, points out that the magic of the film is "trickery not of dramatic illusion but of technology" that includes computer-generated graphics, "[a] dragon by Henson's Creature Shop, griffins courtesy of Buf, Paris, and live action bluescreen."[51] Many different kinds of professional expertise went into the making of this loose adaptation of Merlin's story. Merlin is the avatar for the writers and directors as narrator, and we have added dramatic identity to the actors, especially the protagonist. However, there are many other roles off-screen such as crew who form much of the creative drive to the various versions of Arthur and Merlin. Jim Henson's legacy of puppeteering adds a layer of creative anachronism, as do the miniatures, costuming, and digital effects programmers and technicians. Cinema and television productions have become modern scriptoria in which the material workers, writers, editors, and illustrators—the graphics code writers and programmers—all have rigidly separated roles. Collaboration is an integral and sometimes difficult part of film and of electronic entertainment and makes the

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[51] Muriel Whitaker, "Fire, Rock, Water: Elements of Setting in John Boorman's *Excalibur* and Steve Barron's *Merlin*," in *Cinema Arthuriana*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002): 44-53 (52).

difference between a "believable" Middle Ages and an implausible one like Hallmark's *Merlin*

or *Merlin the Return* (2000).[52]

Another film that claims truth but is almost entirely fabricated is Antoine Fuqua's *King*

Arthur (2004), which claims in all capital, metallic letters, "For centuries historians believed that

the tale of King Arthur and his knights was only a legend. But the myth was based on a real

hero…who lived 1600 years ago."[53] This particular version claims that the Roman Arthur

commanded a group of horsemen from Scythia who were forced to fight for the crumbling

Roman Empire to win their freedom. This script was born of the research of C. Scott Littleton

who makes these claims based on "new findings" that the knights of the Round Table were

Sarmatian cavalrymen stolen from their homes to serve their Roman overlords, claims that most

scholars find specious at best.[54] The film uses "historians" in opposition to "legends" to frame

the "real" story of Arthur and his knights. The insistence on revealing the "truth" while

innovating the story have been part of the process since Wace's claims at the moments of

greatest invention. *King Arthur* not only draws from the Sarmatian knights hypothesis, but it also

reaches into Geoffrey of Monmouth's sources—Bede, Gildas, and Nennius—to craft a late

antiquity version of the tale, rather than a High Middle Ages romance, already differentiating it

from other versions.[55] Fuqua's Merlin is a revision of Myrddin Silvestris, rather than Merlinus

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[52] This film was deemed so terrible that it was the subject of its own commentary by *Rifftrax*, the same group that produced *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. Both series add running satirical comedy additions to films in order to make light of any number of topical associations.

[53] *King Arthur*, by David Franzoni directed by Antoine Fuqua (Touchstone, 2004).

[54] C. Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor, *From Scythia to Camelot: A Radical Reassessment of the Legends of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail* (New York: Garland, 2000).

[55] *The Last Legion* (2007) also has the same setting but involves Merlin too little to be relevant here.

Ambrosius.[56] He is a mysterious sage, leader, and priest who eventually helps to unite Britain

and rid it of Anglo-Saxon invaders, one of the few recognizable themes left from the Welsh oral

poetry and from Monmouth's revisions. Merlin is the political and spiritual leader of the

"Woads," named after the plant they use to paint their skin, whom Bors calls "British rabble who

hate Rome." They are supposed to be medieval Picts because they live north of Hadrian's Wall,

one of the film's major visual sets and symbols. When asked who leads them, Lancelot replies,

"Merlin, a dark magician some say." The writers perhaps were referring to many other versions

in which he is a spell-casting magician. This serves to differentiate the Merlin portrayed in this

film and in its spin-off game for the Xbox and PlayStation 2 consoles from other versions for a

more "authentic" Merlin. It is fortunate that there is a game and a film version, in order to

compare and contrast the media, their elements, and participation by the audience. The

combination and disambiguation of themes, roles, and characters in this film highlight overlap

between and within the two different media, making meaning out of differences from each other.

Similarly, the interactive version highlights an aspect of gaming so central to the present study:

multiplayer interaction, which transforms the text by adding another voice.

The opening of the film and the video game involve a historical positioning from Nennius

and signs of the medieval to portray authenticity. The armor is more in line with what the

costuming department of the studio believes late antiquity Roman soldiers and Sarmatian cavalry

would have worn. An important carriage bears royal eagles as their symbols. The audience come

to find out that it is Saint Germanus, mentioned as coming to Britain at the same time as

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[56] See Russell Peck, "Antoine Fuqua's *King Arthur* within Imaginary Boundaries of the Celtic World," *Arthuriana* 26 no. 2 (2016) 86-109. He details many of the Celtic images and analogues in the movie.

Vortigern is meeting with Saxons in the *Historia Brittonum*.[57] Germanus came to fight

Pelagianism, a heresy mentioned by Nennius, and to which the protagonist, Arthur (Clive

Owen), subscribes, a conflict that drives the plot. The game version of the film uses scenes from

the film to bring the player into the game. The *auctoritas* of the game *is* the movie, a crossover

between the media that allows the game to borrow from but adapt in many ways. In the film,

when Merlin and the Woads attack Germanus' caravan, the man riding in the carriage, the

bishop's double, looks out at the carnage.

Figures 8 and 9: *King Arthur* (2004): Germanus in the Film Becomes the Digitized Version.

In the video game, this moment serves as a bridge to gameplay, the character becomes

the computer-generated graphical version of himself (figs. 8 & 9).[58] Several adaptations occur at

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[57] Chapters 39-47. Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, in *Six Old English Chronicles*. ed. J. A. Giles (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848). https://books.google.com/books?id=bxI5AQAAMAAJ.

[58] Xboxbbcity, "King Arthur Xbox Gameplay," *YouTube*, Published May 27, 2010. Accessed February 18, 2019. www.youtube.com/watch?v=hBEkYhtiee4. I have played *King Arthur* until the end, but this is a much easier reference tool.

this moment. First, the implicit truth-claim is predicated on a transitive property from the film to the game. If the film is the "true history" behind the legend, and the game uses the *auctoritas* of the movie and visually transfers that to the game, then the game must be the truth, or at least based on it. This medievalism borrows from the previous one, which defies the canon while still relying on certain aspects and adapts its story to the different genre. Next, this moment is also a matter of translation. The celluloid film, which had translated literature to its own unique medium, is then digitally transformed by CGI into a game. The replacement of one post-medieval medium for another adds a metonymic layer to the player's access to medieval Britain. The juxtaposition of the two images intersplices the film into the game to produce interactivity of the two separate narratives of the game and the film. Like any other adaptation, the game adds and subtracts from the movie. The moment when the Woads attack Germanicus' train initiates the game's narrative divergence from the film. The movie has action and themes, but the only object of an action role-playing video game is to fight, kill, and win. Nearly every version of Arthur depicts his battle prowess since the first mention of the twelve battles, his earliest claim to fame. But in most medieval and literary medievalisms, he only fights against invaders, for justice, or in God's name. Chivalric depictions of generosity and Christian mercy abound in Arthuriana and he is always the hero, even if a tragic one. Clive Owen's interpretation is of a just, if reluctant, *dux bellorum*. Even *Legion*, a one-player game has a narrative in which the characters are fighting against evil, even if it is a misogynistic depiction of Morgan le Fay. But this hack-and-slash RPG knows neither chivalry nor mercy. This neomedievalism is far removed from the medieval in any way, substituting the newest genre of medievalism for the last. And as two players interact with the text, the multiplicity of perspectives erases the last vestiges of Arthur's and Merlin's of the romance or *historia* genres.

Neomedievalisms allow for a multiplicity of perspectives and interactions with the story and the text itself. Like literary and filmic adaptations, the game must reject, adopt, or modify some or all of the previous adaptations. The "original" stories since Monmouth have been altered many times over in depiction, language, genre, and medium. The many translations have emptied the characters of a recognizable heritage, replaced by a discourse among competing versions. The subjectivity of the player/reader adds another layer of interactive interpretation: the manipulation of the game toward goals is not just a passive viewing or reading but adds a co-authorship. The game is a revision, but every replay of the game is another, separate version of the game within the narrative provided. As in the *HRB* and *King Arthur* the film, violence and death are everywhere in action RPGs, but unlike the film, in the game death lacks meaning. First, the enemies look human but are not linked to another player, meaning the player does not usually perform a kindness common in Malory: offer mercy to characters against whom they fight. In *Legion*, if an avatar dies, they must return to the beginning of the chapter or level in which they failed to achieve the goal. In the game *KA*, if there is only one player, the same holds true. But in two-player mode, the avatar can die repeatedly while the other player "resurrects" him. The Christological significance of that term is backgrounded in this and other games, but in most action RPGs is more akin to reincarnation. Those religious ideas produce different meanings, but both refer to death with reverence. Video games do not. After the first level, the game plays a scene from the film in which Arthur and his men are being pursued and trapped by the Woads, which leads to Bors falling off his horse. The *King Arthur* film scene morphs into the gameplay and from there, the player must kill many enemies before he or she succeeds. However, in the film this scene is meant to arrange the peaceful meeting between Arthur and Merlin. Indeed, Merlin engineers the trap to expedite the meeting and no one is hurt because the Britons were

only trying to scare the riders in the right direction. Arthur and Merlin meet to arrange an alliance between the Woads and the Roman commander in order to drive back the Saxons and reclaim their land. But action RPGs completely eradicate any humanity of any character other than the player and his or her allies. The Woads only count as "kills" and experience or gold. This genre dehumanizes even further this flawed "noble-savage" depiction of Merlin and the Picts. In the game, the player must kill or be killed to make the plot progress and "win." This is the opposite of every depiction of an idealistic Arthur who stands for justice, or chivalry, or the unity of Britain, even in the film from which the game derives its authority. The last event that occurs in the film is the wedding of Arthur and Guinevere, in which Merlin performs his most symbolic gesture in the film, but again, the game empties it of all meaning.

At the end of the film version, Merlin is the Wildman shaman, aligned with the natural aspects of the land, as in Marion Zimmer-Bradley's druidic depiction. But that is where any resemblance between the Celtic sources or vestiges of the *Vita Merlini* disappear. All the other correct semiotic signs are combined with inauthentic ones to become empty signifiers of the medieval.[59] In a Stonehenge-like circle on the edge of a seaside cliff, Merlin, still painted like the Woad, raises a chalice to the sun and makes crosses with incense. He then hands the drink to Guinevere, dressed in white with a flower garland, who drinks and hands it to Arthur, who does likewise. Merlin finalizes the marriage pronouncement, in what can only be described as an affected accent meant to conjure British: "Arthur. Guinevere. Our people are one, as you are." After a kiss from the couple and a joke by Bors undercutting the solemnity of the occasion, Merlin then presents them to the genuflected, surrounding crowd to which all reply: "Hail King

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[59] Russell Peck, "Fuqua's *King Arthur*" claims that the this ending was slapped together when the studio executives rejected the original ending: with the burial of the knights, after which they become horses, a type of pagan animism.

Arthur!" After calling for "All Britons" to be united in "one common cause," he draws Excalibur and Woads shoot fire arrows off the cliff's edge, aiming at nothing. All of the "right" symbols are replaced by modern signifiers that retain only a semblance of authenticity. The rock circle is not the war memorial on Salisbury Plain as in the *HRB* and Arthur's sword is not the one pulled from the anvil or Excalibur. Merlin is culture-confused, and no one is sure why archers are shooting arrows aimlessly. Keira Knightley has no affair to look forward to since Lancelot (Ioan Gruffudd) is already dead when the wedding takes place. The tragedy precipitated by marriage, courtly love, and power is erased from this version. The game cuts the last and the penultimate burial scene in the film version, which at least ends with some chivalry and hope. The comradery of battle is all that remains in the game, accompanied by pretended tears since the player has no fear of death or sense of tragedy. There are no consequences for murdering Britons because Merlin helps the player in the last battle of the game no matter what the player has done. There are no unions between the oppressed to stem tide of evil. The correct names and symbols are used, but they are not given any importance. Multi-player action RPGs replicate the characters but do not produce significance associated with a first-person game like *Legion*. Just as with one author, like Geoffrey or T. H. White, a single-player adaptation is one narrative, cohesive and coherent. But when more than one player is introduced, the narrative and potential social meanings become wholly discursive between the players: the exchangeability of the correct signifiers, regardless of their emptiness. As games incorporate thousands of players in MMORPGs, the names become less and less relevant to the game than the player's own perspective and the multiplicity of meaning that this point of view engenders.

The Absent Merlin: Re-Populating History

First-person narrative is the mode of the twenty-first century, and neomedievalisms have catered to the reconstructions of the past that the ego-driven consumer tastes recognize. To his three main categories of medievalism, David Matthews appends two more, both neomedievalisms, which are "[a] cultural production based largely on medieval elements [that] incorporates modern references or motifs" and one "essentially of its own time, [that] looks back to the Middle Ages with greater or lesser explicitness."[60] These two subcategories of neomedievalisms are deployed in two modes: those that present themselves as the authentic, and thus more serious, and the satiric, which are less "authentic.". For instance, a production that presents itself as authentic with medieval elements, but modern references would be a "Medieval Fair" and the online game *Dark Age of Camelot*. These examples present an illusion of the genuine but are inflected by tropes that are more recent in their creation. A satiric and fantastic Arthurian medievalism would be *Shrek 3*. This neomedievalism recognizes the inaccessibility of the medieval original and pokes fun at contemporary attempts to recreate it. A "less explicit" modern production would be something like Arthuriana being folded into science fiction, for example *That Hideous Strength* and a story arc on the television series *Stargate: SG-1*. Finally, a more explicit medievalism that is satiric would be *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and its derivative musical play, *Spamalot*. These last two are critical of modernity while employing contemporary modes of production while dressed in medieval garb. The Middle Ages becomes unrecognizable at this point, but it is being redeployed as the site for a fantasy by modernity in

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[60] Matthews, *Medievalism*, 38

which to explore contemporary social and political issues. It seems to fade away but is preserved in process rather than product.

Lyotard's model of language play in its ideal form has no master narrative, but rather a decentralized discourse in which every speaker is adjusting and adapting to other players' speeches. The rise of the World Wide Web has made this kind of discourse possible on a global scale. Massive Multiplayer Online (MMO) games offer a perfect example of language play because many people can interact with the world, its citizen NPCs, enemies, and quests simultaneously via a remote. World of Warcraft (WoW) is an MMO role-playing game (MMORPG), a game that is some combination of medievalisms, whether on our planet in our timeline or, as in WoW, a fantasy. The MMO remade the single-player Warcraft games—which were real-time build-and-kill strategy games—into an open-ended, interactive world. The player in this narrative is still represented by an avatar, but the avatars are much more customizable than single- or multi-player continuous games like *Legion* and *King Arthur*. Customizing a character is often a personal matter to a player, one that heightens the individuality and subjectivity, the first-person perspective, of the MMO. One MMORPG is *Dark Age of Camelot*, a game played on a PC or MacIntosh. As in table-top RPGs, players can choose between different races, such as humans, elves, giants, or ogres, each of which can specialize in certain types of abilities, known as classes, such as fighter, magician, or ranger.[61] The player can name his or her character anything he or she wants, further catering to participatory medievalisms' egocentrism. Players can reenact aspects of Arthuriana without being constrained by the names of Arthur or Merlin. Also, the worlds are much more interactive than in a single-player

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[61] See Paul B. Sturtevant, "Race: the Original Sin of the Fantasy Genre," *The Public Medievalist* December 5, 2017, https://www.publicmedievalist.com/race-fantasy-genre/. Accessed May 5, 2019.

continuous narrative game. There are many Non-Player Characters (NPCs) who give the player quests, missions, or tasks. And because there is not a continuous narrative, these missions can be completed in almost any order, though some are a prerequisite for another. Just as a two-player game opens up perspectives on the narrative, different interpretations, and contributions (i.e. play), MMOs allow for almost infinite discursive interaction on several levels. The player interacts with the narrative threads, completing quests that often do not involve violence or "grinding" out kills against different types of NPC enemies: animals, humans, or monsters too numerous to list, ranging from dragons to fantastic creatures that have no mythical source material in the real world like a Grunk, a sort of frost giant that roams Salisbury Plain. At the moment of play, the player in an MMO can rewrite the narrative in any way he or she wishes with Arthur and Merlin and Camelot only echoes of the previous versions.

Figure 10: *DAOC*: A Neomedievalism Cartographical Representation.

Figures 11 and 12: A Digital In-Game Map of Albion and a Drawn Map Created by a Fan.

The game begins signifying its provenance with maps of the realms of Albion, Midgard, and Hibernia, which represent Britain, Scandinavia, and Ireland respectively (fig. 10). The game is using this map, with nicely "frayed" edges to seem like parchment, an object signifying a medieval original. Thomas Rowland explores how "video game maps[…]provide context to the narration but in ways that adds ontological awareness."[62] The ontological delimitations in *Dark Age of Camelot* are problematic from the first because "Hibernia," the Land of Winter, is the Roman name for Ireland, and "Albion" is a Latinization of the Celtic-rooted Brittonic, "Albu," and Scandinavia is rendered as "MidGard," a Germanic word for lands that encompassed many nations during the fifth-century setting of the game, not a monolithic realm. Monmouth used "Hibernia" in his Latin accounts, but he also discussed the issues of naming in different languages by various people. He also writes that the island was called "Albion" before the arrival of Brutus, who renamed it "Britain" after himself. The game is at once giving primacy to the "original," however inaccurately etymologized, and preferring the form of the conquerors. The present study is confined to Arthur's realm, Albion, because it is analogous to Briton, except for

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[62] Thomas Rowland, "Maps as Narrative Spaces in Video Games and Medieval Texts," in *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middles Ages*, ed. Daniel T. Kline (New York: Routledge), 189-201 (193).

one notable difference. Contrary to the realms map, Albion is not the entirety of the real Britain

(figs. 11, 12). One will quickly notice that Wales and Scotland are not part of the playable map.

The realm's limits have been Anglicized, essentially erasing any "British" identity from this

land, despite many Welsh place names within the realm. This version of Albion performs the

same erasure of the Britons as Layamon and Malory. The digital map of Albion, not the drawn

rendering, shows the limits of computerized "lands" that are square or rectangular, with no

nuance of coast. Each large rectangle is its own map, with some familiar places, like Snowdonia,

the Forest Sauvage, and Stonehenge. All of the areas have their own sub-maps, denoting

different places, objects, and castles. However, there is no continuous narrative to impart

meaning, no recapitulation of tragedy, similar to the two-player *King Arthur* game. So, none of

the names mean anything except as potential places in which to acquire a quest, gain experience,

or to earn treasure.

Figure 13: A Labelled In-Game Map of Camelot.   Figure 14: An Exterior Image of Camelot.

Figure 15: The Round Table Room in Camelot Castle.

Camelot is again the center of the game, but it is most notable for its emptiness. The setting of the game is the time after Arthur has died, when King Constantine rules, and there is constant warfare for domination of the three realms. The precedent for this end of the tale is present in the older texts. Geoffrey, his sources, and the *historia* tradition tell of the fall of Arthur and continue their stories with his nephew Constantine to the very end of British dominance: Cadwallader's refusal to return from Rome and his subsequent death. Indeed, the characters are significant in their absence in this narrative. Absence is visually represented through gameplay in several ways, including architectural lacunae in different buildings and outside the castle, which is empty except for any passing players' avatars or some pre-set NPCs (figs. 13, 14).[63] The castle is high medieval, despite the temporal setting. The iconography of the castle banner and the stained glass on the front of the castle is the grail chalice, even though that depiction was an invention of medieval romance. Other recognizable images abound throughout Camelot, but the most significant one is the Round Table (fig. 15). The vaunted table of Arthur is all but empty. Sir Yvaine and Lady Genevieve are the only occupants of this room. The rest of the knights are

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[63] Depicted is my avatar, a human wizard named Myrddin Emrys. "Merlin" was unavailable.

either dead or missing. There is a round table in Camelot, and Merlin even has a tower in the castle, but few characters in the books, films, or other video games are present. Yvain, the last of the knights of the Round Table, has only a few stock phrases and missions for us. He is not a hero but a simulacrum devoid of will or any purpose other than to inform. The game performs its authenticity through their names and symbols, but they are empty of anything else. This virtual world is constructed, with many details wrong or right, to mirror much received material, but the open-ended *DAOC* plays with its sources much as its players manipulate the game by allowing anyone to be a character in Camelot. The old names, symbols, and places must be erased to allow room for the gamers to fill it with something relevant to themselves. Paradoxically, this generic consideration contains the key to all medievalisms. Every player becomes his or her own co-author because they may play with the text, the game, adapting their source, the programmers' code, and the games' writers' quest texts. The player innovates the game in a completely unique way every time. The heroes of legend must be absent to open the discourse for individualized interaction at every level. There are no more heroes, only empty names, because the players become the heroes, the authors, the historians, and prophets of the future of the Middle Ages. Neomedievalisms have replaced the medieval genres, styles, and motifs, in favor of modern ones, but the process of revision links even these versions.

Just as in *Dark Age of Camelot*, *The Adventures of Merlin* (2008) is a mélange of medievalisms that is a cultural production of its own time. It blends some authority and innovation, history and prophecy, but the mode of storytelling is modern television. For instance, in episode four, Lancelot (Santiago Cabrera) is a peasant whose dreams of knighthood are dashed when the court record keeper and genealogist of Camelot, Geoffrey of Monmouth (Michael Cronin), proves to Uther (Anthony Head) that Lancelot's credentials are fake. The

relationship of Geoffrey to the story is a discussion of authorship in a uniquely neomedieval way. Geoffrey of Monmouth is a character in Arthur's kingdom as a character that is the nosy, shushing librarian which, while disputed in its accuracy, is a fixed caricature of the profession in modern television and film. He is a recurring stock comic figure who has been situated within a modernized version of his own work. *Adventures* conflates the historian with the history, giving both equal disregard for authenticity. The author of arguably the most influential Arthuriana in the last thousand years is depicted *in* his own creation as a modern stock character. This sort of irony is precisely the basis of neomedievalisms that perpetrate modernity in medieval garb. Even the peasant Lancelot becoming a knight is, with a few exceptions, not how reality or romances would depict such a transformation. But *First Knight* (1995) sets the medievalism precedent: the rags-to-riches story in which Lancelot (Richard Gere) is a peasant who becomes Arthur's (Sean Connery) most trusted knight and, of course, his greatest betrayer with Guinevere (Julia Ormond). The transformation of the genre adapts the story in a non-medieval way. The film sets up a canonical romance, with Meleagaunt kidnapping Guinevere and Lancelot rescuing her as in Chrétien's *Lancelot*, only to remove anything resembling medieval significance. King Arthur, on his deathbed, hands Lancelot Excalibur and says, "Take care of [Guinevere] for me." The peasant hero gets the girl, a cool sword, and the kingship, with none of the nasty consequences of tragedy. Presumably, Camelot lasts forever, even if the once and future king's body is burned in faux-Viking style. The ending of the film is exactly contrary to nearly every other portrayal but reenacts the rags-to-riches hero story in which he attains the rewards: a leading lady and a kingdom to rule.

In *Adventures*, Merlin himself is replaced by other modern medievalisms. In episode ten, Merlin's (Colin Morgan) home village is being attacked by bandits.[64] He and Arthur (Bradley James), as well as Gwen (Angel Colby) and Morgana (Katie McGrath), come to the rescue of the besieged hamlet. The entirety of the episode is the same plot as *The Magnificent Seven*, which itself was a westernized version of the *Seven Samurai*. The plot of the episode follows the story arc of both films. Arthur vows to help, but he has grave concerns about their odds of winning, doubting only the skill of the villagers, not their resolve. An initial defeat of the bandits angers the chief, who brings an even larger assault upon the village. The marauders are defeated by the misfit band who had a special *esprit de corps* and a lot of barricades, traps, and some scripted luck. The only "medieval" part are the swords and magic. Furthermore, Merlin is a meta-medievalism because he references other Arthuriana in self-aware moments of differentiation among modern retellings. In episode three, Merlin is talking to his mentor and the court physician, Gaius, who warns him about pursuing Nimueh, the main antagonist of the first season, by saying, "Magicians are hard to spot." Merlin replies, "Maybe I should go around wearing a pointy hat."[65] This is an obvious allusion to and dismissal of *The Sword and the Stone*, both the novella and the animated film, ridiculing the Disney portrayal in preference to this one of a teenaged Merlin. They spend most of their time disobeying parents to "do the right thing" and Gaius and Uther just do not understand what it is like being a kid these medieval days. Other subtler references could serve as a completely self-referencing system, such as Merlin making objects like a pair of shoes move, a reference again to the animated film. This neomedievalism

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[64] *Merlin*, "The Moment of Truth," Season 1, episode 10, Dir. Jeremy Webb, written by Jeremy Capps. BBC. August 2009.

[65] *Merlin,* "The Mark of Nimueh.," Season 1, episode 3, Dir. Jeremy Webb, written by Jeremy Capps. BBC. June 2009.

does not replace the medieval with the modern, it replaces the modern with the more modern, or the post-modern. The modern media genres have now superseded the medieval ones to contain its meaning within its own formulaic plots. Genre requirements of a television series are as flexible as those of *historia* or *romans*, but they were invented for modern screen depictions. Both are formulaic genres but superimposing the one onto the other is a privileging of signifying the modern over and into the medieval. Only the costumes and the setting are markers of the medieval. Modern comedic genres set the stage for the absence that signifies nothing.

In *Dark Age of Camelot*, textuality itself is a medieval signifier that is replaced with modern or post-modern meanings. In the empty hall of the Round Table stands a lectern on which lies a book labelled "Yvain's journal." It reads:

> And He blessed the grail saying, "Yay, this grail is blessed. That is good because I like blessed. Blessed is good. Hurray for blessed." And the people rejoiced by killing each other to see who deserved the grail more. And after all were dead, He spoke thus, "Wow, that's not really what I intended." So, it was that the grail fell into legend until Arthur came and plucked it up saying, "Hey look, a grail. I wonder if it is holy?" And, so, it was that King Arthur claimed the grail for his people and there was some rejoicing, but not a whole lot.

This is an instance of the "Pythonesque" nature of neomedievalism, which Carol Robinson calls, "an almost socio-psychotic 'disease' of the post-modern, pseudo-adolescent, pseudo-intellectual, who sits in an armchair and practices a purposeful perversion of medieval codes, ethics and

life."[66] The "Pythonesque" in digital media is predicated on simultaneous interchangeability and potential contradiction of those concomitant juxtapositions. This passage refers to the Last Supper if the "He" is Jesus, likening it at least to the communal cup instituted at the meal. This alludes to the Round Table connection made in Robert de Boron's work and the subsequent French and Middle English versions of *Merlin*. The next portion is a quasi-historical criticism of religious fanaticism, perhaps the Crusades or contemporary extremism, and either Jesus or God refutes violence in His name. This is especially ironic, given that most games are predicated on violence replacing meaningful quests, including, to some extent the MMORPG. The journal refers to Arthur finding the Grail again, asking, "I wonder if it's holy?" In the discursive schizophrenia of neomedievalism, the symbols are meaningless, replaced with modern words, referencing tradition, but taking it out of context and using it ironically to comment on the inaccessibility of the past. This satire of the genre has its own provenance.

Satiric neomedievalism is predicated on self-referential systems, comic and otherwise. David D. Day highlights the Monty Python's "anachronistic juxtaposition of unlikes" in the film.[67] One of the most famous contrasts is when Arthur (Graham Chapman) explains to a peasant (Eric Idle) that he is king, only to be met with Marxist economic theories of "exploiting the workers, by hanging onto outdated imperialist dogma which perpetuates the economic and social differences in our society" and power derives from a "mandate from the masses not some farcical aquatic ceremony." King Arthur has no answer but, "Be quiet" and "shut up" while manhandling the peasant, leading to malapropistic line: "Help! Help! I'm being repressed!" Not

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[66] Carol Robinson, "Beyond That 'It's Just a Flesh Wound' Kind of Feeling: A Medieval Game Proposal," *Universitas* no. 2, 1 (2006), Last accessed February 16, 2019, https://universitas.uni.edu/archive/spring06/default.htm, (PDF).

[67] David D. Day, "Monty Python and the Holy Grail: *Madness with a Definite Method*," in *Cinema Arthuriana*, ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland), 127-135 (129).

only does the scene ridicule medieval ideas of kingship through contemporary criticism, it reflects upon the traditional representation of the story as the dreams of a lunatic. This scene actively dismisses the authority of both historical ideas and of medieval themes. History and film (and literature) are simultaneously juxtaposed as well in the form of the "Famous Historian." The scene starts with a broken fourth wall, showing the production of the scene with the clapboard in the shot and the "director" calling, "Picture for schools, take one…Action!" The dramatic technique of showing the audience "how it's done" while performing the scene indicates a world outside the narrative that is commenting on the interaction of history and narrative. The Famous Historian, replete with bowtie, is a caricature of the discipline, but also of the desire for authenticity and the elimination of anachronisms. Many medieval and post-medieval texts, films, and games have claimed "the true story" of Arthur or Merlin, either through explicit statements or tacit techniques, but this juxtaposition eliminates the difference between fantasy and authenticity by having the Historian summarily killed by a passing knight. Fantasy has killed history, self-referentiality has murdered any pretense to grand narrative, and the symbols are not only been evacuated, but ridiculed. The past gets its revenge, however. The murder of the Historian leads to a police investigation outside of the film's plot. Just as the battle scene is about to occur, a typical climax for a film on Arthur, the "real" police intervene and arrest Lancelot and Arthur, ending the film. Even the satire is ridiculed. This self-referential episode is more of a commentary, along with the coconuts substituting for galloping horses, upon the chicanery of modern film making. Not only does it substitute Foley effects for the thing itself, but the film production is ultimately revealed for what it is: an inauthentic representation.[68] If history is being

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[68] Foley effects are named after Jack Foley, the originator of many effects when film had a separate audio and visual track that must be spliced together. It is now legend that the Monty Python troupe substituted the coconuts for horses simply because of the delivery of the animals to be used was delayed and filming had to take

murdered by films about the medieval, then history will reach from beyond the grave to expose the process of medievalism itself. They are, as Donald Hoffman puts it, "playing with the anachronism of the intrusion of the twentieth century on the fifteenth" in a "relentless circling to return to the beginning."[69] The more we reinvent, even for satire's sake, the more we understand our relationship with the medieval past the more we realize that Middle Ages can be anything we want them to be. This relation is rife with pitfalls and is susceptible to destruction at the hands of "authority," here represented by the police at the end. The twenty-first century has begun purposefully to misrepresent the Middle Ages, replacing the previously well-known Arthurian denizens. Merlin is absent in the *Holy Grail* and its neomedievalist spin-off *Spamalot*, replaced by the sorcerer "Tim," who performs many of Merlin's roles. His presence and Merlin's absence is significant because it makes a previously integral element of the story replaceable. Far from being a powerful wizard, Tim is powerless in the face of the killer rabbit. But even his absence seems like a stock satiric move.

The schizophrenia of neomedievalisms is about how the fragments of medievalisms can be spliced with others in any order because their signifier has purposefully been detached from its signified. The *Shrek* series of movies is a project dedicated to this prospect from its very first opening scene: like Disney's *Sword in the Stone* or like the opening screen of *Legion*, *Shrek* opens with an animation of an illuminated manuscript as it narrates the rescue of a princess by a brave prince. He then says, "Right! Like that's ever going to happen," and tears a leaf from the manuscript and presumably uses it to wipe himself after defecating, since the next shot is of him

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place without them because of budget and time constraints. Serendipitously, the incident precipitated one of the most famous points of satire in the movie.

[69] Donald Hoffman, "*Not Dead Yet:* Monty Python and the Holy Grail *in the Twenty-first Century*" in *Cinema Arthuriana,* ed. Kevin J. Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland), 136-48 (146).

exiting an outhouse without book or leaf. In *Shrek 3*, the DVD menu is a digitally rendered set of

a play, already indicating self-reflexivity because they are revealing its production. The end of

the movie is a play within the movie in which "King Charming," formerly Prince Charming, the

villain of the series, enacts the story book rescue of the princess which was discredited in the first

movie. In *Shrek 3*, the king of Far Far Away, the mythical land in which all fairy tales and myths

reside, dies and leaves the kingdom to Shrek, his son-in-law. Shrek refuses the job and searches

for the only alternative: Arthur. The future king is a lonely outcast who is bullied by the "jocks"

of his "medieval" high school. After Shrek persuades Arthur to accompany him to Far Far Away,

they stumble upon Arthur's "old magic teacher" Merlin in an earth mound in the woods. In the

first words of Merin, there are several allusions layered in ways that blur any line left between

medieval and modern. As a projected hologram emanating from crystals, Merlin says, "Greetings

Cosmic children of the universe. Welcome to my serenity circle. Please leave any bad vibes

outside the healing vortex." The projection dissipates and a little buffoon smashes the crystals,

saying "I should have gotten the warranty." The magic is technologically like a television, but

which works on "magical crystals." The New Age greeting from an oversized projection

becomes a nervous, small man in a deflating of the name of Merlin in the same way as the

Wizard of Oz is unmasked. The present replacing the past works to produce a film that is neither

then nor now, but both in discourse with one another. Merlin has been a staple for the New Age

self-help section of the bookstore at least since Deepak Chopra's *Way of the Wizard* and *The

Return of Merlin*. Without going into much detail, this facet of twentieth-century medievalisms

have their roots in the Druidic and Wiccan strains of the last two hundred years. Marion Zimmer-

Bradley's group tapped into that aspect to produce not only the book, but a way of spirituality,

much like Chopra. The druids are a medievalism themselves based in the Nature Worship that

informed ancient Celtic traditions, some of which spawned Merlin Silvestris and Avalon, the Grail and the Spear.[70] However, it was nineteenth-century academic medievalist interpretations that imposed a religious ordering of these disparate practices.[71] New Age spirituality often cites the power of crystals, which, in this case are used as a technology to reproduce an homage to and parody of the scene in which Dorothy discovers that the great and powerful Oz is just a man.

In *Shrek 3*, Merlin is similarly reduced from powerful mage or Druidic healer to a teacher, in a slight nod to J.K. Rowling, who had to retire because "he had a nervous breakdown" and under the "request of [his] therapist retired to nature to discover his divine purpose." He does become the vehicle for Arthur discovering himself when they peer into the "fire of truth" on their "journey into the soul." Shrek sees a baby carriage and Arthur sees a baby bird abandoned by the father bird. Merlin says, "Proper headcase, you are, aren't you? Really messed up." The theme of the orphaned boy is certainly within the canon, both for Merlin and Arthur. This dilemma is psychologically rendered in Stewart's second novel, in which the future king and Merlin bond over their common lack of paternity. Here it is Shrek who comforts Arthur because his father was "an ogre." Merlin sets the background music ("That's What Friends are For," by Burt Bacharach) "to set the mood" for their "big heart-to-heart." They do indeed find themselves becoming friends. When Arthur asks Merlin for a spell to get them back to Far Far Away, the character, a bumbler like Disney's Merlin, says, "I don't have that kind of magic in me anymore, kid. How about a hug? That's the best kind of magic." But he is persuaded to help and sends them away with a mixture of Latin, hand-waving, and "a zoom zoom." He only reappears to switch Puss in Boots and Donkey back into their rightful bodies since his transport spell mixed

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[70] See *Merlin and Woman,* ed. R.J. Stewart (New York: Sterling, 1988).

[71] See chapter three of the present study.

them up in a *Freaky Friday* subplot to the movie. Merlin's lasting impact on Arthur is teaching

him and Shrek and all the villains to love themselves first. The bad guys are no longer bad, they

throw down their weapons in a reversal of all traditional material. Everyone lives "happily ever

after," except Charming. All of this takes place on the same stage as the "traditional story" and at

the moment of triumph the animated audience cues the real audience with their applause. Merlin

is emblematic of the genre that reduces Arthuriana to a joke about itself, dressed up as modern

versions of the past and more modern adaptations. There is precedent for even this version of

Merlin as a way of simultaneously ridiculing the medieval, and the modern is bitingly employed

in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.*

Mark Twain begins his preface with "The ungentle laws and customs touched upon in

this tale are historical, and the episodes which are used to illustrate them are also historical."[72]

The medievalism is asserting its veracity as surely as Geoffrey or Wace, but the irony of

knowing it is not accurate at all satirizes Southern fantasies of *noblesse oblige* that were

themselves grounded in the revival of romantic medievalisms like Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*. He

makes his position clear on the medievalism of Sir Walter Scott when he says that the American

antebellum South "is curiously confused and commingled with the Walter Scott Middle Age

sham civilization; and so you have practical, common-sense, progressive ideas and progressive

works; mixed up with the duel, the inflated speech, and the jejeune romanticism of an absurd

past that is dead, and out of charity ought to be buried."[73] Obviously, the satirist overemphasizes

the influence of Scott, but not by much. The southern aristocracy employed the Middle Ages in

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[72] Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1917), iii.

[73] Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1917), 375.

defense of slavery because, as Eugene D. Genovese observes: "The assertion of historical

Continuity in a Christian tradition based upon the subjection of the laboring classes to their

betters provided the moral and ideological rock on which the slaveholders could build a new

society."[74] Twain's contempt Scott's and the South's version of medievalism, especially in

support of an economic system that Twain himself condemned, led him toward his own in an

attempt to "free American literature from medieval influences" that "met with little success."[75]

Indeed, that same strain of medievalism has apparently survived into the twenty-first century, as

Richard Utz has recently pointed out.[76] But Twain is criticizing *both* modernity and the medieval

era when he continues in the preface to *Connecticut Yankee*, "It is not pretended that these laws

and customs existed in England in the sixth century[…]One is quite justified in inferring that

whatever one of these laws or customs was lacking in that remote time, its place was

competently filled with a worse one."[77] If the Middle Ages were not this barbarous, then modern

man would invent something worse. Twain foreshadows the end of the book in his beginning and

indicts the entire modern human race, his usual target. But American ideals and institutions are at

the forefront. Clark Griffith calls this satire "savagely divided against itself," but this is not

entirely accurate.[78] Neomedievalism understands the duality of post-medieval reflections upon

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[74] Eugene D. Genovese, "The Southern Slaveholders' View of the Middle Ages," in *Medievalism in American Culture*, ed. Bernard Rosenthal and Paul Szarmach (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1989), 31-52 (48-9).

[75] Tison Pugh and Angela Jane Weisl, *Medievalisms: Making the Past in the Present* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 42.

[76] Richard Utz, "We Want Wall. We Want Knight. Not. Medievalism and the Atlanta Superbowl," *Medievally Speaking,* February 3, 2019. Accessed March 19, 2019. https://medievallyspeaking.blogspot.com/2019/02/we-want-wall-we-want-knight-not.html.

[77]Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, iv.

[78] Clark Griffith, "Merlin's Grin: From 'Tom' to 'Huck' in *A Connecticut Yankee*," *The New England Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (1975): 28-46. Accessed: August 18, 2018. https://www.jstor.org/stable/364911.

itself. The book is not divided against itself; rather it looks both ways simultaneously in a unity

that both supports tradition and subverts it, which satirizes medieval literature, the romantic

medievalism, *and* modern American ideals through the very same artifice. Unsurprisingly,

Merlin's roles in the book are changed and yet remain focused around the same issues of the

present's relationship to the past.

The story of the "Connecticut Yankee," Hank Morgan, is filtered through a random

acquaintance, who in the end is revealed as "M.T." M.T. reads some Malory, but finds it alien to

him, highlighting the distance between his modern time and the Middle Ages by showing their

incongruities. The frame narrative of *Connecticut Yankee* has Hank relate to "M.T." his own

account of history, written thirteen hundred years previously by Hank himself. The fictional

provenance authenticates the manuscript of the book that Hank gives to the simulacrum of the

author. The provenance story is replicating an *auctoritas* invocation, such as those used by

Geoffrey, Layamon, and Malory to argue for the veracity of their versions. The first method by

which Twain replaces everything medieval with a modern version is with this artifact. The

manuscript is about a modern man who went back in time, only to bring the worst of it with him,

and then write about it. Hank replaces Merlin as the narrator of his own story, which

subsequently presented as a first-person narrative. Merlin authored the narratives in his dictation

to Blaise in the *Prose Merlin* and the *Morte Darthur*. There are many other moments of

confusion between the medieval and the modern that allow Twain to juxtapose and even confuse

them in order to use Camelot and Merlin to satirize his own moment.

When Hank wakes up in the past after taking a crowbar to the head, the first sign of

incongruity is language, which when spoken is indecipherable to him. He is convinced that the

knight who captures him is "from an asylum."[79] The past is crazy because it is not modern.

When the knight brings him down a river valley, Hank sees "a vast gray fortress, with towers and

turrets," and he simply asks, "Bridgeport?" only to find out it is Camelot. Bridgeport, CT, was an

industrial shipping center by 1889, *Yankee*'s publishing date. There were probably continuous

outpourings of smoke from factories and ships travelling the length of the Connecticut River to

and from Long Island Sound. Since the collapse of the industrial production of America,

Bridgeport has languished in economic and social problems. No one, then or now, would ever try

to equate these two cities. The juxtaposition of these two names is an intentional absurdity meant

to undermine the idea of some shining beacon on a hill, as Scott and Tennyson portray Camelot.

Hank continues to replace the medieval with a farcical modern caricature of Merlin. Merlin then

becomes the central focus of conflict between Hank's pragmatic knowledge and the magician's

magic and prophecy. Twain has already replaced Merlin with Hank as author of this adaptation,

but here the author further deconstructs Merlin's authorial and historical functions. During a

feast at Camelot, Clarence groans when Merlin rises to tell a tale, saying, "Merlin the mighty liar

and magician, perdition singe him for the weariness he worketh with his one tale![...]He telleth it

always in the third person, making believe he is too modest to glorify himself"[80]Just as in the

Prose Merlin and Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Merlin tells a story he has lived in the third person,

but this time not to Blaise, but to a bored "medieval" audience. Of course, the tale is from

Malory, though Twain does use other sources.[81] The authorial function of this adaptation is both

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[79] Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 6.

[80] Ibid., 25.

[81] Vinaver, *Works*, 35-7. See Robert H. Wilson, "Malory in the 'Connecticut Yankee,'" *Studies in English* 27, no. 1 (1948), 185-206. Accessed August 18, 2018. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23309516. And Lesley C. Kordecki, "Twain's Critique of Malory's Romance: Forma Tractandi and a Connecticut Yankee," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 41, no. 3 (1986): 329-48. Accessed August 18, 2018. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3044930.

highlighted and undermined. On the former point, Twain is (sub)consciously consuming the

tradition in preparation for adapting it, but in Hank's story, the words of both Malory and Merlin

ring false. Malory's story is a lie if Merlin is a liar, which would be also true if Merlin truly did

transmit the stories to Blaise, which became the book itself. The logic of the prose versions has

us inheriting these passages from the "author" himself, Merlin. Twain is upholding the tradition

of transmission, and even that Merlin is the author and character while simultaneously his satiric

neomedievalism undermines historicity by positing itself as more "historical" than his source.

The author demonstrates that he is self-aware of replacing the medieval with the modern

meaning and then revising the modern misconception and replacing it with a "truer"

medievalism.

Satiric neomedievalism comments on the medieval and the modern simultaneously. Hank

knows that an eclipse will occur "on the 21st of June A.D. 528" and he uses this information to

challenge the magic of Merlin (16). Billing himself as a "magician myself," Hank "predicts" that

the hour at which he will be burned, "at that hour I will smother the whole world in the dead

blackness of night[…]and the peoples of the earth shall famish and die, to the last man!" (37, 41)

Twain is commenting on the authenticity of prophecy, obviously, but also calling attention to the

convenient foreshadowing technique of *ex eventu* prophecy. This type of prophecy has served to

legitimate the authenticity of the narrative since Monmouth. He also highlights the ease with

which present knowledge can be translated into the narrative's future. Merlin calls his bluff, but

Hank is proven right and supplants Merlin in King Arthur's favor. Hank has Merlin imprisoned

and announces that he will "blow up Merlin's stone tower."[82] Hank magnanimously offers

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[82] Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 57

Merlin the chance to "break my enchantments," but Merlin's handwaving, "like the sails of a

windmill" are ineffectual.[83] Of course, Hank's improvised explosives make "that old tower [leap]

into the sky in chunks[…]it rained mortar and masonry the rest of the week. This was the report;

but probably the facts would have modified it."[84] As Donald Hoffman points out, this episode

"reconstructs Geoffrey of Monmouth's tale of Merlin and Vortigern," but in reverse. Merlin is

now the one authority putting Hank on trial, threatening death, only to be disproven, like

Maugantius in the *HRB*.[85] Just like the empty Merlin's tower and Round Table in the game *Dark

Age of Camelot*, the sign is present, replacing its meaning and the roles. Hank physically destroys

the source of the medieval but Twain repurposes the structure of the tale, perhaps to demonstrate

"the nineteenth century struggling to obliterate its memory of and indebtedness to its sixth

century father."[86] Merlin's magic stands in the way of progress, technology, reason, and science

from Hank's perspective. Now that the tower has been destroyed, its meaning can be reinscribed.

This medievalist satire rewrites the past to critique the present. The self-reflexive interaction of

the author and Merlin reinvents the tradition, ultimately upholding the process handed down

from Monmouth while overturning the tradition's authority.

Twain turns his sights on criticizing modernity when Hank becomes obsessed with

amassing power through technology in order to supplant the medieval. He invents and uses guns,

cannons, and other tools to "improve" Camelot. These technologies begin innocently enough but

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[83] Ibid., 58.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Donald Hoffman, "Mark's Merlin: Magic vs. Technology in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*," in *Popular Arthurian Traditions*, ed. Sally Slocum (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green SUPP, 1992), 46-55 (47).

[86] Ibid., 48

eventually Hank's desire for modernity produces civil war and tyranny. Hank announces over the radio, "all political power has reverted to its original source, the people of the nation[…]there is no longer a nobility[…]all men are become exactly equal; they are on one common level, and religion is free[…]*A Republic is hereby proclaimed*."[87]American ideology could not be more succinctly enunciated, but the ideals of liberty and equality have been destroyed by Hank's weapons, and it is chivalry and feudalism that fight back at The Battle of the Sandbelt. The battle is a tragic farce in which Hank achieves victory by electrocuting all of the knights, leaving a pile of bodies lying all around Merlin's Cave, the place of Hank's last stand. The place is significant because it is where Merlin has been trapped in so many tales. Twain pays tribute to the symbol while inverting the meaning. Lesley C. Kordecki, observes, "Hank is given Merlin's traditional end by Merlin himself when he is entombed alive in a cave. This makes sense, for Hank takes on the role of Merlin."[88] Then he uses the inversion to show nineteenth-century American society its foibles, with Hank congratulating his men on the slaughter, calling a victory that "will not perish out of the minds of men," a phrase similar to both Arthur's fabled fame and Lincoln's address at Gettysburg.[89] Progress is only more efficient at producing death. But Merlin embodies the past's vengeance upon the contemporary moment of the author by being the vehicle by which the satirist mocks the present, similar to the "Famous Historian" in Monty Python's *Quest*. Surrounded by the proof of his power-hungry murder and choking on the "poisonous air bred by those dead thousands," Hank is upon the brink of killing every last inhabitant of Britain, when Merlin summarizes Clarence and the boys' thoughts: "Ye were conquerors; ye are conquered" by

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[87] Ibid., 427.

[88] Kordecki, "Twain's Critique of Malory's Romance," 346.

[89] Twain, *Connecticut Yankee*, 435.

their own technology and rhetoric.[90] Alan Lupack makes it clear that Merlin's laugh reveals the truth, as it did in the *Vita Merlini*, when he says, "The petrified laugh which lasts beyond death is so terrifying because it is laughter at all our human illusions that progress can improve the world and laughter at the dream that we can change the condition and so remake the world. It is a laugh that mocks and reminds us of our human failings which impede all our attempts at true progress."[91] Merlin's laughter is Twain's own voice as he uses the name Camelot to debunk magic *and* technology, to caution monarchs and presidents. Twain lays bare the sins of the past and the present and warns the future of unbridled power and hyperviolent propagandistic rhetoric used to rouse men to war. As a man who lived through the Civil War, Twain seems the most emphatic at this point: the people who spread lies progress in the name of liberty are so delusional that they cannot understand their own humanity, let alone another's.

Hank is then enchanted by Merlin and laid to sleep for thirteen hundred years until he reawakens in the nineteenth century, but torn between times, an American stuck in his fantasy, which turns into a lunatic's nightmare before he dies, leaving M.T. his manuscript. The modern man, not Merlin, sleeps for a millennium, only to return to the nightmare of modern "civilization." Hank wishes with his last breaths to return to his fantasy of superiority over the past, progress's triumphant endless march forward. Hank is entombed in Merlin's cave, replacing him even in his death. Merlin—and thus the Middle Ages—is merely the delivery device, a womb, to return Hank, the once and future Boss, back to his own flawed era. Ironically, it is the replacement that is replaced. Lupack continues in his article to discuss the lasting effect

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[90] Ibid.

[91] Alan Lupack, "Merlin in America," *Arthurian Interpretations* 1, no. 1 (1986): 64-74 (67). http://www.jstor.org.libproxy.library.wmich.edu/stable/27868611.

of Mark Twain's *Connecticut Yankee* on the American imagination. However, amid the

terrifying destruction of the twentieth century that Twain predicted and warned against, the

movie industry seemed to be intent on distracting from it, rather than highlighting it. Kevin J.

Harty states, the "consistent failure of film to match the critical complexities of Twain's novel is

one of the frustrations those who study cinema Arthuriana must confront" and by "watering

down the novel, these films ultimately eliminate Twain's social critique" because it "doesn't play

well in Peoria."[92] Hollywood's relentless commercialism is another form of American society

that Twain would probably have railed against, but which, ironically, silences him and Merlin's

laugh. Just as Yvain's journal reveals a satirical look at the Grail legend in *Dark Age of Camelot*

amid the absence of the "real" legends, contemporary neomedievalisms consciously play with

the past in order to manipulate the game of history for their own goals: winning. The absence of

the medieval being replaced by the modern is itself adapted to replace the modern with the even-

more-modern, the hyper-modern: the future, familiar territory to Merlin.

Merlin as He Will Be (Again)

In the latter-half of the twentieth century through now, these textual medievalisms have

metamorphosed into a veritable symphony, or perhaps cacophony, of portrayals of the

"medieval" within a modern setting, not just modern themes, genres, and devices. There are too

many referents to choose from for each signifier: the proliferation of Arthurian film, television,

and animation in the twentieth century pales in comparison to the innumerable websites

dedicated to medievalisms and computer games that replicate the Middle Ages in some way.

Seemingly paradoxically, science fiction has flourished alongside and even overlaps with

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[92] Kevin J. Harty, "Cinematic American Camelots Lost and Found: The Film Versions of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and George Romero's *Knight Riders*, in *Cinema Arthuriana*, ed. Kevin Harty (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002): 96-109 (104).

fantasy. Science fiction is akin to fantasy as a genre because it is another place, just like Middle Earth, and another time, like the Middle Ages, into which the contemporary culture interjects into that place and time. The obvious contrasts between the agrarian European Middle Ages and the imaginary futures of the technological age present a metaphor for our relationship to the Middle Ages. The contradictions are obviated by both being in places that are not now. This interaction of temporal unlikes, the past and the future, reveals more about the present than either of the other times. Science fiction medievalisms can be traced through C. S. Lewis's *Space Trilogy*, culminating in *That Hideous Strength*, which is as much a statement against Objectivism and other morally relative contemporaneous philosophies as it is an adaptation of the medieval, specifically of the Grail quest. Similarly, a movie and its television spin-off, *Stargate: SG-1* syncretize the past and the future in order to comment on religious extremism in the twenty-first century.

Stargate (1994) and the show are ardently pro-scientific and acutely anti-religious throughout their mutual storyline. The gods of the ancient world are revealed to be aliens who enslaved humankind for centuries. This is very much in the same vein as T.H. White's rational explanations of mythological aspects of Merlin. Gods are aliens, scientifically speaking. Repeatedly throughout the show they teach other "less-civilized" human populations on other planets that technology looks like magic or divine powers to the uninitiated. In the early 2000s, in a post-9/11 world, this show's writers push further to descry religious extremism, using the Middle Ages and Merlin. In the show, Merlin is an Ancient, a humanoid race that figured out how to ascend to a higher plane of being, like Buddhas. They have god-like powers but have sworn to leave free will intact for humans and other races throughout the galaxies. In seasons nine and ten, the plot arc revolves around the ancients and the Ori, a branch of the Ancients that

decided to use their powers to conquer galaxies. Their power source is the faith of their

followers, and the Ori demand unwavering and complete submission of populations on different

worlds, or else they destroy those people. The Ori produce armies of blind followers through

"miracles" performed by "priors" of Origin, their holy scripture, such as plagues that only they

can cure. Their powers that stem from the Ori, the god-like but evil entities, represented by

raging infernos.

In Season 9, episodes 1-2, the team of explorers, becomes embroiled in a quest to seek

out "a lost treasure" that was left on Earth by "Myrddin," or Merlin. Daniel Jackson, the resident

archeologist of the team, explains to his colleagues about the legends and performs some

interesting anachronisms, saying "Merlin took Arthur to the vale of Avalon," a place where

ancients help mortals ascend. He does so while showing the team a PowerPoint of medieval

manuscripts, explaining the legends, eventually saying that the treasure may be the holy grail. He

goes on to comment that monks "In 1191" claimed to have found the grave of Arthur and then he

ties it to "Henry II's" exhumation of the spot in 1278. Henry II died in 1189 and couldn't have

investigated it that late. But it *was* investigated, with Giraldus Cambrensis, in *Liber de Principis

Instructione* in 1193, in which he credits Henry II with telling the monks to dig in the very place

and that the king was right. Giraldus tells us:

> Many tales are told and many legends have been invented about King Arthur and his
>
> mysterious ending. In their stupidity the British [i.e. Welsh, Cornish and Bretons] people
>
> maintain that he is still alive. Now that the truth is known, I have taken the trouble to add
>
> a few more details in this present chapter. The fairy tales have been snuffed out, and the
>
> true and indubitable facts are made known, so that what really happened must be made

crystal clear to all and separated from the myths which have accumulated on the subject.[93]

Giraldus attempted to kill the legend of Arthur in the form we know through Geoffrey. He did it perhaps for pro-Anglo-Norman propaganda, perhaps out of competitiveness, since his "real" Myrddin Silvestris may never have been described. The show's writers either mis-researched the details of or specifically misrepresent the tomb and conflated it with a text that is used to disprove Arthur's everlasting status. If it were intentional, then it fits the "science debunks myth" motif that is a constant throughout the movie and the show. In this case, fiction is stranger than the truth.

The members of the team SG-1 look under the Glastonbury Tor, thought to be the entrance to Avalon. The team must decipher riddles in order to complete the quest in a cave. The final test is defeating a holographic knight that hits with real force. The only way that the character, Colonel Cameron Mitchell (Ben Browder), can defeat the knight is to pull the sword from an anvil and fight the knight, eventually defeating him. The obvious transference of King Arthur's power through the sword to Mitchell is manifested in the sword, but when Col. Mitchell calls it Excalibur, Jackson corrects him by saying that actually Excalibur is the sword given to Arthur by the Lady of the Lake. Ironically, he is correct. In this case the medievalism is correcting itself and misconceptions that have flourished in other medievalisms, like the conflation of the sword in the stone and Excalibur in Disney's animated film, among others. However, this is a hyper-correction since Arthur's sword was only split in two in the *Post-Vulgate* and in English in Malory's works. The *Vulgate*-inspired *Prose Merlin* retains the one

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[93] Gerald of Wales, "The Tomb of King Arthur," translated by John William Sutton *The Camelot Project*. https://d.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/text/gerald-of-wales-arthurs-tomb. I have no access to the Latin.

sword. The forward-looking neomedievalism incorrectly corrected a backward-turned medievalism with a more-modern, but still legitimately medieval, adaptation.

Eventually, the show reveals that Merlin is actually a technologically adept alien who was working long ago on a device to destroy the Ori: the "san graal." Eventually their season-long quest takes them to Camelot, where they find Merlin's library, at first locked by a technological barrier, which the "medieval" inhabitants have thought was a curse. It turns out that the "san graal" is a red stone on a pendant. When Mitchell says, "Every movie I've seen calls it a cup," he is referring to many, but the convenient medievalisms would be *Excalibur* or *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Again, the neomedievalism corrects the medieval and medievalism when Daniel Jackson says that some versions like von Eschenbach's *Parzifal* have a "stone" as the grail. *Parzifal* is nearly the only version of the Grail that does this. The future continues to correct the present about the past, but by using the discourse between medieval and medievalism to prove its point. The rational Jackson continues to inadvertently muddle past and future. One of the more comic moments of this discourse is when the Jackson keeps telling the "superstitious" inhabitants of Camelot that "there is no magic," only technology beyond their understanding, twice he gets transported, seemingly by magic. Gods are aliens, and technology *is* magic, and perhaps vice versa. After all, Merlin baffles Uther and his men with his *ingenium* that transports the Giants' Ring to Salisbury Plain in the *HRB*. Technology again replaces magic when Merlin's sleep is scientifically explained as his having been imprisoned in a stasis device, a cryogenic machine meant to preserve, not trap him. They thaw him, and he finds out that his ancient enemies are trying to tyrannize the universe again. He agrees to help, but he must "build" another san graal because the old one is lost. The technology replaces faith and magic. Merlin interfaces with an alien computer that renders the parts of the grail machine in a three-

dimensional holographic computer image, which is then translated into reality through an advanced "printer." Essentially, Merlin is playing a video game that comes to life. Art makes life, it doesn't imitate it. Merlin is not just a character, but an author, an engineer, a god in name, but humanized, mortal. Merlin dies, but his work is incomplete. He continues his work by transferring his consciousness to Daniel Jackson's mind, so that he may complete the san graal to defeat the Ori. Jackson, like Hank, replaces Merlin, even becomes him. This time Jackson replaces Merlin to discover knowledge to defeat religious zealotry, to uphold human rights for all species throughout the galaxy. And the only way to achieve the Grail—like Jackson or a video gamer, a fantasy novelist, or a self-help guru—is to become Merlin ourselves or replace him with a reasonable facsimile of modern self-referents that contradict the medieval but will be accepted by the audience.

AFTERWORD

The Sarasota Medieval Fair was Arthurian-themed in 2011. Guests are always encouraged to dress in "medieval" garb, ranging from knights to fairies, as well as every other imagined fantasy role, like pirates and mermaids, and medievalisms that never were, like characters from J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and George R. R. Martin's *Song of Fire and Ice*. The many types of medievalisms now interact with each other in a place where everyone's fantasy is equally acceptable. Volunteer actors, many of whom have been regular participants for years, pretended to be various characters from Arthurian literature. "King Arthur" presided over the tournament jousts by the Knights of Valor, a professional troupe of jousters who don plate armor and regularly break solid lances on each other, unlike other shows. Arthur also reigned over the battle chess show. The combat chess shows pit the actors against one another in play fight on a human-sized board. Arthur played the white king while Mordred was black king, and the battle of Camlan was "reenacted." Any aficionado of chess would have recognized no strategy in the chess playing; the moves were made to arrange certain rehearsed pairings of characters who battle with medieval weapons. The featured fights more closely resembled professional wrestling in the choreographed violence than any combat in literature or history, simply performed with props that are recognizable metal facsimiles. A few guests are invited to move on the board (though they never fight), while the rest of the audience is exhorted by other cast members to cheer for their side. All of the names of the famous characters were present, but their significances were only vaguely alluded to. Mordred and Arthur are enemies, but Arthur wins in the end. Merlin mitigated the battle between the two opponents by being the announcer. In this version the fleeting ideals of justice were upheld, but Arthur was injured and then taken to

Avalon to return someday. It seemed to me ironic that actual people were substituting for legends that have long since supplanted any historical Arthur and Merlin.

Similar ironies prepossess all neomedievalism. In Neil Gaiman's comic book series *Sandman*, a character named Robert Gadling, more commonly known as Hob, is immortal man originally from medieval England. He has lived for many centuries, been many people, buried many wives and children. In the tenth volume, *The Wake: An Epilogue*, in an issue named "Sunday Morning," Hob is driving to a Renaissance festival with his current girlfriend Guenevere, a woman of color, telling her that, "Nobody in England had even *heard* of the Renaissance until it had been over for centuries."[1] His girlfriend rolls her eyes at his fetishism of history, saying she wishes to be queen of the fair but cannot because, as she says, "There weren't any black queens of England." Hob tells her, "Trust me," Catherine of Aragorn would have been made to "ride in the back of the bus" if she had lived in "Alabama in the 1950's." After donning a corset and dress, Guenevere assumes her festival name of "Lady Constance." She tells Hob of a bookseller at the faire who shows the immortal man a codex that is coincidentally "A Genuine [Robert] Gadling and Company book," one that Hob himself had made centuries before. The "original" has an inscription that the imitation binder cannot read, but Hob can. Hob becomes maudlin for his lost past, gets drunk while telling the waitress "don't call me thee or thou or milord," and complains about cold beer. He then breaks into a condemned building that Hob says is "the only one that actually reminds me of the old days." A woman—whom the reader knows is the *Sandman*'s personification of Death—enters and chats with Hob. She asks him if he likes the fair, knowing his long life full well. He replies, "*This* isn't history. It's not the past. It's a great moldering lump of now." When Death says she thinks everyone is simply having a good time

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[1] Neil Gaiman, "Sunday Morning," *Sandman: The Wake* 10, no.3. DC Comics, 2012.

and people get to dress up, he retorts, "The past was never *like* this." The astute reader will notice several ironies in this paragraph, all focused around the discourse between authenticity and facsimiles of the past, not the least of which is an immortal character who has lived the past being the only one who, unlike the fair fake binder, can read the manuscript correctly. In a neomedievalism, the main irony is that we continue to attempt to recapture a past that never existed because history is contingent on now, not objectively real except through reflection. And by observing the past, it is changed, much like Heisenberg's principle for experiments on an electron. Just conceiving of any time as past is inherently ironic since no person ever physically experiences any state of existence but the present, except through the faulty faculties of memory or foresight. Time is one continuum of now, and history is an artificial tool that humans use to categorize the past in order to make sense of it and now. In other words, historicity *is* the punchline in participatory medievalisms.

Hob in *Sandman* represents the factual past trying to compete among the anachronisms. He believes, like medieval studies scholars have for a century and a half, that only the "real" past should be heard. Films, video games, and Medieval and Renaissance fairs demonstrate a spectrum of authenticity, whether historians wish them to or not. Neomedievalism does not eradicate the factual past, it considers it as one voice in a discourse of competing "Middle Ages." The issue then becomes *accessibility* to the "myth of history," which continues to divide medieval studies and medievalisms of all types. Education has always been seen as the line between access to the "real" and the "fictional" past. Monmouth and his contemporaries wrote in Latin, the language of his academic milieu, a practice long maintained until vernacular scholars could be deemed somewhat legitimate. As information has become more readily available in the twentieth and twenty-first century, so has the past become more easily attainable by everyone.

Even as the many adaptations of the names transform any meaning the originals may have possessed, people still replicate the Middle Ages for the sake of play, both the purely entertaining kind and in the language games of history. The Arthurian canon, from Internet websites to video games, from online repositories like The Camelot Project to digitized manuscripts, from "true" stories of Arthur to Bud Light commercials, has made the Middle Ages more accessible by using technologies alien to that era. No one has benefited more from the increased attainability of the Middle Ages than I because otherwise this project remains unfinished. That brings me to my last set of ironies.

How is it that an independent American scholar—one with no library except Jstor, Google Books and Scholar access, and as many books as he could afford and a bunch of photocopies—would presume to even discuss, let alone suggest a course for medieval studies and its post-medieval counterpart, medievalism? Academic presumption looks something like this present study. Yet, ironically, being on the margin of academia for the last decade has had some benefits. A decade of summers either reading or writing are equivalent to two years of daily work, just more expensive. But I was under no publish or perish dictum, no deadlines, and only self-imposed stress. I will remain what I have been, "a school teacher," an amateur, as I imagine elitist scholars calling me in my nightmares. But that is another irony: there are no elitists in Arthurian studies. Or if there were, I have not talked with them much. I believe that understanding our place relative to our topic has made and will continue to make Arthurian studies the spearhead of medievalism studies. The Arthurian corpus of medieval and modern adaptations is the longest and broadest and its characters the most famous. Additionally, a generation of Arthurian scholars has already made significant progress into normalizing filmic and popular culture criticism in medieval studies. The leap to video games became a matter of

language and application, not of legitimacy. Monmouth wrote both *historia* and *fabula*, to the detriment of the facts of either the fifth century or Geoffrey's own twelfth. Arthur and Merlin have always occupied the perceived divide between history and myth, legitimacy and fabrication. Everyone's first question when I tell them about my project is "Do you think Merlin really existed?" I always tell them I do not know and that it is beside the point. We will never know because the basis for our "facts" is a myth that obscured every other competing text at the time. In other words, Geoffrey successfully altered his discourse, his versions won the game of history until they were supplanted by newer versions that altered his stories in maneuvers similar to his own. And each author uses Merlin as a representation of his or her actions within the supposed history. He is used by the same authors and others to interpret the story, whether fiction or not. Merlin has been the avatar of both scholar and creative writer for nine hundred years, allowing us to play with the past in any way that suits us. There is no irony in that because that was Monmouth's original use for him.

Merlin has often spoken from the margins, the woods, or the social borders as the fatherless boy. He interpreted for kings, wrote for an author's audience, and prophesied the future from his liminal space. Perhaps we should interpret Arthurian and medieval studies from the margins, from the perspective of participants in medieval fairs and electronic games because they are playing with the Middle Ages. Scholars need to document and interpret cultural adaptations of the Middle Ages, just as we have analyzed the past. When we do, we enter the discourse in much the same way as every other academic or creative author, any director or programmer, any player of signifying games. Everyone else in the world is just playing with Arthur and Merlin, with the Middle Ages as it "might have been" or "never was." On rare occasion, the two sides have met, as when J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis played with history

"as it was" in their scholarship and "never was" in their fiction. And their work on both sides of medieval/ism have spawned so many varieties of medievalisms that we are only now finding the vocabulary to describe them all. Participating in the past is exactly what authors of all stripes have been doing since recorded history. But rarely has the writer been the hero. Merlin is a legend for being an author, a prophet, and a historian. Yes, he has now become a fireball-throwing, staff-waving conjurer or necromancer in role-playing games, but wizard is only a peripheral function that was emphasized when violence became the currency of action movies and video games. Merlin the poet prophet has attracted many writers because some us see ourselves, scholarly and creative, serious and anachronistic, in him. Scholars have long seen themselves as the arbiters of history, literature, and the future of interpretive methods. But the amateur participants have valuable input to the discourse as well.

The reason neomedievalism needs to be considered not only as examples on a spectrum of medievalisms but also as a method of analysis is simple. If academia does not continue to track current perceptions as well as historical realities of the Middle Ages, we cannot understand why the nefarious fantasies of the Middle Ages thrive alongside the medieval fairs in which many kinds of marginalized people feel comfortable enacting their own desire for play. Participatory medievalisms have provided the *jouissance* in fantasy in many forms and have produced despicable cultural projections onto the Middle Ages, including those who argue that "medieval" walls are beneficial for maintaining a fantasy of a monochromatic America; those who espouse religious intolerance by invoking crusades or jihads; and those who would promote toxic masculinity by gamer-gating women players and programmers. We need to take very seriously every significance that Merlin, Arthur, and the Middle Ages have contained and will contain. Monmouth and Wace used Merlin to legitimate dynasties, Robert de Boron unified

Christ with temporal history, and Malory (via Caxton) attempted, like Tennyson and Lerner and Lowe after him, to recapture the utopia of Camelot that probably never existed anyway. Films, commercials, television shows, and role-playing electronic games are the new texts that are dressed as the Middle Ages but are signifying our present. How and why does the past, but especially the Middle Ages, entice our imagination to project ourselves onto it, to express through it our fears, hopes, our desires? I cannot speak to the malicious medievalisms. But in the case of Arthurian literature and history, the eternal reasons have repeatedly revivified the names Merlin and Arthur: we need something to believe in uncertain times. We need heroes and we need to believe that we can be them, even if for a few minutes while we read about them or watch a show or play a game involving the names. Or when writing a book about the one character dedicated to the most legendary author ever. What does it say about everyone who has focused on Merlin for the last nine hundred years? Writing *is* our participation, our play, and Merlin is the closest to a hero for authors in Camelot. I understand now why I was attracted to this character: I am playing Merlin in this work as surely as Monmouth did in his. And I play Merlin (and scholar) in much the same way as I play his avatar in *Legion*: *The Legend of Excalibur*. He is my avatar when I am participating in the past, whether scholarly or fun play, or both simultaneously.

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