

Writing Conquest: Traditions of Anglo-Saxon Invasion and Resistance in the Twelfth
Century

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Introduction

No doubt in an attempt to find a solid foundation through which the stark social, religious, political, and cultural upheaval could be understood, historical writing in England during the long twelfth-century (ca. 1100-1250) reached almost unprecedented heights, both in quantity and in quality. As James Campbell once remarked, this was the period that witnessed “the greatest advances in the study and understanding of Anglo-Saxon history made before the nineteenth century”;¹ this was the age of Henry of Huntingdon, William of Malmesbury, and Geoffrey of Monmouth—among others—each of whom sought to fit their own particular Anglo-Norman moment into the wider sweep of insular history.

And yet, to do so required a deft touch. Shortly after the Norman Conquest of 1066 wherein the native aristocracy was replaced almost wholesale and the French language predominated; as such, the place of the Anglo-Saxon past in the twelfth-century was far from secure. As such, traditional, or even foundational, narratives of the Anglo-Saxon past were under unique stress; otherwise largely stable representations of *the adventus Saxonum*, the battle of Brunanburh, and the Norman Conquest of 1066, for instance, were drastically modified, augmented, and rewritten in a new ideological context. *Writing Conquest* examines the ways in which Latin, Old English, and Middle English historical texts remembered these traditional narratives of the past. While

¹ James Campbell, “Some Twelfth-Century Views of the Anglo-Saxon Past,” in *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London: Hambledon Press, 1986), 209.

invariably this study engages with questions about the exigent social and political forces operative on these narratives, the primary focus is on how invasion and resistance survive as textual memory. In this, it differs from the large body of more traditional historical studies in that it provides a systematic, literary analysis of these formative moments of Anglo-Saxon history during a fascinatingly complex period.

Perhaps more importantly, *Writing Conquest* represents a radical expansion of previous scholarly studies in two important ways. First, whereas previous studies largely analyze these moments of conquest, invasion, and resistance in isolation, *Writing Conquest* contextualizes them both inter- and intratextually; in so doing this study sheds new light on how the literary tradition of these foundational moments developed diachronically, but also how individual authors—like William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon—responded to and reshaped these narratives to fit their ideological and literary contexts. Second, this study pairs more traditional historiographical works with what have been described as more fictional constructs—like Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*, or the anonymous *Vita Haroldi*—in order to provide new insight on the relationship between fiction and history.²

In its basic structure, *Writing Conquest* has three sections, each treating different moments of invasion and resistance in Anglo-Saxon England: the first concerns the *adventus Saxonum* (the invasion of Roman Britain by the Germanic “founding fathers” of

² For recent studies of that examine the intersection between history and fiction, see particularly Gabrielle Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: the Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), D. H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150-1220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Robert M. Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), and Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the Anglo-Saxons), the second the battle of Brunanburh (a watershed moment of Anglo-Saxon resistance to Viking invasion in the tenth century), and the third the Norman Conquest of 1066. Each section begins with the early tradition and then moves to the reception of this material in twelfth-century England.

In section one—chapters one, two, and three—I examine the ways in which the *adventus Saxonum* was remembered. In chapter one, for instance, I suggest that the work of historians like Gildas, Bede, and Nennius depends on a set of metaphorical commonplaces—the marking of linguistic difference, the inclusion or suppression of names, and the geographic marginalization of the Britons—in their representation of the *adventus Saxonum*. While—as Robert Hanning has noted—Bede and Gildas ultimately fit the *adventus Saxonum* within a providential model that saw this event as just punishment for the sins of the British, each historian uses these metaphoric commonplaces to their own ends. Gildas, for instance, emphasizes Vortigern’s responsibility, strips the Germanic tribesmen of their humanity, and accents the dichotomized relationship between the Germanic tribes and the Britons; while Bede maintains Gildas’s distinctive binary relationship, his narrative begins to rehabilitate Vortigern’s role in the *adventus Saxonum* by shifting blame more squarely onto the Britons themselves. It is not until Nennius’s time, however, that this rehabilitation reaches its apex as Vortigern is all but absolved of political responsibility; here it is his personal, and not his political, failure that precipitates the coming of the Germanic tribes.

Chapter two moves to the twelfth century and examines the representation of the *adventus Saxonum* in William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, and Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum*. Herein I argue that William of Malmesbury shifts

away from that early tendency to recuperate the fall of the Britons and instead uses this providential scheme he had inherited from Gildas to chart the ascendancy of the Anglo-Normans in a post-Conquest Britain. For him, the Germanic tribes are the forbearers of his current society, and the *adventus Saxonum* is the foundational moment of a perdurable reign that endures because of the Norman Conquest of 1066. The *adventus Saxonum*, then, marks not a moment of rupture, but continuity. In contrast, Henry of Huntingdon relies on a providential scheme that is inherently cyclical and repeatable. As such, he strips the *adventus Saxonum* of its power inasmuch as it becomes a pedestrian occurrence and not something inherently foundational. In both instances, the *adventus Saxonum* becomes a tool through which other moments of conquest can be understood and rehabilitated; for in both, the Norman Conquest—and the reign of the Normans more generally—becomes natural and even justified.

Finally, in chapter three, I examine the memory of these events in a much more fictional narrative context, namely Geoffrey of Monmouth's pseudo-historical *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Herein Gildas's two-dimensional representation of Vortigern gives way to a fully-realized character—a corrupt personal and political leader—who precipitates the coming of the Saxons at the expense of his own people; such a characterization is then carefully contrasted with a portrait of those arch-usurpers, the Germanic tribes, in a narrative patterning that only reinforces Vortigern's failures. Concomitantly, the Britons slowly recede into the fabric of history and, as a result, are subsequently absolved of their responsibility in the *adventus Saxonum*. The coming of the Germanic tribes is no longer the result of a Gildasian national miasma, but of the corruption of an individual. In a short coda to this chapter, I look beyond the twelfth-

century to Layamon's early thirteenth-century *Brut* portrays to discuss the series of metaphorical boundaries and the influence that anti-Welsh discourse has on his retelling of the *adventus Saxonum*.

In the next section, chapter four, I examine the extant literary representations of Athelstan's resistance to the combined Viking invasion forces during the battle of Brunanburh (ca. 937). Although accounts of this battle in the twelfth century typically depended on the eponymous poem found in the Old English *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, these retellings were not without their own interpretative moves. In many ways, Henry of Huntingdon's is perhaps the most visible—and unique—manifestation of this trend; instead of simply providing a prose summary as his contemporary William of Malmesbury does, he translates the Old English poem directly into Latin poetry. While much has heretofore been made of Henry's metrical experiments and his attempts to capture the vitality of the Old English original, little substantive analysis of the poem and its place within the *Historia Anglorum* has been done. In rectifying this critical gap, I argue that Henry of Huntingdon's translation of the poem, when taken in context with the surrounding narrative material, resists the kind of leveling of historical difference between the twelfth-century Normans and the tenth-century Danes that is invited by his providential and cyclical structure. Instead of eliding the very real ethnic and social differences between the Vikings and the twelfth-century Normans, I suggest that Henry's account reconfigures *The Battle of Brunanburh* in a way that foregrounds the creation of a stable English polity, founded in Wessex, privileges a pattern of lineal descent, and promotes a unified sense of England that is embodied in his description of the land itself and those who stand against it.

In the final section, chapters five and six, I examine the literary representation of the Battle of Hastings during the Norman Conquest of Anglo-Saxon England in 1066. Chapter five analyzes the ways that the extant eleventh-century narratives of the Norman Conquest found in the Latin histories of William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi*, William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, and the epic, anonymous poem the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* portray these events; I then contrast this tradition with the D and E versions of the Old English *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. In order to retell these events, these narratives construct an image of Harold Godwinson that is then used to manage, suppress, or even glory in the trauma inherent in the Battle of Hastings. In doing so, these works rely primarily on the following aspects of Harold Godwinson: his relationship with William the Conqueror, his personal characterization, his death, his burial, and his command of the English landscape. Chapter six then examines four twelfth-century Latin accounts of the Battle of Hastings: William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*, the Waltham Chronicle or *De inventione sancte crucis*—and the early thirteenth-century pseudo-hagiography the *Vita Haroldi*. Whereas the early accounts of the Norman Conquest and the Battle of Hastings largely sought to excise Harold Godwinson, or marginalize his position, these texts substantially reinvent many of those elements present in the early tradition in order to incorporate Harold Godwinson—and the Anglo-Saxon past by extension—into England by associating him within the ecclesiastical structure of the Anglo-Norman present, reformulating the metaphoric impulses from the continental tradition, or simply reinventing the narrative itself.

Chapter 1

The *Adventus Saxonum*: Remembering the Conquerors and the Conquered

The *adventus Saxonum*, as it has come to be known,³ represents a watershed moment in the history of Britain; it is a story about the foundation of Britain itself, about the coming of the Germanic tribes and their eventual domination throughout the country. It is not a narrative about a people who find a new home on an uninhabited isle; there is no Brutus who can arrive at an uninhabited island and establish an empire. Instead, it is a narrative of origins that depends on the very act of conquest, on the destruction of the Britons. As the story goes, the British population faced numerous threats, both internal and external, and, with the Roman legions having been recalled in the early fifth century, could no longer adequately defend itself. Accordingly, the British leader Vortigern sought the aid of continental Germanic tribes; while these tribesmen would pledge their loyalty and turn back the initial threat, it was not long before they turned against their hosts and left their mark on areas like Wessex and Essex, Kent and Mercia. Given the violent nature of this narrative, it poses a rather unique challenge to any historiographer of early Britain; how does one memorialize a national ancestor whose first arrival

³ As N. J. Higham long ago noted, any term applied to the *adventus Saxonum* carries with it the weight of an individual's perspective: "a 'migration' conjures up a specific group of images; so too does a settlement': so too does a 'conquest.'" N. J. Higham, *The English Conquest: Gildas and Britain in the Fifth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 2. Although the term "*adventus Saxonum*" can still carry its own ideological weight, it represents perhaps the most neutral; accordingly, this is how I will refer to these events throughout.

precipitated the displacement of an entire native people? What does it mean to have violence and conquest as part of a foundational narrative?

Throughout this chapter, I will examine this question with particular reference to three historians of early England: Gildas, Bede, and Nennius. While often separated by wide swaths of time, the close intertextual relationship between these narratives will allow me to explicate the development of the *adventus Saxonum* narrative in early England. My analysis will be broken down into two sections, that on Gildas and Bede, and that on Nennius. Although different in their generic focus, Gildas and Bede form a particularly close-knit textual group that is similar in many ways; accordingly, I engage with them in a comparative manner. Nennius, on the other hand, reimagines the events in the *adventus Saxonum* in a way that is startlingly different from that which we find in his early contemporaries and thus is treated singularly. Ultimately this analysis of the *adventus Saxonum* in the early tradition will provide the framework upon which I will form my argument in the next chapter; for in analyzing these early texts, certain trends, or points of contention, will emerge which will be important for me to consider in twelfth-century historiography of the *adventus Saxonum*.

Gildas and Bede

As Antonia Gransden has reminded us, Gildas's *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* (*DEB*), written in ca. 540, represents the "only authority who was in any sense contemporary with the period of the Anglo-Saxon invasions,"⁴ the start of which have

⁴ Antonia Gransden has rightly characterized Gildas as a man who "stood between two worlds, his back to the Roman past and his face to the Anglo-Saxon England of the future." Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 1. Although I here suggest that the compositional date of the *DEB* is ca. 540, such a date is far from secure. As David Dumville has noted, "In the whole of *DEB* Gildas makes only one chronological statement which would in principle enable us to date his activity." David N. Dumville, "Gildas and Maelgwn: Problems of Dating," in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 51. Thomas

been traditionally dated to 449. As such, it has been fundamental for medieval and contemporary histories of early England. It serves, for instance, as Bede's primary source for his eighth-century account of the *adventus Saxonum* in his influential *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (*HE*) as well as Nennius's ninth-century *Historia Brittonum* (*HB*). Even in the twelfth century Gildas's narrative was still of particular import. William of Newburgh, in fact, cites Gildas's *DEB* as a model history. The key for William is that Gildas is resolute and not willing to pass over the "multa...mala" [many bad things] his forbearers had done; as such he stands in stark contrast to Geoffrey of Monmouth and his propensity for "ridicula...figmenta contexens" [weaving ridiculous fictions].⁵

While there can be no doubt of the importance of Gildas's text, the value of Gildas's *DEB* as a historical document itself leaves much to be desired. Although Gildas styled at least portions of his text as a history and would be accorded a similar title by later historians—⁶Bede, for instance, refers to him as a *historicus*—⁷Michael

O'Sullivan, for instance, has emphasized the early quarter of the fifth century—ca. 515-520. Thomas O'Sullivan, *The De excidio of Gildas: Its Authenticity and Date* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 180; Molly Miller has asserted date of a publication date of ca. 545-9, based on the later dating of Maelgwn's reign, with the ultimate composition occurring some ten years earlier based on Gildas's statements in the preface. Molly Miller, "Relative and Absolute Publication Dates of Gildas's *De excidio* in Medieval Scholarship," *The Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 26 (1974-76): passim. Ultimately I follow Dumville, who goes on to confirm the "usual broad dating of Gildas's literary activity to the second quarter of the sixth century." David Dumville, "The Chronology of *De Excidio Britanniae*, Book I," in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 84.

⁵ William of Newburgh, *William of Newburgh: The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh and M. J. Kennedy, 2 vols (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1988), 29. The translation is my own.

⁶ Gildas states, "hic sane vel antea concludenda erat, uti ne amplius loqueretur os nostrum opera hominum, tam flebilis haec querulaque malroum aevi huius historia" (105) [truly this tearful history, this complaint, on the evils of this age ought to have been concluded either here or before so that my lips might not utter more on the works of our men]. *Gildas: The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (London: Phillimore, 1978), 105. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically; the translations are my own.

⁷ The relevant line reads as follows: "Qui inter alia inenarrabilium scelerum facta, quae historicus eorum Gildas flebili sermone describit, et hoc addebant, ut numquam genti Saxonum siue Anglorum, secum Britanniam incolenti, uerbum fidei praedicando committerent" [among other things of indescribable wickedness which Gildas, their own historian, described in his doleful discussion they added this, that they

Winterbottom rightly points out that “historians who have quarried his early chapters are understandably irritated” because “he did not provide a clear narrative with names and dates.”⁸ As such, Michael Lapidge and David Dumville have claimed that “whatever its original purpose and audience, it was not intended as narrative history.”⁹ Instead, Neil Wright has asserted that “the account itself is impressionistic with a few personalities and no recoverable dates”;¹⁰ the narrative itself then becomes a “series of moral *exempla*—principally of the dangers of tyranny and impiety.” In other words, Gildas’s work represents an “earnest and hortatory *pièce d’occasion*, a ‘tract for the times,’” that ultimately worked towards “the establishment of the British past firmly within the context of the history of salvation, i.e., of the guidance of history by divine providence.”¹¹

Because of this text’s rhetorical character, there exist explicit literary elements in this purportedly historical narrative that are manifested both syntactically and stylistically. Although oftentimes derided for its rather dense syntax—or as Winterbottom notes, the very language of the narrative might be interpreted as “tiresome,” and many might find “its purpose irrelevant to other ages”¹²—Neil Wright argues that its elaborate and complicated prose is in fact part of an artful display; the work, he suggests, employs hyperbaton in a way that links it with the late Latin tradition; the “complex and often convoluted word order... is an important element of the literary

never committed to preaching the word of faith to the Saxons or the Angles, with whom lived]. Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 68. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically; the translations are my own.

⁸ Introduction to *Gildas*, 3.

⁹ Preface to *Gildas: New Approaches*, x.

¹⁰ Neil Wright, “Gildas’s Geographical Perspective: Some Problems,” in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 85.

¹¹ Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 57.

¹² Winterbottom, *Gildas*, 3.

texture of *De Excidio Britanniae*.¹³ It also is replete with what Wright has called “artistic and emotive language which is both difficult and apparently imprecise.”¹⁴ In a careful and thorough study, A. C. Sutherland has similarly demonstrated that Gildas’s text abounds in a complex web of animal imagery that is conditioned by biblical narratives. Far from simply a rhetorical commonplace, however, the imagery in Gildas—Sutherland has argued—is singular in its “development of traditional metaphors, similes, and images with reference to one another and to conditions in sixth-century Britain.”¹⁵ More than that, these images serve simultaneously to describe and condemn the moral condition of the Britons.¹⁶ Although the historical narrative itself can be vexing, there can be no doubt that Gildas’s work, to quote Sutherland, is a “literary text of considerable and coherent power.”¹⁷

Gildas’s narrative is an influential document that, perhaps somewhat dramatically, has been seen as one of the fundamental texts that would shape Western historical imagination for generations to come;¹⁸ although his work was understood as a kind of history, both in the way it was conceived and received, it displays a distinctive literary quality that complicates such a simple generic distinction. The product of an accomplished rhetorician, replete with complicated artistic syntax, a web of biblical imagery, and a structural form more aligned with a hortatory piece than an objective annal, Gildas’s narrative provides us with an artistic retelling of the *adventus Saxonum*.

¹³ Neil Wright, “Gildas’s Prose Style and Its Origins,” in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 126.

¹⁴ Wright, “Gildas’s Geographical Perspective,” 85.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

¹⁶ A. C. Sutherland, “The Imagery of Gildas’s *De Excidio Britanniae*,” in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 162.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁸ Gildas’s *DEB* imbued the “early medieval consciousness of British (and therefore Saxon) history... with the impress of religious ideas, developed in a typological manner through an exegetical method.” Hanning, *Vision*, 61.

Although it was completed in 731—some two hundred years after Gildas’s *DEB*—Bede’s monumental account of the *adventus Saxonum* found in his *HE* relies heavily on Gildas’s account; indeed much of his narrative—particularly of Vortigern’s reign—is derived almost wholesale from Gildas’s history itself. And yet, Bede’s text marks a key stage in the development of the narrative. Most recently, Nicholas Howe has argued that the changes that Bede undertakes to the *adventus Saxonum* narrative of the *HE* demonstrate an impulse to immortalize it and transform it into an origin myth. Given Bede’s predilection for dates, it is no surprise that his text is the first to associate the *adventus Saxonum* with the year 449.¹⁹ In Bede’s *HE*, the *adventus Saxonum* is first discussed in just such terms; according to him “anno ab incarnatione Domini CCCCXLVIII Marcianus cum Ualentiniano quadragesimus sextus ab Augusto regnum adeptus VII annis tenuit” (48-50) [in the year of our Lord 449, Marcian, forty-sixth from Augustus, having obtained the kingdom with Valentinian, held it for seven years] then the “Anglorum siue Saxonum gens Brittaniam tribus longis nauibus aduehitur” (28-30) [Angles or the Saxons were carried to Britain in three long ships]. Similarly, in the annalistic recounting found in book five of the *HE*, Bede once again ties the date explicitly to 449 and the reign of Valentinian and Marcian. While Colgrave and Mynors are right to assert that Bede makes reference to other dates for the *adventus Saxonum*, such generalizations do not necessarily imply that Bede’s dating was intended—as Colgrave and Mynors would have it—as a sheer “approximation” (49n3). In the three other instances where the *adventus Saxonum* is referenced, Bede explicitly delineates his reference as a general approximation. In book 1, Bede mentions that in the fifteenth year

¹⁹ Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 54-59.

of Gregory's reign he sent Augustine and others to Britain; this was "circiter CL (68) [about 150 years] after the coming of the Saxons. Similarly, Bede dates the conversion of Edwin "circiter CLXXXmus" (186) [around 180 years] and the state of Britain in the present to "circiter ducentesimo octogesimo quinto" (560) [around 285 years] after the coming of the Saxons. In his dating Bede is quite precise in locating the *adventus Saxonum* in the year 449; it is only in his relative dating of later events—keyed by the term "circiter"—where any sense of approximation encroaches. While as Howe indicates "he is less concerned to write a chronologically exact narrative," his narrative nonetheless does "fix a single date of origin for his myth";²⁰ for "although Bede may not have believed the migration began in a single year, he did emphasize 449 in telling of this event as part of a larger process of mythmaking."²¹ The annalistic retelling of the dates as well as the second connection with the year 449 thus create a memorial to the *adventus Saxonum* whose root was the year 449—a year that would continue to influence English historiography.

The inclusion of this date, and the projection of a seemingly more historically accurate narrative, demonstrates the tenor of many of Bede's alterations; while invested in Gildas's narrative tradition, Bede nonetheless varies his account due to the exigencies of his historical and ideological moment. It is with the variations in these traditions that I will be concerned. My analysis will be confined primarily to an examination of the ways in which each author characterizes Vortigern and his motivation, the Britons by extension, and the Germanic tribes themselves. As a whole, I will argue that both Gildas and Bede's texts depict the *adventus Saxonum* in a way that starkly contrasts the

²⁰ Howe, *Migration*, 59.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

Germanic tribes with the native Britons. In Gildas, this begins with a depiction of Vortigern who becomes the root cause for the troubles of the British—the epitome of failed leadership; more than that, in Gildas’s vision, the Germanic tribes are stripped of their very humanity and arrive in Briton as a bestial plague that stands in contradistinction to the native Britons. Ultimately such a portrayal depends on what has previously been termed as Gildas’s imprecision—his failure to provide names and dates; instead of seeing this as a lack, however, I would suggest that it is an intrinsic artistic quality of the narrative that ultimately serves to refuse the Germanic tribes—and the leader of the Britons—a place in the history of England itself.

Bede’s text, written from a greater historical distance, creates a more exacting narrative than Gildas’s that includes the names and dates of the relevant players in the *adventus Saxonum*. Bede also minimizes Vortigern’s role and refocuses his tale of the fall of the Britons on that very people themselves. More than that, Bede’s narrative creates a fiction of origins that depends on the wholesale transference of the Germanic people to England while still relying on the strict binarization that was the hallmark of Gildas’s narrative. Ultimately what becomes clear in an analysis of these two very different texts is the explicit difficulty in writing about the past as conquest in which a national ancestor’s arrival precipitated the displacement and destruction of an entire native people. Gildas approaches this problem by denigrating those responsible for the coming of the Germanic tribes, effectively disconnecting them from the present; and although Bede acknowledges the primary figures of the past and connects them to future generations, he ultimately limits their influence by minimizing their role in the *adventus Saxonum* itself.

Vortigern and the Britons in Gildas and Bede

From the outset, Gildas's *adventus Saxonum* narrative depends on the decline of the British people; more than that, their continued degeneration authorizes God's desire "purgare familiam suam (96) [to purge his family]. As Hanning has noted, the *adventus Saxonum* adheres to a pattern, wherein a "corrective punishment directed by God towards the Britons" is meted out due to the "overturning of values by a nation swollen with pride and prosperity."²² And yet, it is the British leader Vortigern and his councilors who are condemned by Gildas. As Gildas relates, a meeting is called in response to the continued invasions of Britain by various groups:

Tum omnes consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno caecantur, adinvenientes tale praesidium, immo excidium patriae ut ferocissimi illi nefandi nominis Saxones deo hominibusque inuisi, quasi in caulas lupi, in insula ad retundendas aquilonales gentes intromitterentur. (97)

[Then all the counselors together, along with the *superbus tyrannus*, devising the protection of their home in such a way—or rather the destruction—such that those most ferocious (name not to be spoken!) Saxons, hateful to God and man were invited for the quelling of the northern people, like sheep into the fold.]

The blame for the coming of the Saxons here rests squarely at the feet of "omnes consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno" [all the counselors together, along with the *superbus tyrannus*]. Even though the plague of the Saxons would be molded to a providential model of history that sees their coming as a just punishment for the Britons as a whole, it is the actions of the single leader, the *superbo tyranno* and his particular "consiliarii," that precipitate their coming.

Perhaps even more importantly, however, Gildas here refers to the leader of the Britons not by the name that he would come be known—Vortigern—but by an oblique

²² Hanning, *Vision*, 56.

reference—*superbus tyrannus*.²³ While it is plausible that the epithet applied to Vortigern here might be a result of Gildas’s lack of information—the traditional leaders of the Germanic hordes, Hengist and Horsa, are similarly unnamed—given the context in which this epithet occurs, the symbolic value of the term cannot be ignored. Howe, for instance, correctly notes that this passage represents a moment when Gildas “cannot tell of this calamity through facts but must instead have resort to an elaborate syntax and imagery.”²⁴ Although Howe perhaps pushes the issue too far to claim that at this moment Gildas “throws off all semblance of the historian,” he is right to note the particularly literary quality of Gildas’s description. This passage is indeed replete with metaphor—whether inasmuch as the councilors are blind or the Saxons are likened to wolves in the sheepfold.

In much the same way, Gildas’s use of *superbus tyrannus* functions symbolically to marginalize the British leader. Instead of naming the tyrant himself, we are left with what Winterbottom has described as “word-play.”²⁵ The Welsh name Ver-tigernus literally means something like “over-lord,” or “high-lord”; the Welsh *-tigern* is likely derived from the word for “house,” and *Ver-* corresponds to the Old English *ofer*.²⁶ Gildas’s *superbus tyrannus*, then, represents a calque that figures the original Welsh name while deliberately aligning the new description with a negative connotation; the

²³ Winterbottom, Introduction to *Gildas*, 2. H. M. Chadwick confirms such a reading. H. M. Chadwick, “Vortigern,” in *Studies in Early British History*, ed. H. M. Chadwick et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), 26.

²⁴ Howe, *Migration*, 42.

²⁵ Winterbottom discusses this change briefly in, Introduction to *Gildas*, 2.

²⁶ Chadwick, “Vortigern,” 27.

over-lord has become the proud-tyrant.²⁷ Gildas's refusal to name Vortigern suppresses the ruler's real name under the patina of verbal play.

Of course, this renaming itself—as Kenneth Jackson has demonstrated—is not an uncommon phenomenon in Gildas's *DEB*. In a section devoted to the denunciation of five tyrants, Jackson argues, Gildas uses an elaborate system of punning and animal imagery to vilify—for the most part—each ruler. For instance, when naming Cuneglasus, Gildas makes the following remark: “Cuneglase, Romana lingua lanio fulve” (101) [Cuneglasus, the “Tawny Butcher” in the Roman language]. The Welsh version of the name emphasizes a certain kind of virtue; as Jackson notes, it can be translated into something like “Tawny Wolf.”²⁸ Gildas's translation, however, modulates any positive connotations. It depends not on the animal itself, but instead emphasizes the animal's rapacity. In this sense, the Latin *lanio* marks decidedly sinister transformation of the Welsh “wolf.” We can see a similar pattern in Gildas's rendering of Aurelius Caninus, which likely would gloss his likely real name Cunignos.²⁹ In this instance, just as in Cuneglasus, Gildas translates the name with a Latin term—Caninus, or dog-like—that carries a pejorative sense.³⁰ Accordingly, the elaborate word-play that Gildas employed in his translation of Vortigern is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a systemic, symbolic method.

²⁷ In this statement, I am not suggesting that Gildas was a speaker of the vernacular. Sims-Williams rightly claims that this pun in fact shows “more about his expected audience's ready grasp of the vernacular than about his own.” Sims-Williams, “Gildas,” 169.

²⁸ Kenneth Jackson, “*Varia* II: Gildas and the Names of British Princes,” *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 3 (1982), 32.

²⁹ Jackson posits this possible real name. Jackson, “*Varia*,” 31.

³⁰ Jackson, “Gildas,” 31. Two final kings remain, Vortipor and Maglocunus. Although Gildas does not employ the same word-play with their names—and I thus exclude them from the above discussion—he does nonetheless rely on distinctive animal imagery. Vortepor, for instance, is associated with a “pardo” (101) [panther], and Maglocunus is referred to as the “*insularis draco*” (102) [dragon of the island].

And yet, *superbus tyrannus* does differ from these other two instances in a rather important way; for instead of marking out the linguistic disjuncture by retaining both the Welsh and the Latin or by only translating the second half of the Welsh name, Gildas's use of the *superbus tyrannus* is both decidedly monolingual and complete. In his translation of Cuneglasus, Gildas provides the Welsh name first, then demarcates the Latin that he has invented; he is "Cuneglase, Romana lingua lanio fulve" (101) [Cuneglasus, the "Tawny Butcher" in the Roman language]. Similarly, the instance of Aurelius Cunignos only half the name is translated into a pejorative Latin form. In the *superbus tyrannus* example, such is not the case; the term itself stands alone and replaces the Welsh original as a whole. As a result, Vortigern is, in many ways, stripped of his very ethnicity because his name has been reduced to a Latin pejorative phrase.

It is possible, as Jackson has suggested, that the Welsh name was present in the oldest manuscript—which has been used as the base text both in Mommsen's edition and in Morris's—and that the eleventh-century copy found in Cotton Vitellius A VI simply omits Vortigern's name.³¹ In the twelfth-century Avranches manuscript, the reading is "una cum superbo tyranno Vortigerno" and in the early thirteenth-century Cambridge manuscript the reading is the same as that in the Avranches except that Vortigern's name is provided in its Welsh format—"cum uno superbo tyranno Gurthigerno Brittanorum duce (38) [with the supreme tyrant Vortigern, leader of the Britons]."³² The recent discovery of the Rheims Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 414 also suggests that the reading in the Canterbury text might not be authoritative. In fact, this early manuscript tends to

³¹ Mommsen's edition is as follows: Theodor Mommsen, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi*, vol. 9 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1892).

³² For a discussion of the Welsh form and its Latin equivalent, see Kenneth Jackson's *Language and History in Early Britain: A Chronological Survey of the Brittonic Languages 1st to the 12th c. A. D.* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), 386.

agree most consistently with the later Avranches text.³³ Although the chapter mentioning Vortigern is not present in the ninth-century Welsh manuscript, the reading could follow the Avranches text and thus include Vortigern's name. Even if we find this reading to be authoritative, the inclusion of the name itself here is still markedly different from the instance of Cuneglasus or elsewhere in Gildas's narrative. In the Avranches manuscript tradition, the Welsh Vortigern is explicitly translated into the Latin pejorative; it cannot stand on its own, unlike the Welsh Cuneglasus which is separated from the Latin calque by Gildas's tag line.

Even in the Avranches tradition there is a marked difference in the way that Vortigern's name is treated, and this is expressed even more fully in the tenth-century Canterbury tradition. For here Gildas's use of *superbus tyrannus* suppresses Vortigern's name—and name it surely is³⁴—that effectively eliminates this character from the record of Gildas's history in two important ways. First, although the Welsh name is implicit and necessary for understanding the Latin phrase, Gildas has explicitly disconnected Vortigern from his Welsh heritage by transforming his name into Latin. Second, by essentially translating his name into a Latin phrase that connotes something altogether negative, Vortigern the man disappears and all that remains is a caricature; for in a narrative that catalogues the disasters visited upon Britain by the five tyrants, Vortigern becomes not just the “final example of that British tyranny” as Hanning suggests, but the apex of tyranny—³⁵the supreme, the highest, the haughtiest of tyrants. Although as Jackson notes, we cannot ultimately know “why Gildas should have omitted [his name],

³³ Jackson, “*Varia* II,” 33.

³⁴ For a thorough discussion of the debate as to whether or not Vortigern is a name or a title, and an assertion for the former, see Jackson, “*Varia* II,” 37-40.

³⁵ Hanning, *Vision*, 56.

if he did,” the substitution of this Latin calque for the original Welsh name ultimately modulates the narrative of the *adventus Saxonum* by limiting the role of a Welsh king and transforming this particular moment into a parable on the role that tyranny played in the *adventus Saxonum*.

This characterization of Vortigern, in fact, continues in the later portions of the *adventus Saxonum* narrative wherein the Germanic tribes settle more permanently in Britain. When they first arrive in Britain, Gildas relates the following: the pack of whelps “*primum in orientali parte insulae iubente infausto tyranno terribiles infixit ungues*” (97) [first fixed their terrible claws in the eastern part of the island on the orders of the unfortunate tyrant]. The repetition of *tyranno* here continues the trend initiated by Gildas earlier and emphasizes the negative role that Vortigern had in the *adventus Saxonum*. While this term is coupled here with *infausto*, it only modulates the key quality that has come to represent Vortigern—here he is no longer prideful, but an ill-fortuned tyrant. Coupled with this repetition, however, is a key syntactical element. The *iubente infausto tyranno* here marks the textual fulcrum upon which the island and the claws of the Germanic invaders turn. While Gildas does emphasize the role that the British as a whole played in the coming of the Saxons, the continued repetition of Vortigern’s epithet—*tyrannus*—as well as the central syntactic position that he is given suggests that he is primarily responsible for the settlement of the Germanic tribes.

More than that, Gildas emphasizes Vortigern’s political failings in his description of the land allotted to the Germanic tribes for settlement. As he relates, they are given vast holdings; they “*in oriental parte...terribiles infixit ungues*” (26) [fixed their dreadful claws on the east side of the island]. While it is likely that such a statement is hyperbolic

and meant to emphasize Vortigern's fault, it nonetheless suggests that their holdings were substantial; *parte* is an imprecise term that lends itself to exaggeration. While the invasion of the Germanic tribes was ultimately precipitated by a unanimous vote of the council and the leader, their substantial holdings in *orientali parte insulae* squarely falls to Vortigern—the *tyrannus*.

While Gildas's narrative, then, fits the *adventus Saxonum* within a providential scheme that sees the coming of the Saxons as a just punishment for the sins of the British, it singles out Vortigern in particular for his role. In so doing, it vilifies him by playing on the Latin translation of his Welsh name, which simultaneously marginalizes his stature as a king of the Britons. More than that, it envisions him as particularly responsible for the settlement of the Saxons and the vast holdings that they would have in Britain.

While Bede's account shares many similarities with Gildas's, his narrative nonetheless emphasizes the communal responsibility that the Britons have in the *adventus Saxonum* rather than an exclusive focus on Vortigern. For instance, Bede borrows much of the language of settlement that I noted in Gildas's account. In the *HE*, they are, in fact, allotted a portion of land that is consistent with the account that we find in Gildas; they settle “in orientali parte insulae...locum” (50) [the place in the eastern part of the island]. Additionally, while Bede avoids the punning on Vortigern's name, there is still a subtle manipulation of his name. In the place of Gildas's *superbus tyrannus* Bede names the king of the British; as he relates, the idea of inviting the Saxons to Britain “placuitque omnibus cum suo rege Uurtigerno ut Saxonum gentem de transmarinis partibus in auxilium vocarent” (48) [was pleasing to all, along with Vortigern, to invite the Saxon people from the lands across the sea in aid]. As Nicholas

Howe has correctly suggested, “the mention of Vortigern alone signals that Bede will offer a more precise account of the migration than did Gildas.”³⁶ While arguably more precise, Bede does nonetheless translate Vortigern’s name in a manner of speaking by rendering it in a distinctively Latinized form; instead of the typical Welsh “gu” spelling of Vortigern, Bede’s proper noun carries the characteristic Latin translation—“uu.”³⁷ While this Latinization of a Welsh name is typical of Bede and his methodology, it nevertheless distances his account from the pun that was so key in Gildas’s retelling and avoids denigrating the British leader as a *superbus tyrannus* in the same way that Gildas did, thus suggesting a tonal shift in the treatment meted out to Vortigern.

This particular moment, however, also demonstrates a shift in the responsibility for the coming of the Saxons; for while undoubtedly blame and responsibility this event resides once again with the incumbent leadership of England, Bede’s frame of reference noticeably revises Gildas’s account. In his retelling, Vortigern’s action was pleasing “omnibus” [to all]. Similarly, the fact that Bede denotes Vortigern not as some nameless king, but specifically delimits the explicit relationship between the populace—*omnes*—and Vortigern with the possessive pronoun—*suo*—suggests that the very people themselves bear some of the burden or responsibility for the coming of the Saxons. In this, Bede diminishes Vortigern’s personal responsibility and shifts the blame seemingly onto a wider population who would call Vortigern king. This shift is made even more explicit in the very next instance when Vortigern is referenced. Here the “Anglorum siue Saxonum gens” (50) [the tribe of the Angles or Saxons] arrive “inuitata a rege praefato” (50) [at the invitation of the aforementioned king]. Ultimately while the first instance in

³⁶ Howe, *Migration*, 54.

³⁷ As Jackson points out “W. *gu-* =Lat. *u-*.” Jackson, *Language*, 386.

which Vortigern's name is included represents a more precise historiographical moment, such precision is immediately met with elision; the formative leader which he had just named is slowly removed from the path of history and replaced simply with a tag—he is simply *rex praefatus*. Unlike in Gildas, his role is not important enough to vilify; instead both he and his people bear equal responsibility.

Of course, Vortigern does also reappear in Bede's *HE*; when Bede outlines the genealogy of Æthelberht, he relates that “*Erat autem idem Aedilberct filius Irminrici, cuius pater Octa, cuius pater Oeric, cognomento Oisc...cuius pater Hengist, qui cum filio suo Oisc inuitatus a Uurtigerno Britanniam primus intrauit, ut supra retulimus*” (150) [Moreover, that same Æthelberht was the son of Irminric, whose father was Octa, whose father was Oeric, whose surname was Oisc...whose father was Hengist, who—along with his son Oisc—was first invited to Britain by Vortigern, as related above]. In this, Bede's narrative on the whole then is willing to connect the past and the present—embodied here in the connection between Vortigern and his ancestors—in a way that is fundamentally different from Gildas

And yet, Bede's retelling represents a systematic tonal shift that avoids the vilification of Vortigern and, as a result, relegates him to a more marginal position in the events of the *adventus Saxonum*; in his place, Bede emphasizes the role that the British people themselves have in this historical moment by linking them explicitly with the land granted to the Germanic tribes for settlement. While in both Bede and Gildas the first land grant is made at the orders of Vortigern—whether he is called the *infausto tyranno* or *rex praefatus*—Bede expands such a narrative to include a second land grant. As he narrates, hearing of the “*insulae fertilitas*” [fertility of the island] well as the “*segnitia*

Brettonum” [weakness of the Britain] a second fleet, replete with a “classis prolixior” [stronger band], arrives in Britain only to receive a “locum habitationis” [place of habitation] which is given to them “Brittanis” (50) [by the Britons]. This second gift of land is unprecedented in Gildas. While he does mention a second fleet, no additional lands are granted by the Britains to the Saxons in the *DEB*. While Vortigern bears some responsibility as the king of the Britons in Bede, it is not he alone who ought to bear the responsibility for the coming of the Saxons: the Britons as a whole are directly responsible for the Germanic settlement. In this representation, Vortigern is reduced from the *superbus tyrannus* and the bringer of the Saxons to a one-dimensional character who ultimately is important to English history only inasmuch as he was the king during this period and an ancestor to Æthelberht.

The Germanic Tribes in Gildas and Bede

The pattern of revision that sees the complex negotiation of the role of Vortigern and the Britons I have outlined above, however, is not an isolated phenomenon, but symptomatic of a process that is also bound up with Gildas and Bede’s descriptions of the Germanic invaders. Whereas Gildas vilifies them by crafting a strict narrative of opposition wherein they and the Britons are explicitly binarized, Bede attempts—with varying levels of success—to clearly link the past with the present in a narrative of explicit transference that’s reminiscent of the *translatio imperii* motif. In many ways this is not a surprise; even though they rely on the same origin narrative, Gildas is writing about his British ancestors and Bede is writing about his Anglo-Saxon ancestors. Ultimately, however, Bede cannot escape Gildas’s rhetoric and has recourse to similar binary terms.

From the outset, Gildas's narrative of opposition is clear. Retelling the coming of the Saxons, for instance, Gildas remarks that "Tum erumpens grex catulorum de cubili leaenae barbarae, tribus, ut lingua eius exprimitur, cyulis, nostra longis navibus...in orientali parte insulae...terribiles infixit ungues" (97) [Then a pack of whelps, bursting forth from the lair of the barbarian lioness, in three—as they're called in their language—keels, warships in ours...fixed their terrible claws in the eastern part of the island]. As has oftentimes been remarked on in the past, the Germanic tribesmen are not human—they are simply a *grex catulorum* [a pack of whelps]. Sutherland, for instance, has argued that such a description is ultimately biblical in nature and serves to "point out their moral or spiritual significance and contain an implicit moral judgment."³⁸

While undoubtedly the biblical images themselves abound in negative connotations and marginalize and dehumanize the invading Germanic tribes, Patrick Sims-Williams has complicated such a reading with particular reference to the vernacular traditions that Gildas may have had access to. As he points out, lion is used "in a positive sense" and is much more common as such in the Bretonic nomenclature in late Latin epic and panegyric poetry as well as in the Bible as an epithet for Christ.³⁹ While it is difficult to prove that Gildas was himself a vernacular speaker or had access to the specific epic and panegyric traditions that Sims-Williams cites, his audience would have access to such connotations and might have viewed the Germanic invasions portrayed in Gildas differently than Sutherland and Hanning have suggested. To assert the positive quality of such descriptions, however, we would have to elide the proliferation of such terms in decidedly negative contexts. Dog imagery in particular, as I have shown above,

³⁸ Sutherland, "Imagery," 168.

³⁹ Patrick Sims-Williams, "Gildas and Vernacular Poetry," in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. Michael Lapidge and David Dumville (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1984), 185-6.

often served in Gildas's narrative to denigrate particular historical personages. Although it is possible that such imagery could have been viewed positively, it seems far more likely that these descriptions emphasize—albeit implicitly—the rapacity of the invaders and thus serves as a tool by which the Germanic tribes are vilified. Such a negative connotation is assured when we consider that the names of the invaders—both tribal and personal—have been completely replaced by these bestial references. In classifying the invaders as a “*grex catulorum de cuibili leaenae barbarae*” they become not an invading horde of Germanic tribesmen but base, inhuman monsters. Here no such names are provided; Gildas fails to personalize his description of this invasion, and simply treats the Germanic tribes as agents who would later turn to destruction. The invaders have here become ruthless animals who visit savagery on the shores of England.

This transformation wherein the Germanic warriors become a bestial horde continues throughout the latter portions of Gildas's narrative. In that same sentence, for instance, they are said to have “*terribiles infix[erunt] ungues*” (97) [fixed their terrible claws] on England's coast. Later, when discussing the arrival of more Germanic warriors, Gildas terms their compatriots as a group “*satellitum canum*” (97) [satellite dogs] who are sent by the “*supradicta genetrix*” (97) [the above-mentioned mother]. It is not simply that the invading tribes are condemned to a bestial trait. In such descriptions, these particular terms work to denigrate the invading tribes; they have terrible claws and are dogs—in all the pejorative force that that term carries. Although as Sims-Williams suggests, we might be able to find a precedence by which we could judge lions to be positive, given the continued proliferation of such imagery here, there can be no doubt that the Germanic tribes are being described in a negative sense.

To leave it here, however, is to miss a valuable symbolic impulse; for concomitant with such a description is the dehumanization of the Germanic tribes themselves. Their leaders are nameless and they have no genealogy beyond a singular, female progenitor—a *genetrix*. In short, they are, for all intents and purposes stripped of their individuality in Gildas’s history; they are made to inhabit an amorphous land, be led by an unnamed Germanic warrior, and have an illusory *leana* as their root. Unlike the Britons, they are simply an invading plague lacking any sort of history; they are only defined with reference to their actions against England

Gildas’s linguistic references, for instance, contrast this nameless horde with the Britons. When describing their arrival in England, Gildas relates that the Germanic tribes came “tribus, ut lingua eius exprimitur, cyulis, nostra longis navibus” (97) [in three—in their language—keels, in ours warships]. While the three ship motif likely has its root in mythic origin narratives,⁴⁰ the particular use of *cyulis* here, as Howe points out, “announces that the Saxons come from outside the Latin and hence the Christian world.”⁴¹ Gildas’s narrative does maintain the Old English, *ceol*, which is rendered as *cyula* in the Latin. In much the same way that Vortigern’s name was transformed, Gildas marks the difference of the Britons and the invading Germanic tribes; they are speakers of a vernacular language that can be transposed into Latin, but whose vocabulary is markedly different. Here both diametrically opposed linguistic systems are brought into contact in order to emphasize difference. Whereas elsewhere Gildas’s narrative worked to subsume the invaders and the invasions into an amorphous space and time, here he

⁴⁰ As Sims-Williams claims, “The small number of ships in which the first representatives of a nation sail is a standard theme.” Sims-Williams, “Gildas,” 22.

⁴¹ Howe, *Migration*, 44.

uses language itself to create a binary between the Britons and the English that emphasizes the disparity: the Germanic tribes are alien.

Finally, when relating the arrival of the Saxons, Gildas editorializes about their name itself, once again working create a binary that emphasizes the difference between the Saxons and the Britons. Gildas relates the moment when the Saxons were invited to the island as follows:

Tum omnes consiliarii una cum superbo tyranno caecantur, adinvenientes tale praesidium, immo excidium patriae ut ferocissimi illi nefandi nominis Saxones deo hominibusque invisī, quasi in caulas lupi, in insula ad retundendas aquilonales gentes intromitterentur. (97)

[Then all the counselors together, along with the *superbus tyrannus*, devising the protection of their home in such a way—or rather the destruction—such that those most ferocious (name not to be spoken!) Saxons, hateful to God and man were invited for the quelling of the northern people, like sheep into the fold.]

Once again, the term *Saxones*, here, is used to mark differentiation and becomes pejorative; the name of the tribe itself *nefandi* [is not to be spoken]. The Germanic warriors are to be denied not only their place in England but their place in history itself. Gildas’s narrative, in other words, crafts a binary that privileges the natives and denigrates the invaders. Such a move, however, is made concurrently with a drive to depersonalize the invading armies and strip them of their history; Gildas transforms them into an “other” that stands against the natives.

From the outset, it is clear that Bede’s narrative works to produce a more complete history than that which he found in Gildas, no doubt because he was writing about his own national ancestor. In his account, the invading Germanic tribes are not simply composed of and descended from beasts, but of various specific, named tribes—the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. Each one of these tribes is then given a contemporary, eighth-century corollary that traces them to a distinctive, present-day

kingdom. The Jutes, Bede tells us, founded the kingdoms of Kent and the Isle of Wight; the Saxons are the ancestors of the East Saxons, South Saxons and West Saxons; finally the Angles give contemporary England the East Angles, the Middle Angles, the Mercians, and the Northumbrians (31). While the origin tale itself—particularly the tribal affiliations that Bede asserts—has received much attention, Howe has most recently discussed the way that the geography of Bede’s account takes on a rather fictive quality. As he relates, “Archaeological research suggests that this beautifully symmetrical account bears at best a limited relation to the actual patterns of migration”;⁴² instead, his narrative creates a “dramatic and memorable map of the migration.”⁴³

While Bede is more attuned to the diversity of the Germanic hordes, his depiction of their homelands is remarkably vague. Neither the land of the Jutes nor the Saxons are specifically named. While Bede does name the Saxon homeland as the area that is “*nunc Antiquorum Saxonum cognominatur*” (50) [now Ancient Saxony] the original name is missing and in its place is a sobriquet. The only name that exists is that which is present—what exists *nunc* in the eighth-century present. In contrast, the land of the Jutes is simply glossed over; no original, or present, name is mentioned. Instead, the only mention that Bede makes is that “*De Iutarum origine sunt Cantuari et Uictuarii, hoc est ea gens quae Uectam tenet insulam, et ea quae usque hodie in prouincia Occidentalium Saxonum Iutarum natio nominatur*” (50) [The people of Kent of those people who inhabit the Isle of Wight are of Jutish origin, as are those who reside in what is today called the land of the Jutes in the province of the Wessex]. The Germanic tribes’ continental homeland has faded from view with their coming to England.

⁴² Howe, *Migration*, 60.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The only homeland which is explicitly identified is that of the Angles. As Bede relates: the Angles come from a land “*quae Angulus dicitur*” (50) [which is called *Angulus*]. This name is not a sobriquet, and although it exists in the present, as demonstrated by the present tense of *dicitur*, it is the name of the land from which the Angles themselves originate. Ultimately however, such a homeland is evacuated; as Bede relates: Angulus “*ab tempore usque hodie manere desertus*” (50) [from that time to today it is said to remain deserted]. Bede’s narrative, then, provides an origin myth that lends historical specificity to the present kingdoms of England. Energizing this myth is a narrative of transference. For Bede’s narrative, Old Saxony is the only remnant of the Saxons that exists to this day; Juteland has ceased to exist wholesale; *Angulus* has become vacant with the movement of the Germanic tribes. These kingdoms, like the tribes that inhabited them, have been moved to Britain and linked with the contemporary kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England. Bede’s narrative of the conquest depends on a translation that sees the movement of the Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, into Britain in a one-to-one correlation.

In addition to an ethnic specificity, however, Bede continues his revisions by humanizing the encroaching horde itself. Gone is Gildas’s animal mass and in its place is a Germanic army led specifically by the twin brothers Hengist and Horsa—with the bestial only intimated.⁴⁴ With regards to these names, it is, once again, correct to note the value of naming these two leaders; for

⁴⁴ Hengist and Horsa, are both terms for “horse”; Hengist translates as “stallion” and Horsa simply as “horse.” According to Nicholas Brooks, “there is no reason to suppose that either term had any currency as a personal name, but horses were associated with the cult of a number of Germanic gods including, it would seem, Woden.” Nicholas Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths: State and Church 400-1066* (London: Hambledon Press, 2000), 88.

by adding his final detail about the migration—that the tribes were led by Hengist and Horsa—Bede reinforces the communal quality of his origin myth. In one sense, the individual deserves mention only as he occupies a privileged role in the larger group, and in another sense the group exists as a coherent entity because it has identifiable leaders.⁴⁵

And yet, in many ways such a communal quality is transitory. Followed immediately by mention of the leaders' names, Bede details the death of Horsa and his continued existence as a monument in the eastern part of Kent: "Horsa postea occisus in bello a Brettonibus hactenus in orientalibus Cantiae partibus monumentum habet suo nomine insigne" (50) [Horsa afterwards was killed in a battle by the Britons, as far as this there is a monument in the eastern part of Kent with his name marked thereon].⁴⁶ Horsa is, in this moment, written in and out of Bede's narrative with stunning alacrity. Just as with the tribal origins, these names serve only as monuments to the present; Bede's narrative relegates them quickly to the realm of memory, denying them any agency for the present.

In these instances, Bede creates a narrative that ultimately gives to the Germanic hordes a specific narrative of origins and personalizes them to the extent that they do have leaders and are an army of men. This ethnographic effect, however, gives way quite quickly to a narrative that cordons off that history; the past that Bede creates is quickly elided as the tribes' homes are removed and the leaders killed off. While there can be no doubt that Bede's narrative represents a thorough revision of Gildas's narrative, it is important not to overstate its complication nor its objectivity. In order to write about the *adventus Saxonum*—composed as it is of conquest, treachery, and violence by Bede's

⁴⁵ Howe, *Migration*, 60.

⁴⁶ As Sims-Williams correctly notes, the presence of this monument in Kent ought not immediately lead to the conclusion that Bede here relates that the Anglo-Saxons landed there initially. As he suggests, "Bede does *not* say that Hengest and Horsa landed in Kent or even that they settled there...only that the monument known as Horsa's was there, and that Æthelberht and other kings of Kent were descended from Hengest's son Oisc." Patrick Sims-Williams, "The Settlement of England in Bede and the *Chronicle*," *Anglo-Saxon England* 12 (1983): 21.

own national ancestor—he reduces it simply to a basic tale of origins and emphasizes that such a reality has ceased to exist in the present in any demonstrable form.

In much the same way, Bede’s more explicit description of the Germanic tribes give way to more generic terms that replicate—and even in some ways exaggerate—Gildas’s distinction between the Germanic horde and the Britons. Shortly after the Saxons arrived, Bede relates that they “certamine cum hostibus...uictoriam sumsere” (50) [achieved victory in battle with the enemy]. Bede carefully delimits the affiliation the tribe has with the Britons; they both stand against the enemy. More than that, as I’ve noted above, the second wave of invaders is given an explicit tribal affiliation which—although in some ways fictional—creates the effect of an ethnographic recounting and comes to form an “inuincibilem...exercitum.” Such political, social, and even military distinctions, however, quickly give way; for instance, Bede relates that they come “in insulam” (52) [into the island] such that “grandescere populus coepit aduenarum” (52) [the population of the foreigners began to grow]. All internal division has been overwritten; the tribes are marked only by the fact that they are part “populus aduenarum”; they have become defined by their locality, inasmuch as they have come—*adveniverant*—from the continent to the island.

This kind of simplification continues throughout Bede’s recounting and in many ways mirrors the distinctions originally established in Gildas. Bede relates that “hostilis exercitus exterminatis dispersisque insulae indigenis domum reuersus est” (52) [with the indigenous people of the island having been exterminated or dispersed, the hostile army returned home]. While Bede’s passage shares the general outline, there is a marked change from Gildas’s narrative wherein the Britons are only able to rebound from the

depredations visited upon them “cum recessissent domum crudelissimi praedones” (98) [when the most cruel plunderers had returned home]. Each relates the return of the tribes to their *domum*, and yet the terms applied to the Germanic tribes are different. The pejorative force of Gildas’s superlative *crudelissimi praedones* has been replaced by the more neutral *hostilis exercitus*, which creates a symbolic link with Bede’s earlier description of the Saxons as a hostile “inuincibilem...exercitum” (50) [invincible army]. While still defined by their military position in Bede, they have become differentiated only as they are opposites, hostiles, to the Britons. When Gildas does retain a more neutral term for the Germanic hordes, Bede’s account follows suit. For instance, when recounting the exploits of Aurelius Ambrosius, both narratives retain the following: “Et ex eo tempore nunc ciues nunc hostes vincebant” [from that time, now the citizens now the enemy were victorious].⁴⁷ Bede’s account, then, depends on a tonal modification of the terms applied to the Germanic hordes that reduces the pejorative force of Gildas’s imagery and marks their evolution into hostiles, enemies.

This vague “othering” continues in passages with no parallel in Gildas’s *DEB*. After aligning themselves with the Picts, the Germanic tribes become a “hostile agmen” (62) [hostile battle-line]. Similarly, when the *pontifices* overcome them, they are referred to as “hostes” (64) [enemies]; and when mentioned as part of a summary they are grouped as “superatisque hostibus” (64) [the overcome enemies]. Any sort of geographical or tribal differentiation has been completely elided and the Germanic tribes become known simply by their contradistinction to the native Britons. While Bede does make one other specific tribal reference in the latter stages of his narrative, this differs

⁴⁷ This quotation is taken from Bede (54). Gildas, however, has the same: “Ex eo tempore nunc ciues, nunc hostes, vincebant” (98).

quite dramatically from the multiplicity we note before; the “Saxones Pictique” who “bellum...susceperunt” (62) [Saxons and Picts take up war] against the native Britons. While Bede is possibly making a clear claim to which tribe formed an allegiance with the Picts here, given the general ways in which Bede talks about the invaders it seems far more likely that *Saxones*, here, have become a catch word for all the Germanic tribes that have made their home *in insulam*. While it is undoubtedly true that Bede’s narrative creates a more complete narrative that depends on the naming of the Germanic tribes’ leaders, by describing the native lands and ethnic composition of such tribes, this specificity gives way quite quickly to a generalizing narrative that has much more in common with Gildas’s *adventus Saxonum* narrative.

Conclusion

In both Gildas and Bede, the basic events of the *adventus Saxonum* are the same. Germanic troops, having been invited by the native population, arrive in England to defend its borders. Such an aim, however, quickly gives way as they treacherously turn on their hosts and begin their violent conquest that leads to a settled population throughout England. While these elements are, on the whole, consonant, each work demonstrates the ways in which this divisive moment of English history was remembered. Gildas’s narrative, for instance, represents a careful and complex negotiation of history that depends on marginalization and depersonalization to create a narrative that simultaneously trumpets difference and suppresses individuation. What might be seen as a deficiency in Gildas’s narrative, the lack of personae associated with the *adventus Saxonum* and even a lack of specific dates themselves, however, serves a complicated rhetorical purpose that attempts to elide and rewrite the conquest in such a

way that its memory no longer poses a cohesive threat to Gildas's contemporaries. In Gildas's text, the past is literally cordoned off and dehumanized—Gildas's text subsumes the events of the *adventus Saxonum* under an elaborate system of word-play and imagery that vilifies the Germanic hordes and those who invited them. While undoubtedly Bede provides a more historically exact narrative, his text nonetheless manifests a similar impulse to rewrite the past. Instead of suppressing the past by cordoning it off, Bede evacuates the past of inherent violence by emphasizing its passing. Vortigern's role in the *adventus Saxonum* is dispersed more explicitly among the contemporary Britons and he becomes simply a genealogical marker of a former age; the homelands of the invaders are made to no longer exist—securing England from future threats from the continent. And yet, Bede's text cannot ultimately escape from Gildas's rhetoric as the Germanic tribes become simply those who are hostile to the Britons.

The Adventus Saxonum in Nennius

The *HB*, traditionally attributed to Nennius,⁴⁸ dates to the early ninth century—roughly a hundred years after Bede's *HE*—and represents an expansive retelling of the *adventus Saxonum* itself that includes new elements like Vortigern and Hengist's daughter Rowena's marriage, Vortigern's incestuous relationship with his daughter, and Merlin's famous divinations.⁴⁹ While Nennius's substantial revision of his source material would influence retellings of the *adventus Saxonum* for generations, the

⁴⁸ That Nennius was the author is not certain. See David Dumville, "The Historical Value of the *Historia Brittonum*," *Arthurian Literature* 6 (1986), 4-5 but more importantly David Dumville, "Nennius and the *Historia Brittonum*," *Studia Celtica* 10/11 (1975/1976), passim

⁴⁹ The *HB* is extant in some 35 manuscripts. Of those, the earliest version—Harleian MS 3859—dates, rather securely to 828/9. Introduction to John Morris, ed. and trans., *Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals* (London: Phillimore, 1980), 1. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically; the translations are my own. The date of the first edition of Nennius's work is a bit more difficult to ascertain, but is likely to be in the early ninth century. Morris, Introduction to *Nennius*, 2.

historical veracity of many of the augmentations found herein is doubtful. The question of the extent to which Nennius's historical sections—particularly those found in subsection of the Kentish Chronicle—are accurate ultimately hinge on his narrative method. In the prologue, Nennius suggests that the following work will depend on a “heaping together” of the various source material he has at hand.⁵⁰ On the one hand, such a method lends credibility to his claims about early Britain. Morris, for instance, states that “the historical concept of Nennius’ [sic] compilation is original, and startlingly modern”; he produced a kind of “modern selective source book” that served to provide a history that “was clearer than any narrative history written in early 9th-century Wales could have achieved.”⁵¹

While it is tempting to think of Nennius as simply a compiler of various materials and—as such—that the material he includes is virtually uncorrupted, David Dumville, among others, has reminded us that such an interpretation of Nennius's work is dangerous. Perhaps a bit strongly, Dumville claims that those who have employed Celtic sources, and particularly Nennius's *HB* “in the writing of fifth- and sixth-century history have not done the fundamental part of their homework and have then failed to appreciate the nature of the source-material which they have employed.”⁵² Although meant to evaluate the sustainability of then recent historical examinations of the Arthurian age by found in works like Leslie Alcock's *Arthur's Britain* and John Morris's *The Age of Arthur*, he goes on to contend the relative difficulties in using a source like the *HB* to

⁵⁰ Nennius's phrase is as follows: “Ego autem coacervavi omne quod inveni tam de annalibus Romanorum quam cronicis sanctorum patrum” (50) [I have, therefore, heaped together all those things that I found in the annals of the Romans and the chronicles of the holy fathers].

⁵¹ Morris, Introduction to *Nennius*, 6.

⁵² David Dumville, “Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend,” *History* 62 (1977), 174.

deduce anything about 5th and 6th century Britain;⁵³ for, as he rightly claims, “the *Historia Brittonum* is not even a reliable—much less contemporary—witness to the history of the seventh- and sixth century Britain.”⁵⁴ While Alcock’s and Morris’s approach is no longer in vogue, Dumville’s primary assertion, that Nennius’s work can hardly be thought of as reliable history, is key.

Perhaps more importantly, though, while Dumville finds solace in Nennius’s pioneering synthetic style that depends on the harmonization of various sources and which—he argues—would lay the groundwork for other Welsh historians of later dates, his work fails to account for the literary quality of Nennius’s history.⁵⁵ Because Nennius’s work is undoubtedly far from an objective, modern historical narrative, there can be little doubt that it is suffused with many of the same rhetorical strategies and techniques that I have outlined above in relation to the *adventus Saxonum*. Although his work is not the first to name the major players in the invasion, nor to inscribe the events with an indelible date, Nennius’s revisions display a remarkable expansion that constellates around the figure of Vortigern and the Germanic tribes. In this section I will argue that Nennius’s text functionally rehabilitates Vortigern’s role by deemphasizing his political faults and shifting blame even more squarely onto the indigenous Britons. In keeping with the *adventus Saxonum*, Nennius once again binarizes the Britons and the Germanic tribes. Instead, however, of denigrating the Germanic warriors or emphasizing their threat to the indigenous population, Nennius emphasizes their transmarine origin. Concomitant with such a reevaluation is the creation of an idea of Britain that depends on

⁵³ Leslie Alcock, *Arthur’s Britain: History and Archaeology, AD 367-634* (New York: Penguin, 1973) and John Morris, *The Age of Arthur: A History of the British Isles from 350-650* (New York: Scribner, 1973).

⁵⁴ Dumville, “Historical Value,” 19.

⁵⁵ As he states, “what we see [in Nennius’s work] is, in [his] view, a synchronizing history—a form with which students of Irish history and literature are already quite familiar.” Dumville, “Historical Value,” 5.

the exteriority of the invading hordes and is manifested through the language and personification of the incoming tribes themselves. These changes represent a synthetic expansion of the *adventus Saxonum* narrative that we see in both Gildas and Bede and begins the process whereby twelfth-century narratives as a whole become more expressly personal and individual.

Nennius's account reclaims Vortigern's name and more explicitly rehabilitates his role in the *adventus Saxonum*. For instance, he begins his account of the *adventus Saxonum* with the following:

Guorthigirinus regnavit in Brittonia, et dum ipse regnabat in Brittonia, urgebatur a metu Pictorum Scottorumque et a Romano impetu, nec non et a timore Ambrosii. Interea venerunt tres ciulae a Germania expulsae in exilio...Guorthigirinus suscepit eos benignus et tradidit eis insulam quae in lingua eorum vocatur Tanet, britannico sermone Ruoihm. (26)

[Vortigern ruled in Britain and while he was ruling in Britain, he was beset by a fear of the Picts and the Scots, as well as an attack from Rome, and not the least from a fear of Ambrosius. Meanwhile, three keels, having been driven into exile from Germany arrived...Vortigern received them, and bequeathed to them the island that in their language is called Thanet, in British Ruoihm]

From the outset, Nennius marks his narrative as separate from the Gildasian and Bedan tradition. Although Nennius writes his account in Latin just as Bede did, he relies explicitly on the Welsh spelling of Vortigern's name. For Bede's Latin transcription—Uurtigern—Nennius gives the typical Welsh rendering—Guorthegirn.

Undoubtedly this shift is a function of the text's proposed production in Wales; other typically Welsh names, like Vortimer, also retain Welsh spellings.⁵⁶ This rendering, nonetheless, signals a distinctive tonal change from both Gildas and Bede that is systemic in Nennius's account. Just as he retains Vortigern's Welsh name—and accordingly his

⁵⁶For instance, Gildas relates that “interea Guorthemir, filius Guorthigirn, cum Hengisto et Horso et cum gente illorum petulanter pugnabat” (72) [meanwhile, Vortimer, the son of Vortigern, was fighting petulantly with Hengist and Horsa and their people].

ethnicity—Nennius also reworks Vortigern’s motivation in accepting the aid of the Germanic horde. In Nennius’s retelling of the *adventus Saxonum* as found above, no mention of any invitation or order is present. Similarly, Nennius makes no mention of a council meeting at which the fate of the island is decided. Instead, the foreign keels, driven into exile, arrive without British invitation.⁵⁷ While Vortigern does ultimately accept their overtures *benigne*, Nennius emphasizes that the impetus for such an action is the pressure under which Vortigern has been placed. He faces a threat not only from tribes “Pictorum Scottorumque et a Romanico” but also from Ambrosius. Each of these threats sparks *metus* or even *timorem* in Vortigern. The repetition of various words for fear and intimidation work to emphasize the impending invasions that Vortigern faces and the fact that the invasion itself cannot be placed solely at his feet. Nennius seems to suggest, in the face of such threats, that it is understandable that Vortigern would have welcomed a group of warriors onto the island. While ultimately the fall of Britain will be Vortigern’s fault because of his love for Hengist’s daughter Rowena, here Nennius overwrites the tradition of invasion that had been initiated in Gildas’s text to minimize Vortigern’s political responsibility for the *adventus Saxonum* and to transform his motivation for seeking external aid into very human, and sensible terms.

Not only is Vortigern’s political responsibility limited and his motivation transformed into something more personal, but in Nennius’s account the burden of the *adventus Saxonum* rests just as much with the Britons. After driving the Germanic tribes from England in a series of battles, Vortimer—Vortigern’s son—falls, entreating his

⁵⁷ While this point has been referenced before, by M. Bridge in particular, her focus is not on the way that this represents a wholesale narrative shift that is symptomatic of Nennius’s view of the Conquest. Margaret Bridges, “The King, the Foreigner, and the *Lady with a Mead Cup*: Variations on a Theme of Cross-Cultural Contact,” *Multilingua* 18 (1999): 187.

warriors to “sepulchrum illius in portu ponerent a quo exierant, super ripam maris” (72) [erect him a tomb in the port over the bank of the sea from that which they had fled] so that he might incite his followers and ensure that the English “in alia parte portum Britanniae teneant et habitaverint” (72) [will never hold a port in any part of Britain, nor dwell here]. Unfortunately, however, his compatriots fail to heed his command and instead bury him elsewhere. Accordingly, the Germanic tribes arrive again and continue their settlement throughout England. The Britons stop the Germanic incursions because there was “nullus” [none] who would “illos abigere audaciter valuit” (72) [boldly resolve to expel them]. In this section, Nennius expands his focus largely beyond Vortigern’s personal responsibility; while not unique to Nennius *per se*—in many ways it is the same rhetorical move that I noted in Bede’s account—he nonetheless emphasizes the collective responsibility which the Britons have in the settlement of the Germanic tribes. Vortigern is no longer a political scapegoat to be chided for the coming of the Saxons; he has become part of a much larger political drama.

Perhaps more importantly, however, Vortimer’s attempts to be buried on the seashore imply the creation of a singular Britain, both geographically and politically, that stands counterpoised against any invasion; this conception is, in fact, integral to the way that Nennius reports the *adventus Saxonum* narrative. As I have noted, Nennius’s opening lines relate that “Guorthigirinus regnavit in Britannia, et dum ipse regnabat in Britannia” (67) [Vortigern ruled in Britain and during his rule in Britain he was under pressure]. While I mentioned this particular line in my earlier readings regarding the ways in which Vortigern’s motivations were rewritten, here the distinctive reference that Nennius makes to *Britannia* is key. While it is not unusual for Vortigern to be portrayed

as the leader of the Britons—although such a title is explicitly missing in Gildas, he is a king in Bede’s text—the emphasis that Nennius places on his demesne is unique. More than that, the repetition of *Brittannia* emphasizes not only Vortigern’s rulership and his place of prominence, but creates a marked differentiation between native and invader, a binary that depends not on military juxtaposition—the hostility of the invaders against the indigineous Britons—but one that depends on a spatial relationship, thereby insinuating the impropriety of the invaders’ actions and their usurpation of proper rule.

Nennius’s description of the settlement of the Germanic invaders also manifests this binary relationship. In this, Nennius’s account is much more robust than that which we find in Gildas or in Bede. Here Vortigern “tradidit eis insulam quae in lingua eorum vocatur Tanet, britannico sermon Ruoihm” (67) [gave to them the island which in their language is called Thanet, in the British tongue Ruoihm]. On the one hand, such a claim delimits the Germanic tribes’ incursion to a specifically delineated realm that is, by nature of its insular quality, marginal and partially excluded from Britain proper. On the other hand, in Nennius’s distinctive reference to the name of the island, a further binarization is at play. While the inclusion of the British name might ultimately be “added in order to help the reader,” as Nicholas Brooks has suggested,⁵⁸ it nonetheless separates the name of the island into two distinctive registers, one for “the invaders” and one for “the British.” In this Nennius makes a claim about the place itself. It has become a lost land that no longer belongs to Britain proper. It now has a Germanic identity.

This geographical allotment also emphasizes that Vortigern still seeks to maintain the unity of Britain, at least initially. By placing the Germanic tribes on an island on the east side of Britain, he has maintained a racially homogenous kingdom. Moreover,

⁵⁸ Brooks, *Anglo-Saxon Myths*, 83.

Nennius's detail emphasizes the limited scope of Vortigern's gift. They are not given lands properly belonging to the Britons in a literal sense and in no way has he given them something as substantial as the "eastern part" of the island. Such a minimization—just like the way Vortigern's motivation was changed—partially rehabilitates Vortigern's role in the invasion—at least initially. In these moments, Nennius portrays Vortigern as a relatively responsible leader who strives to protect a singular Britain and, reasonably, limits the holdings of the Saxon invaders.

The geographical binary is expanded even further in Nennius's personification of the Saxon invaders as they become explicitly linked with the transmarine. When first arriving in Britain, Nennius states that "venerunt tres ciulae a Germania expulsae in exilio" (67) [three keels came, having been driven out of Germany in exile]. While the detail about Germany emphasizes the alien nature of the invaders, the mention of the keels here adds a particularly important detail. Once again, Nennius's detail relies on the Old English word for ships—*ciulae*—that has been altered to fit the Latin context; as I mentioned above, the Old English word, *ceol*, was regularly rendered as the Latin *ciula*. The inclusion of the Old English word certainly has precedent as it appears in Gildas's narrative. There, however, it is coupled with a Latin cognate that restricts the meaning of the Old English word to a *navis*, or something like a warship; as Gildas relates they came in "tribus, ut lingua eius exprimitur, cyulis, nostra longis navibus" (97) [in three—in their language—keels, in ours warships]. More importantly, Gildas's translation keeps both linguistic systems visible, thus marking out—and emphasizing—the invaders as alien because of their linguistic difference. Bede's narrative dispenses with the linguistic play we see in Gildas and instead relies solely on the Latin translation of the Old English

word; there the invaders arrive “tribus longis nauibus” (50) [in three warships]. As I argued, while Bede’s narrative similarly restricts the intention of the invaders with the term *nauibus*, the inclusion of only the Latin phrase effectively elides the linguistic difference between these two peoples in order to project the current state of Britain. Here we see that Nennius uses the term specifically to personify the coming Germanic tribes. While doing so might seem to parallel Gildas’s dehumanizing impulse, no implicit denigration is present. Instead Nennius uses the term simply to emphasize their alien quality; they are defined, very explicitly, by their transmarine nature—coming from somewhere other than Britain.

This personification continues throughout the latter portions of Nennius’s narrative. When discussing the arrival of more Germanic troops to aid the already landed group, Nennius states that they arrived in “cum ciulis sedecim, et milites electi venerunt in illis” (69) [with sixteen keels, and chosen warriors came in them]; immediately thereafter Nennius relates that “in una ciula ex eis venit...filia Hengisti” (69) [in one of the keels came Hengist’s daughter]. Hengist continues to bring over more invaders; he “semper ciulas ad se paulatim invitavit, ita ut insulas ad quas venerant absque habitatore relinquere” (69) [always invited ships to him, little by little, so that they left the islands whence they came uninhabited]; and finally, “Et ipse legatos ultra mare usque in Germaniam transmittabant vocando ciulas cum ingenti numero bellatorum virorum (72) [he sent envoys across the sea and went across into Germany to summon keels with a vast number of fighting men]. With the exception of the third quotation that witnesses the desertion of their homeland—a detail also found in Bede—these instances lack the explicit personification present in the first mention of the Germanic invaders; and yet, no

mention of the Germanic troops is complete without an explicit reference to the ships in which they arrive. Even Rowena, the downfall of Vortigern and of Britain by extension, is expressly tied to a keel, to a *ciula*. The *ciula*, as a symbol of their transmarine quality, define the Germanic tribes; having *relinquerent* their homeland, they have become nomads, housed only in their ships.

Such a connection is even more explicit when the Vortimer moves against the Germanic invaders. After two quick victories, Nennius relates that “barbari victi sunt, et ille victor fuit, et ipsi in fugam versi usque ad ciulas suas mersi sunt in eas muliebriter intrantes” (72) [the barbarians were beaten, {Vortimer} was victorious, and {the Germanic tribes} turned in flight and, reaching for their ships, were drowned near them]. Nennius makes no mention of their homeland, nor of their return to the island home that had been granted to them—Thanet. In conjunction with an obvious attempt to align them with women in a form of degradation that questions their masculinity, Nennius once again explicitly links them with their keels. The two have become inexplicably bound; as Nennius reminds us time and again, the Germanic tribes and their ships are one.

To this point, I have argued that Nennius’s narrative marks a key revisionist shift that rehabilitates Vortigern’s role in the *adventus Saxonum*. His motivations have been changed, the not-so-subtle mockery of his name has been removed, political blame for the coming of the Saxons has been shifted to the Britons more generally, and his actions have become much more reasonable—he does not give up the entire eastern half of Britain from the outset. Concomitant with a revision of the characterization of this fallen British leader, Nennius also works to emphasize a unified notion of Britain that predated the coming of the Germanic tribes; Vortigern rules over Britain, the Germanic tribes are

transmarine aliens and not to be associated with Britain as a whole. Nennius's account, then, expands what had only been hinted at in Gildas and Bede.

By suggesting that Nennius's narrative rehabilitates the Vortigern of the early tradition, I in no way mean to suggest that he is entirely blameless. Nennius's account still relates Vortigern's responsibility for the Germanic expansion. He did cede control of "Canturguorale" or Kent (28); similarly under his watch Hengist "ciulas ad se paulatim invitavit" (69) [invited ships to himself, little by little]. His gift of Kent, in Nennius's work receives particular reprobation. It was ruled by "Gwyrangon" who "in scius erat quia regnum ipsius tradebatur paganis" (69) [knew not that his kingdom was being surrendered to the pagans]. While Vortigern's initial reaction to the arrival of the Germanic tribes is understandable, here Nennius demonstrates that his allegiance has shifted. No longer does he have the best interests of his people in mind; he instead will do anything that the Germanic tribes ask. The politically responsible Vortigern is no more.

This shift in Vortigern's political affiliation follows Vortigern's marriage to Hengist's daughter Rowena. As Hengist relates, "Ego sum pater tuus et conciliator tui ero, et noli praeterire consilium meum umquam, quia non timebis te superari a bulla homini neque a nulla gente, quia gens mea valida est" (69) [I am your father and I will be a councilor to you, and you will not disregard my council ever, because you will not fear that you will be overcome by any man or any people because my people are strong]. In Nennius's account Vortigern has become subservient to Hengist because of his marriage to Rowena, a fact which is made explicit in Hengist's paternal reference here. Perhaps more importantly, however, Hengist displays his authority by using the imperative.

While much of the speech is couched in the indicative, his recourse to *noli praeterire*—an imperative with a complimentary infinitive—demonstrates that Hengist is no longer under the control of Vortigern, but in fact acts above the king of the Britons. Britain itself is no longer Vortigern’s own—he no longer *regnabat in Britannia*.

Nennius casts Vortigern’s betrayal of his own people not as an act of ignorance, nor of political ineptitude; instead his shift is directly linked with his romantic infatuation with Hengist’s daughter Rowena. When she—who is “*puella pulchra facie atque decorosa valde*” (69) [a girl pretty of face and very beautiful]—arrives in one of the “*ciula*” (69) [keels], Hengist immediately institutes a “*convivium Guorthigirno*” (69) [a feast for Vortigern] and “*puellam iussit ministrare illis vinum et siceram*” (69) [ordered the girl to serve them wine and strong drinks]. During this banquet “*intravit Satanas in corde Guorthigirni, ut amaret puellam*” (69) [Satan entered into Vortigern’s heart, such that he would love the girl]. In the opening segments, Nennius emphasizes the woman’s appearance in a tautological statement about her beautiful face and her beauty more generally; as such, it is no surprise when, to win Rowena, Vortigern turns to Hengist and declares that he will do anything to have her—“*omne quod postulas a me impetrabis, licet dimidium regni mei*” (69) [all that which you ask from me, you will be granted; half my kingdom is permitted]. That initial ineptitude that witnessed Vortigern dividing his realm as soon as the Saxons arrived has been displaced to a much later moment; it has been transformed from a purely political moment, to a personal one that depends not only Vortigern’s stupidity, but his lust. Vortigern succumbs to his base desires and, in so doing, ensures the fate of his land.

From here, his descent becomes only more precipitous. He “super omnia mala adjiciens...accepit filiam sui uxorem sibi” (70) [adding to all his bad deeds, received his daughter as his wife]—an act for which he receives the censure not only of the Bishop Germanus, but of his entire people. Exiled from his realm and pushed further and further to the fringes, Vortigern is finally destroyed in a castle of his own name—*arx Guorthigirni*—found in the “in regione Demetorum, juxta flumen Teibi” (73) [region of the Demetians, on the river Teifi]. As Nennius relates “in quarta nocte arx tota mediae circa noctis horam per ignem missum de caelo ex improvise cecidit, ardente igne caelistic” (73) [on the fourth night, around midnight, the entire fortress, by means of a fire sent from heaven, suddenly collapsed while the divine fire burned]. Such a retelling links Vortigern’s punishment with a divinely ordained sanction against his illicit relationship with his daughter and his moral failings; the repetition of divine favor can be no accident.

Perhaps more importantly though, this episode also links him with the tyrant Benili who first appears in the Saint Germanus section of Nennius’s narrative. For after shunning many of Germanus’s advances and attempts to preach in his kingdom, God “ignis de caelo cecidit, et combussit arcem et omnes homines qui cum tyranno erant” (68) [smote the fortress with fires of heaven, and reduced it and all the men who were with [Benili] the tyrant to ashes]. Vortigern has, through his moral failings, become a great tyrant pushed to the fringes of Britain and eventually destroyed by divinely ordained retribution—by the very same *ignis de caelo* that consumed Benili; he has become the great tyrant that Gildas and Bede suggested he was. The important variation, however, is that here Vortigern is not that tyrant *a priori*. His initial actions, as Nennius’s narrative makes plain, were understandable and even moderate in their impact.

It is not until Rowena arrives that Vortigern's true descent into tyrannical leadership begins.

Even though his actions, and particularly his later incestuous relationship with his own daughter, cannot be discounted, the invaders play a much greater role in Nennius's retelling. As he relates, when faced with an embargo against food and clothing, and facing an end to the peace that had allowed them to remain in Thanet (28) Hengist quickly moves to secure his position; he was "doctus atque astutus et callidus" (69) [wise, crafty, and sly]. Not only does he invite more people to join him in Britain, a move sanctioned by Vortigern in defense of the realm, but he also sends for his own daughter. More than that, Hengist who "puellam jussit ministrare illis vinum et siceram" (69) [ordered the girl to serve them wine and strong drinks]; after this Vortigern cedes a substantial portion of his kingdom. Hengist orchestrates the meeting, and, by implication, precipitates Vortigern's fall. He invites his daughter, but places her in a position to win Vortigern's favor by making her serve the Britons. While Vortigern's role cannot be absolved completely, Hengist's part, and that of the Germanic tribes by extension, has been augmented and personalized, such that the fall of Vortigern has become a result of their prowess—both in military matters but also in the political arena. What had been a simple recounting of a precious few events has given way to a full, romantic retelling that involves the fall of a British ruler.⁵⁹

Conclusion

While each narrative of the *adventus Saxonum* adheres to the basic premise—namely that various Germanic tribes from the continent invaded Britain in roughly the

⁵⁹ It is interesting to note the exact opposite development in the Welsh historiographical tradition. As Dumville has argued, "After the early tenth century, Gwrtheyrn, as he is in Welsh, has practically disappeared from Welsh poetic and genealogical tradition." Dumville, "Sub-Roman," 183.

fifth century—none is without its own rhetorical and stylistic moves that ultimately result in vastly different narratives that must reconcile the displacement of an entire native people by an external interloper with the fact that that very interloper would eventually become the progenitor for a nation. While on a grand scope each narrative employs a providential model that ultimately subsumes the conquest under the narrative of God’s will, it is perhaps on the textual level that the intricacies of such a complex relationship are laid bare. By the time of Nennius’s narrative, we see the tyrant, Vortigern, transformed into a kind of tragic figure who is doomed by love itself. Perhaps more importantly, we see the uses to which the past can be put. For in the earliest of our histories, Gildas’s narrative vilifies the leader he suggests was responsible for the invasions and initiates a hierarchy that privileges the native Britons and denigrates the enemy Germanic hordes; such becomes a rallying cry for a kind of contemporary nationalist movement that seeks to avoid the mistakes of the past. In Bede, we see the apparently more complete and unbiased history of the events of the *adventus Saxonum* evacuate the past of its disruptive potential; the past becomes important only insofar as provides an origin for the present. Finally, Nennius’s narrative reimagines the events so as to mitigate Vortigern’s initial failings and suggests some alternative explanations for the outcome of the events; the Britons themselves, lust, and the guile of the Germanic invaders all contribute—surely not a surprise for a narrative that would link the contemporary Builth-Gwerththrynion genealogically with the fallen king.⁶⁰

While Nennius’s work represents the latest of what might be termed the early English historians and, along with Bede and Gildas, would have a profound effect on

⁶⁰ As Nennius relates, Vortigern is the progenitor of the line associated with “Fernmail ipse est, qui regit modo in regionibus duabus Buelt et Guorthigirniaun” (74) [Fernmail, who rules presently in the two regions Builth and Gwerthrynion].

later historians, the narrative of the *adventus Saxonum* was far from stabilized. In many twelfth-century historiographic productions, narratives of this invasion and conquest of Britain often display many of the same dynamics, particularly with reference to the characterization of Vortigern, as well as his relationship to the Britons more generally, and the Germanic invaders. It is to these productions that I will now turn.

Chapter 2

The *Adventus Saxonum* in the Twelfth-Century: William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon

The child of a Norman father and an English mother, William of Malmesbury produced the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* (*GRA*)—the first draft at least—ca. 1126 and would continue a steady process of revision that continued until his death in 1143.⁶¹ The *GRA* provides an accounting of Britain from the *adventus Saxonum* of the fifth century until the events of 1120. From its inception, the legacy of the *GRA* was secure; as Antonia Gransden has noted, more than twenty-five medieval manuscripts contain copies of this text.⁶² While primarily remembered for this work, William was nonetheless a prolific author. In addition to the *GRA* he also produced an ecclesiastical counterpart—entitled the *Gesta Pontificum*—and later updated his *GRA* with *Historia Novella*, on which he worked until his death in 1143; over twenty works have also been attributed to him, and his hand has been identified in manuscripts containing works by authors such as Vegetius, Martianus Capella, John Scotus, St. Anselm, and Bede, among others.⁶³

Writing at the same time, Henry, who served as the archdeacon of Huntingdon, produced

⁶¹ For a complete accounting of the production, see Mynors, Thomson, and Winterbottom who describe the composition of William's text as follows: "two drafts of the *GR* [sic] were written" until "about 1126"; these give what Mynors et al refer to as the T and A versions. Up until 1135, William then worked to complete the third version, which produced eventually gave us the C witnesses; finally, a renewed series of revisions and corrections would lead to the "archetype of our B version." Introduction to *William of Malmesbury: Gesta Regum Anglorum / The History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thompson, and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxiii. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically; the translations are my own.

⁶² Gransden, *Historical*, 179.

⁶³ Jean Blacker, *The Faces of Time: Portrayal of the Past in Old French and Latin Historical Narrative of the Anglo-Norman Regnum* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 3.

the *Historia Anglorum* (*HA*) largely in the first half of the twelfth-century (ca. 1129-1154); he died shortly thereafter (ca. 1156-64).⁶⁴ In a way rather similar to William of Malmesbury, he produced this text in a series, with ultimately six different versions produced in chronological order.⁶⁵ For his early history of Britain, he relied heavily on Bede, Nennius, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; his accounting of the *adventus Saxonum* relies quite heavily on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (*EH*).⁶⁶

As scholarship has demonstrated, these two historians are not linked by contemporaneity alone. Robert Hanning, for instance, has highlighted the fact that many twelfth-century historians utilized a providential model to govern their historiographic productions. Henry of Huntingdon, in particular, paired this with a cyclical, unbounded vision of history; as he relates “if [for Henry of Huntingdon] the overt regulating factor in the succession of reigns in Britain is God’s Providence, there is nonetheless a covert, even unconscious recognition of a cyclic pattern in history, a pattern which remorselessly regulates the life and death of realms in a manner analogous to fortune’s regulation of the lives and deaths of great men.”⁶⁷ More recently Kenneth Tiller has collapsed Hanning’s discrete structural models to claim that William and Henry—and all pre-Galfridian insular historians more generally—are united by their use of this providential and cyclical structural rubric—a model that, as Tiller argues, these historians would have inherited from Bede, or even from Gildas. Citing Henry of Huntingdon, Tiller states that “what for

⁶⁴ Henry of Huntingdon produced this text in a series, with ultimately six different versions produced in chronological order. These versions have been dated to 1129, 1138, 1146, 1149, and 1154 respectively. Introduction to Henry of Huntingdon’s *Historia Anglorum: The History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), lxvi. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically; the translations are my own.

⁶⁵ These versions have been dated to 1129, 1138, 1146, 1149, and 1154 respectively. Ibid.

⁶⁶ His composition has been described as inherently synthetic; he becomes, as Diane Greenway has called a “weaver” in light of Bernard Guenee’s work. As Greenway estimates, Henry was ultimately depended on other writers for roughly 75% of his text. Ibid., lxxxv.

⁶⁷ Hanning, *Vision*, 136.

Bede was the one-culture-shaping instance of a providential shift in *verus Israel* status became a full-blown cyclical vision of insular history, wherein successive cultural groups seize power through divine favour, only to lose it –and with it land and power—through their own sin and apostasy.”⁶⁸

Tiller is no doubt aware of the connection between Henry of Huntingdon and a more cyclical vision of history since the *HA* is the sole source for his claim; there can be no doubt that this is the primary structural feature of Henry’s work. From the outset, he organizes his narrative according to “the five plagues”; as he states, “quinque autem plagas ab exordio usque ad presens immisit diuina ultio Britannie, que non solum uisitat fideles, sed etiam diiudicat infideles” (14) [From the beginning up to the present, divine vengeance sent against Britain five plagues, which did not visit the faithful alone, but even distinguished the unbelievers]. Henry correlates each of these plagues with an invading, extra-insular, force that arrives in response to the fall of a populace. As Nancy Partner has claimed, “the theme of the five plagues serves to control the historical materials Henry selected from his authorities, to organize them into intelligible segments of a reasonably intelligible whole without, however, having much effect on the narrative.”⁶⁹ The Normans themselves, in Henry’s imagining, are not even free from such plagues. In book seven he relates that “patebit amodo quomodo et ipsos Normannos uindices quidem suos uariis cladibus afficere inceperit” (412) [from hereon it will be clear how He began to afflict the Normans themselves, his own avengers, with various disasters]. The Normans, just like all those who came before them, are subject to a

⁶⁸ Kenneth Tiller, *Layamon’s Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 52.

⁶⁹ Nancy Partner, *Serious Entertainments: The Writing of History in Twelfth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 25.

dynamic not dissimilar from Fortune's wheel; having fallen into decadence, they too receive divine reprobation.

Tiller's drive, however, to extend such a reading beyond the confines of a single work obfuscates the very real difference that exists, at the very least, between William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon. As I will show, William of Malmesbury rewrites the roles of both Vortigern and the Britons—who are juxtaposed with the cunning and noble Germanic invaders—to emphasize their moral and ethical failings and thus give justification for the *adventus Saxonum*. In so doing, he collapses the divide between the Normans and the English in order to highlight the perdurability of Norman authority and to tacitly suggest that the Norman victory at Hastings was, in fact, a return to rightful rule. Whereas William's narrative depends on their Germanic invaders' inherent nobility and cunning, Henry suggests that it is their possession of the land, their ability to marginalize the Britons, and their military prowess that authorizes their conquest—and other conquests by extension.

*William of Malmesbury and the Creation of a New Britain:
Vortigern*

From the outset, William of Malmesbury's characterization of Vortigern, and that of the Britons more generally, conforms to the idea of a providential historical model; within such a model, however, William suggests that both Vortigern's moral and ethical corruption authorized the conquest of Britain and, in so doing, challenges Nennius's tacitly recuperative model. While William's account lacks, in some ways, the kind of subtle linguistic play that was so prevalent in his source material, he is blunt in his condemnation when he states that

erat eo tempore rex Britanniae Vortigernus nomine, nec manu promptus nec consilio bonus, immo ad illecebras carnis pronus omniumque fere uitiorum

mancipium, quippe quem suiugaret auaritia, inequitaret superbia, inquietaret luxuria. (20)

[the king of Britain at that time was Vortigern by name, a man not prompt in action nor of good counsel; on the contrary he was prone to enticements of the flesh and a slave to nearly all the vices, naturally one whom avarice ruled, pride ruled and indulgence dominated.]

Whereas Bede reduced Vortigern to a virtual shadow and Nennius minimized his political responsibility to make him all but sympathetic, here William engages in an abrupt and personal tirade that is unprecedented and links his failure with both his political and personal ineptitude. Vortigern is a man *nec manu promptus nec consilio bonus*. Perhaps more importantly, he fails to lead his people properly and instead focuses solely on bodily pleasure. As William relates, Vortigern, “hic in tantis tumultibus rem paruiponderans, opesque regni comesationibus abliguriens, scortorum lenociniis deperibat” (20) [paying little attention to things amid such great disturbances and squandering the resources of the realm in feasts, he was lost to the allurements of harlots]. William’s description links Vortigern’s political failures with an ethical and personal component; in William’s version of events, Vortigern’s ill counsel alone does not make him a poor leader, but his concomitant inability to rise above the temptations of the flesh does; he is in all senses *omniumque fere uitiorum mancipium*. William, then, deliberately collapses Nennius’ partitioning in order to suggest that his failure was complete—both as a man and as a leader of the Britons—and without any redeeming qualities.

William expands this implicit corrective to the Nennian material further by emphasizing that not only has Vortigern failed as a leader and as a man, but also as a father. He relates, for instance, that “ut in Gestis Britonum legitur, filiam suam spe regni sollicitatam stupro fregerat et ex ea filium tulerat” (20) [as we read in the *History of the*

Britons, he violated his own daughter with illicit sexual relations, having seduced her with the hope of a kingdom, and produced a son from her]. As William's citation makes clear, this narrative of incest is not original, but has its root in Nennius's account.⁷⁰ And yet, in the *HB* Nennius, as I have demonstrated, delayed the narrative of this event in order to clearly separate Vortigern's political and personal failures. Here William makes it integral and primary in his representation of Vortigern, who, for William, is beyond redemption; he has become the epitome of failure and his leadership could only have culminated in the *adventus Saxonum*.

With Vortigern's ethical and personal values called into question from the outset, William also truncates Rowena's individual role in Vortigern's decline; no longer does this moment represent the turning point after which he begins his precipitous decline into debauchery. Instead, William's narrative suggests that his lust for her is simply a quotidian occurrence that, once again, proves his ultimate failure as the leader of the Britons. After Hengist arranges for his daughter to serve Vortigern, William relates that "ille, ut semper in feminarum decorum adhinniebat, statim et formae gratia et gestuum elegantia sautiatus animum, potiendi puella spem imbibit" (24) [he, because he always lusted after the beauty of women, was immediately smitten by the grace of her form and the elegance of her movement, conceived of a hope to acquire the girl]. There is no mention here of some external force overcoming Vortigern—of Satan entering his heart

⁷⁰ As Nennius relates, "Nam, super omnia mala adjiciens, Guorthigirinus accepit filliam sui uxorem sibi, et peperit ei filium" (70) [For Vortigern, adding to all these bad things, accepted his daughter as his wife, and produced a son by her].

in Nennius's terms;⁷¹ Vortigern's fondness for Hengist's daughter is not unprecedented since he *semper feminarum decorum adhinniebat*.

With Vortigern's lust reinscribed, William also links the loss of Kent to the king's character. As he relates, his willingness to cede Kent to the Germanic tribes is solely a result of the "regis imprudentia" (24) [the imprudence of the king]. The Rowena episode does not mark an explicit transformation in Vortigern's character, but the culmination of traits in evidence long before this episode happened. In this, William crafts an inherently synthetic narrative that collates a variety of information designed to demonstrate that Vortigern cannot be absolved of his responsibility in the *adventus Saxonum*. He is not politically savvy, nor is his lust for Rowena a rare moment facilitated by some external force; Vortigern, for William, is *a priori* a political, an ethical, and a paternal failure and the threat posed by his continued rule authorizes the *adventus Saxonum*. Lest Britain follow the same path as Vortigern, it must be cleansed. In this, the *adventus Saxonum* for William follows a providential model of history that was popularized in the twelfth century.

*William of Malmesbury and the Creation of a New Britain:
The Britons*

In Bede and Nennius this idea of the corruption of Britain was explicitly spread to the Britons themselves; in both, they were responsible for the *adventus Saxonum* just as much as was Vortigern. In William of Malmesbury, however, the Britons are noticeably absent; Michael A. Faletra, for instance, has suggested that "William of Malmesbury

⁷¹ "intravit Satanus in corde Guorthigirmi, ut amaret puellam" (69) [Satan entered into Vortigern's heart, such that he would love the girl].

ignores the ancient Britons almost completely.”⁷² In many ways this is true; aside from their regnal figureheads like Vortigern, Vortimer, Arthur, and Ambrosius, the Britons themselves are an ethereal populace described only in general terms. As William relates, for instance, after the depredations of those leaders that had designs on the Roman throne, all who remain in Britain are “semi-barbaros” (18) [half-barbarians]; although taught by the Romans how to defend themselves, they are no match for the *Scotti* who are able to strike almost at will against the native Britons (20). Instead, however, of arguing that William “ignores” them, I would suggest that he deliberately denies them a place in Britain to effect a kind of fantasy that would see the Germanic tribes taking over a largely uninhabited island.

In the invitation made to the Germanic tribes, William echoes Bede’s account and seemingly expands the responsibility beyond Vortigern himself. William relates that “placuit omnibus Anglos et Saxones ex Germania euocandos, (20) [it was pleasing to all for the Angles and Saxons to be summoned from *Germania*]. While the syntax is slightly different from Bede’s accounting—Bede does not, for instance, utilize a participial construction—William nonetheless follows Bede by mentioning that *omnes* of the leaders of Britain have decided that this course of action is acceptable.⁷³ In this, however, just as in Bede, the responsibility for the *adventus Saxonum* is clearly confined to the aristocratic counselors. The populace, the Britons themselves, are noticeably absent from the invitation given to the Germanic tribes.

⁷² Michael A. Faletra, “Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Norman Colonization of Wales,” *Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): 63.

⁷³ As Bede relates, “placuitque omnibus cum suo rege Uurtigerno ut Saxonum gentem de transmarinis partibus in auxilium uocarent” (48) [was pleasing to all, along with Vortigern, to invite the Saxon people from the lands across the sea in aid].

In the following sentences, William does appear to expand the frame of reference by referring to the messengers sent to the Germanic tribes. After the plan to invite the Germanic tribes was approved by *omnes*, William relates—in a passage unique to the *GRA*—that “mittuntur in Germaniam legati, spectabiles sane uiri et qui digne personam patriae induerent” (20) [they sent messengers into Germany—truly outstanding men and those who appropriately assumed the part of their homeland]. The plural verb—*mittuntur*—reaffirms that the political responsibility for this invitation extends past Vortigern, but William links it with Britain more generally; these *legati* in fact *personam patriae* [represent Britain]. William’s reference here to their *patria*, however, is noticeably different from the treatment meted out to Britain in accounts like those found in Bede. Instead of taking an active role—of doling out lands to the Germanic tribes themselves—the Britons are subject to the whims of their leadership. The *patria* supercedes the people themselves. The *legati* do not go forth on behalf of the Britons *per se*, but of the country itself. In this, the Britons possess no personal autonomy and are only able to respond to those decisions made without their consent; in crafting the Britons as such, William dramatizes the effect of Vortigern’s rule. His corruption and his failure can only be followed without question and is thus all the more dangerous.

In much the same way, the Britons themselves are unable to take any truly active role when the Germanic tribes arrive. As William states that “a rege imperititae gratiae, a populo effusus favor, data fide acceptaque, et tradita Tanatos insula incolatui eorum subuentum” (22) [gifts were bestowed on them by the king, favors showered on them by the people with pledges of loyalty given and accepted, and the island of Thanet was bequeathed to the foreigners for their aid]. While the Britons are mentioned, William

only does so indirectly. The Britons do not heap their favor on the Germanic tribes; only a more general populace does this. Perhaps more importantly, the sentence is rife with passives which serves to underscore the limited role that the Britons themselves can play in the events of the *adventus Saxonum*. For William, Providence has already determined the course of actions, necessitated by Vortigern's failure, and thus they can only stand idly by.

This inactivity, however, is taken to a different symbolic level because William restructures the events of the *adventus Saxonum* in a way that ultimately denies the Britons any sort of lasting, centralized place—and concomitant role—in the development of Britain as a whole; in fact, throughout the sections devoted to the *adventus Saxonum*, William actively removes the Britons from their land and from his history more generally. After Hengist's successful campaign against the Britons and his continued accrual of lands, for instance, he invites Vortigern and his retainers to a feast; here he incites them to battle. William relates that “ita Britones ad unum omnes iugulati animas inter uina uomuere; rex ipse captus datis tribus prouintiis libertatem redemit, seruitutem exuit” (26) [thus all the Britons to a man, with their throats slit, vomited out their souls among their wine; the king himself, having been captured, bought back his freedom by giving away three provinces, cast off servitude]. On the one hand, this particular passage—unprecedented as it is in the early tradition—once again emphasizes Vortigern's ill counsel. He chooses to attend this event despite the inroads that Hengist has made against the Britons more generally; he is also unable to prevent his men from drinking so much that they become vulnerable. On the other hand, this moment represents an ignominious—though fitting for William—end to the Britons' resistance

and to Vortigern. The members of his retinue die in squalor, heaped together in their own blood and wine and, in the end, unburied. While Vortigern is able to make an escape, he is never mentioned again throughout the entirety of the *GRA*. His legacy is the fall of his men and the loss of lands to the Germanic tribes. Proven completely ineffectual, Vortigern fades from English history in a pool of vomit and failure never to be seen again; neither the pages of William's history nor the land of Britain itself remember him because there is no tomb nor castle to claim Vortigern's body as there was in Nennius's history.

Perhaps more importantly, this is the first substantive reference to the Britons more generally that William has provided in his sections on the *adventus Saxonum*. They have been named explicitly, only to die unburied because they followed their flawed leader. While it is true that they reappear later in the narratives of Vortimer, Aurelius, and Arthur's resistance, such references are short-lived. Vortimer, for instance, having found "se Britonesque suos Anglorum dolo preuerti cerneret, ad expulsionem eorum mentem intendit" (26) [that he and his fellow Britons were outstripped by the deceit of the English, sought to expel them]; similarly, "Britonum robur emarcuit, spes imminutae retro fluxere; et iam tunc profecto pessumissent, nisi Ambrosius, solus Romanorum superstes, qui post Vortigernum monarcha regni fuit, intumescens barbaros eximia bellicosi Arturis opera pressisset" (26) [the strength of the Britons diminished, their diminished hopes receded; most assuredly they would have fallen to ruin, had not Ambrosius, the sole remaining Roman who was the ruler of the kingdom after Vortigern, overwhelmed the growing barbarian hordes with the excellent aid of the bellicose Arthur]. Stripped of their lands and deprived of their regency over Britain alone, they

can only be defined by their opposition to the emergent English power. They no longer have a place in William's Britain, a point that is given a literal corollary in William's reference to the geography of Britain. When relating Cewlin's attacks on the Britons, William states that he "in confragosa saltuosaque loca hodieque detrusit" (40) [drove them into the rough and wooded places where they are today].

William goes so far as to deny the Britons any sort of lasting legacy beyond the remnants of a few material possessions. When discussing their flight from a combined force of Picts and Scots, William relates that "Turbati insulani, qui omnia tutiora putarent quam prelio decenerere, partim pedibus salutem querentes fuga in montana contendunt, partim sepultis theauris, quorum plerique in hac aetate defodiuntur, Romam ad petendas suppetias ire intendunt" (18) [thrown into confusion, some of the islanders, who supposed that there was more security than they saw in battle, sought out on foot the mountains in flight; others, with their treasures having been buried—many of which are being excavated in this age—intended to go to Rome in order to seek aid]. Once again, as a population they lack any sort of definable identity, beyond, of course, their occupation of the island—they are simply *insulani*. Just as in Hengist's feast and concurrent slaughter, the Britons leave behind no lasting memory. Their bodies, in both instances, inhere not in the land; only those objects—*thesauri*—which they cast off in flight remember the Britons. The objects they leave behind encode their abject failure—their inability to defend Britain, their need to flee from invasion—into the very land of Britain itself.

William counterpoises this burial motif against the very real, and honorable, burial of the Romans themselves, implicitly suggesting their superiority over the native Britons. In the opening sections of book one, he also makes reference to burial; as he

relates “denique Seuerus et Constantius, imperatores amplissimi, ambo apud insulam diem functi et supremo sunt honore funerati” (16) [then Severus and Constantius, most noble of rulers, both having died on the island, were buried with the greatest of honor]. Whereas the Britons were only defined by their flight and by the objects that they left behind, here William relates that the Roman leaders are buried bodily and *honore*; they do not disappear into the hills but are made to inhere in the very landscape itself, such that William might resurrect them and ensure that their *memoria not sepeliretur ad infinitum*. Just like Vortigern, the Britons themselves are erased from the history of the island and remain not amid its very foundations; that is a position for the Romans and for the Germanic tribes who would replace them.

To stop, then, at identifying William’s adherence to a providential model that was popular in twelfth-century historiography limits our understanding of the interpretative practices underlying his narrative. For embedded within William’s providential model that links the fall of Britain with Vortigern’s own failures, William reimagines the past in such a way that the native Britons can be erased and written over. While the Britons themselves have no explicit role in the *adventus Saxonum*, aside from their passive acceptance or ineffectual resistance, their erasure is a necessary condition for William’s narrative of the emergent English past to occur. Accordingly, the Britons are removed from a centralized position—and made to occupy the outlying areas—and can only be defined by their opposition to the English, lacking any definitive agency in the march of history. Perhaps more importantly, they leave not a lasting legacy but humiliation in their wake. In this, William creates fiction wherein the Britons can be replaced by the English.

*William of Malmesbury and the Creation of a New Britain:
Hengist, Horsa, and the Germanic Tribes*

With Vortigern's moral and ethical slippage necessarily augmented as part of the overarching providential model, Hengist and Horsa—and the Germanic people more generally—are largely transformed into admirable figures who exploit a fallible Vortigern and endure as foundational monuments. Subtending such a portrayal, however, is an overriding principle of integration that links the Germanic peoples explicitly with the present moment and marks the culmination of William's narrative; the *adventus Saxonum*, for William, marks not a single revolution of Fortune's unending turn, as Tiller has argued, but the defining historical, and ethnic, origin for his twelfth-century present.

From the outset, William of Malmesbury's narrative participates in the trend I first noted in Nennius wherein Hengist and his brother become members of Germanic nobility. Both he and Horsa are, as William relates just after introducing them, “*commodae indolis fratribus haud obscura stirpe apud suos oriundis; erant enim abnepotes illius antiquissimi Woden, de quo omnium pene barbararum gentium regium genus lineam trahit*” (22) [brothers of suitable innate quality, born of a lineage not unknown among their own people; for they were great-great grandsons of that venerable Woden, from whom the houses of nearly all the royal barbarian peoples trace their lineage]. William's use of understatement emphasizes the particular nobility of the invaders by referring to their *haud obscura stirpe* and by referencing their *commodae indolis*. Similarly, William modifies Bede's Germanic genealogy by referencing their forbearer, Woden; Woden is not simply the progenitor of many royal Germanic families, but is *antiquissimi* [venerable], lending a certain prestige to the brothers.

Of course, their lineage and the attendant prestige are only matched by their innate cunning. William relates, for instance, that Hengist is “*non minus acer ingenio*

quam alacer in prelio” (25) [none the less sagacious in character than courageous in battle]. Hengist is not simply to be recognized by his fortitude in battle, but his savvy. Such a trait is once again operative in the way that he orchestrates Rowena’s seduction of Vortigern. As in Nennius, Hengist sets up events such that she might “regis accumbentis oculos pasceret” (24) [feed the eyes of the king, who reclined at the table]. Although this passage shares much with the early tradition, William modifies his discussion of the land grant afforded to Hengist in payment for his daughter’s hand. As William relates, he “astu primo negare, tam humiles nuptias rege indignas allegans; postremo, quasi grauatus, in sententiam transit, totam Cantiam pro munere accipiens” (24) [first refused cunningly, asserting that such a match was unfitting for a king; finally, as if he were reluctant, he conceded, accepting the whole of Kent as a gift]. By drawing out this scene, William draws attention to Hengist’s political maneuverings; he—*astu* [astutely]—first flatters the king, only to secure what was his ultimate plan—the kingdom of Kent. In these instances, Hengist—and his brother by extension—emerge as particularly shrewd leaders who are able to take advantage of the king’s *imprudencia* and secure holdings throughout the country for him and his kinsmen. It is this political acumen that authorizes his holdings and the settlement of the Germanic tribes throughout Britain.

Perhaps more importantly, William of Malmesbury highlights the regnal approval of the Germanic tribes’ settlement throughout Britain in order to stress the rectitude of these land grants. Not only is the kingdom of Kent lawfully given to Hengist, but his holding of the land is authorized, according to William, by Guorongus’s poor reign; for it is in Kent “ubi iam dudum omnis iustitia sub cuiusdam Guorongi laborabat regimine” (24) [where all justice had languished for a long time under the rule of a certain

Guorongus]. Similarly, when the Germanic tribes capture Northumbria, William deliberately points out that they do so while sailing around Britain en route to the Orkney islands “rege coniuente ipsi” (24) [with the king himself turning a blind eye to it]. Vortigern also authorizes the influx of more Germanic tribes; Hengist, “abutens regis imprudentia, persuadet uti a Germania fratrem et filium uirtutis uiros euocet” (24) [taking advantage of the king’s imprudence, convinced him to call forth from Germany his brother and son—men of virtue]. In these instances, the Germanic tribes accrue these holdings and expand their numbers with either the implicit or explicit blessing of the king. In fact, the Germanic tribes also meet with the approval of divine Providence in William’s narrative. As he relates, “paulatim cedentibus accolis per totam se insulam extendere, simul Dei non aduersante consilio in cuius manu est omnium imperiorum mutatio” (26) [with the natives withdrawing little by little and with divine Providence not opposing {the Germanic tribes}—in whose hand is the change of every power—they extended themselves throughout the whole island]. The Germanic tribes’ possession of Britain, then, has been sanctioned by both the king and by divine Providence itself. For William, the tribes are not usurpers.

That is not to say that Hengist is above reproach; as I mentioned above, William does relate that he carried out the rather graphic slaughter of Vortigern and his followers at a banquet held in their honor. And yet, even here William excuses his behavior; as he relates, this murder is simply carried out on account of “uitio quodam humani ingenii ut quo plus habeas plus ambias” (26) [a certain sin of human nature wherein the more you have the more you want]. Hengist’s actions in this moment, while vicious, are not without their precedent in human behavior as a whole. While Hengist is subject to a

bloodthirsty disposition, his actions are on the whole lawful, and even his faults can be explained away because he is human; such a characterization stands in stark contrast to that of the leader of the Britons whose faults would brook no justification.

Without the ideological baggage of conquest, violence, and murder, Hengist—for William—becomes a foundational figure who can be used for temporal reference. Relating the advances of his son, William states that the principality of Northumbria was brought under Kentish rule “post mortem Hengesti sexagesimo” (60) [in the sixtieth after the death of Hengist]; similarly, when discussing the rise of Penda in Mercia, he relates that it was “post mortem Hengesti anno centesimo tricesimo nono” (108) [in the one hundred and thirty-ninth year after the death of Hengist]. In both of these instances, the name and date of Hengist’s death has been memorialized as a calendrical marker for the present. Whereas Vortigern has been all but replaced in the memory of Britain, William has created Hengist as a monument to the rise of the English.

This memorializing impulse that seeks to enshrine Hengist as a marker for the development of Britain is key to understanding the ways in which the Germanic tribes are portrayed. While, like the Britons, they are only glimpsed in passing, their portrayal is far more positive. At the outset, William maintains the narrative of transference that Bede first inaugurated; for it is, “valedicentes igitur aruis genitalibus, renuntiantes parentum affectibus” (20) [therefore bidding farewell to their birthlands and renouncing the love of their parents] that the Germanic tribes have arrived in Britain. Instead of simply marking a one to one transference here, William suggests the formation of a new singular collective that has no previous kin-ties to the continent.

In addition, William's narrative minimizes the difference between the tribes in a way that ultimately creates a global community that can still obtain in twelfth-century England. As I related above, one of Bede's interpretative moves was to parse the Germanic tribes into individual elements so that he could then transfer them wholesale onto Britain and create an indelible map of migration still relevant for contemporary England. In the twelfth century, however, such an individual division of the Germanic tribes would not hold the same value; Britain was no longer a divided kingdom but one united under an Anglo-Norman crown. Accordingly William relates that while the tribes maintain a Bedan origin they are all made up of tribes from "terra quae trans oceanum Britannicum...iacet" (22) [the land which lies across the British ocean] and "Germania vocatur, licet multis prouintiarum limitibus distincta" [which is called Germany, even though it is divided by the many boundaries of provinces].

Each tribe has, for William, a single national origin, and it is this unifying ethnic element that subtends the major global communities important to the historical *imaginaire* and the political reality of the twelfth-century world. For from Germania come men who "sedes armis uendicent, sicut Wandali, qui olim protrierunt Affricam; sicut Gothi, qui possederunt Hispaniam; sicut Longobardi, qui adhuc obsident Italiam; ut Normanni qui partem Galliae armis domitam incolentes uocauerunt Normanniam" (22) [won homes by force of arms, thus the Vandals who long ago took over Africa; thus the Goths, who took hold of Spain; thus the Lombards, who still hold Italy; and thus the Normans who call that part of Gaul which they conquered by force of arms and now dwell in Normandy]. Each major medieval community, whether that be in Spain, Africa, Italy, or Normandy has as its controlling element a Germanic origin; for William, the

coming of the Germanic tribes into England effectively connects them with a heritage that stretches beyond the insular confines of Britain. Perhaps more importantly, this ethnic origin allows William to construct a fiction of continuity between fifth-century Britain and twelfth-century England. The coming of the Normans in 1066, in this construct, does not represent an ethnic and historical rupture in English rule, but a return to this singular, foundational ethnic group. The Normans, in this formulation, are fundamentally linked to the English who had ruled Britain prior to 1066. While undoubtedly events of that day are more complicated, as I will show later, the basic ethnic view William displays here is key for charting the development of the *adventus Saxonum* tradition.

It is this ethnic principle that, in many ways, explains why William saw fit to modulate, change, or even rewrite the events of the *adventus Saxonum*. For to chart the ascendancy of the Germanic tribes and their rightful rule in the land, he must relate the failure of the Britons and the impropriety of their rule; more than that, in marginalizing and removing the Britons from their own central location—both historically and geographically—he can create the fiction of a new Britain that is rightly overtaken by the Germanic tribes. Instead of marking simply one cog in the cyclical pattern of history, Hengist and Horsa become the apex; they are, for William, noble ancestors, the rightful rulers of England, who operate—whatever their flaws—with a divine mandate. William's history, then, depends on the continuity that exists between this fifth-century moment and his own twelfth-century present; for the Germanic tribes themselves become a kind of deliberate precursor to the Anglo-Normans and their conquest in 1066 becomes a return to lawful reign.

*Henry of Huntingdon and the Metaphor of Conquest:
The Britons*

Henry of Huntingdon refuses to make the same kind of claim about the perdurable nature of Germanic rule throughout Britain and large portions of the medieval world. On the one hand, this is largely because his narrative depends not only on a providential model of history similar to William of Malmesbury, but also on a cyclical vision of history that sees the Norman conquerors of England subject to the very same vices and divine retribution in the course of their reign. On the other hand, however, it is also largely because Henry's narrative is—on the whole—much more conservative in its augmentation of source material than William's. From the outset, for instance, Henry of Huntingdon quotes Bede's *EH* when he describes the invitation to the Germanic tribes. As there, it was pleasing “omnibus cum rege suo Wirtigerno, ut Saxonum gentem de transmarinis partiibus in auxilium uocarent” (76) [to all, along with their king Vortigern, that they should call forth the Saxon people from across the seas in aid]. Similarly, Henry narrates their arrival as follows: “inuitata a rege prefato, Britanniam tribus longis nauibus aduehitur” (78) [having been invited by the aforementioned king, they arrived in Britain in three long warships]; finally their settlement is pulled verbatim from Bede as “in orientali parte insulae iubente eodem rege locum manendi” (78) [by order of the king, they were to remain in the eastern part of the island]. Although here Henry maintains the oblique references to Vortigern—who appears first as Wirtigerno, and then solely as the “rege prefato” and “eodem rege”—such rhetorical effects, which were so important in Bede, are immediately undercut by Henry's mention of Vortigern's marriage to “filiam Hengeisti paganam” (80) [the pagan daughter of Hengist] and his statement that “Dicitur etiam quod ad cumulum dampnationis sue propriam filiam suam duxerit, et ex ea filium

genuerit” (80) [it is even said that he led his very own daughter to the peak of his own damnation, and begot a son on her]—both of which are culled from Nennius’s *HB*.

Because of the synthetic nature of Henry’s account, Bede’s erasure of Vortigern from the sweep of insular history cannot be fully carried out.

Henry’s strict adherence to a providential and cyclical model of history and his conservative approach to the early English tradition largely limit his contribution to the narrative tradition of the *adventus Saxonum*. And yet, certain figurative moves made in service to his overarching narrative are key to understanding not just how he thinks about the *adventus Saxonum*, but how he narrated conquest and resistance more generally throughout the *HA*. For instance, he amplifies the geographical mapping that had already been a staple of the early tradition; similarly, he augments his description of the military superiority of the Germanic tribes both in terms of their personal weaponry, as well as in the competence of their soldiery. For Henry, this kind of geographical domination and military superiority, as I will show, become the defining terms by which he understands conquest.

In his account of the *adventus Saxonum*, Henry geographically marginalizes the Britons by augmenting an already pervasive rhetorical trope that he inherited from Bede and Nennius—that is, the association of the Britons with the forests and woodlands. Henry, for instance, quotes Bede and relates that after the Germanic tribes had formed an alliance with the Picts, many of the Britons “pauperem uitam montibus, siluis, uel rupibus arduis, suspecta semper mente agebant” (82) [spent their miserable lives in the mountains, the forests, or among the high cliffs, always with a suspicious mind]. While such a trope could have been founded in some sort of reality, in Henry’s retelling it

nonetheless epitomizes the triumph of the Germanic army inasmuch as they are able to push the Britons to the very edges of their realm, into those areas otherwise uninhabited—*montibus, siluis, rupibus arduis*. Once again Henry quotes Bede when he makes reference to the Britons and their residence within the forested and otherwise marginal spaces; after the depredations of the Germanic warriors and the Picts, the Britons “*emergentes de latibulis...animosque resumere*” (82) [emerging from the hidden places...resumed their lives]. In these two instances, Henry relies on Bede’s account in the *EH* and, in so doing, replicates his metaphorical connection between the Britons and marginal spaces which he uses to suggest the particularly pitiful state in which they live.

While Henry would find precedent for such a description in Bede’s *EH*, he amplifies such a rhetorical description by repeatedly linking the Britons with such spaces at key moments. For instance, when they are once again the victim of external invasion, the Britons beseech Rome for aid. When Rome fails to provide any assistance, the Britons turn to God, who rewards them with the strength and courage to fight back. They “*exiliunt igitur de montibus, et latebris, et siluis, irruentesque in Scotos et Pictos undique ceperunt*” (72) [therefore, burst forth from the mountains, the hidden places, and the forests, and, charging into the Scots and the Picts, seized {them}]. Here Henry emphasizes their occupation of these marginal spaces by providing a catalogue of obscure locales. The Britons, however, occupy these kinds of spaces alone; Vortigern himself also turns to the forests. On the run from Germanic tribes, “*Rex autem Gortigernus in occidentali parte Britannie inter prerupta montium et siluarum omnibus exosus degebat*” (82) [moreover King Vortigern, hateful to all, endured in the western part of Britain among the rugged places of the mountains and the forests]. The figurehead for the

Britons in Henry's retelling—whose role in Briton is emphasized even more by the inclusion of his title—is here linked with the very same forests and mountains fastnesses that the Britons have been made to inhabit. Similarly, as time proceeds, duke Aelle arrives at *Cymenes ore* and meets with fierce resistance. After finally crumbing before the Germanic tribes, the Britons have no recourse but to once again flee “ad proximum nemus” (90) [to the nearest forest]. Although the term *nemus* here varies in its connotations from the *silvae* used before, this particular moment nonetheless is consonant with Henry's spatial vision. In a very real sense, the forests and other marginal spaces provide a unique and effective locus of safety to which the Britons can turn in moments of violent aggression; Henry's text creates a metaphorical complex that explicitly joins the Britons with their forests and other hiding places on the margins of Britain.

In many ways, this metaphor reaches its most important manifestation in the moments just before the Germanic invasion; for although Henry here quotes, verbatim, Bede's language for the invitation, he depends explicitly on this link between the Britons and the marginal spaces of Briton to set the stage. As he relates, “Rursum igitur ex more Britanni laetebras et siluas et saltus repetunt. Postea uero *inierunt consilium quid agendum, ubi querendum esset presidium, ad euitandas uel repellendas tum feras tamque creberrimas gentium aquilonalium irruptiones*” (76) [therefore they sought once again the hiding places and forests and narrow passes out of the habit of the Britons. Afterwards, however, they sought counsel on what ought to be done, where help ought to be sought to shun or repel such savage and frequent eruptions of those northern

peoples].⁷⁴ Once again, Henry associates the Britons with the marginal spaces—the *latebras et siluas et saltus*—and in so doing draws particular attention to their residence there with the slow pacing and by the repeated conjunctions. Perhaps more importantly, that they turn to these fastnesses is ultimately done *ex more*—from habit. Henry here draws attention to the clear and marked relationship between these spaces and the Britons as endemic. That such a moment is followed immediately by a discussion of their need for external aid demonstrates that the Britons were, *a priori*, not in possession of the island. In other words, Henry of Huntingdon uses this metaphoric trope to suggest that the Britons are destitute and dispersed; they are not even in possession of their land, and thus the claims made by the Germanic tribes are, in some ways, justified.

Although Ælle’s reign in Sussex postdates the immediate events of the *adventus Saxonum*—Henry describes it as happening “anno tercio post mortem Hengisti” (92) [in the third year after the death of Hengist]—here the forest no longer affords the Britons the kind of protection that it had previously. Although Ælle’s assault meets with staunch resistance from the Britons, they ultimately cannot stand up against the continued assault of Ælle’s Germanic tribesmen; as Henry relates:

Semper uero dum assilirent, instabant eis Britones a tergo, cum uiris sagittariis et amentatis telorum missilibus. Dismissis igitur menibus gressus et arma dirigebant in eos pagani. Tunc Britones eis celeritate prestantiores, siluas cursu petebant, tendentibusque ad menia, rursum a tergo aderant. (92)

[Always, however, whenever they made an assault, the Britons closed on them from the rear with the violence of arrows and with missiles of strung spears. Therefore the pagans turned their steps from the abandoned walls and their arms on Britons. Then the Britons, outstanding in their speed, sought the woods with hast, and then, with {the Germanic warriors} making for the walls, they appeared from the rear.]

⁷⁴ The material here included in italics, as Greenway notes, has been culled from Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*; the material without such typographical distinction is unique to Henry, and of particular relevance here.

While in the strictest sense the forest here still operates as a refuge from the Germanic military might, it more properly serves as a staging ground that allows the Britons to regroup and then launch a counteroffensive against the Germanic warriors. In this, the forest becomes a site of resistance, and—at least initially—an effective one wherein the Germanic warriors “*fatigati sunt*” (93) [were harassed]. It shortly gives way however, as Ælle’s warriors “*duas partes exercitum diviserunt, ut dum una pars urbem expugnarent, esset eis a tergo contra Britonum excursus bellatorum acies ordinata*” (92) [divided their army into two parts, so that while they attacked the city, one part from them would be arrayed in a battle-line of warriors against the charge of the Britons]. In this, even the most cunning of ploys is ultimately ineffective; the Germanic warriors’ superior force, as well as their personal stratagem, cannot be countered by the Britons; even the forests themselves cannot provide a refuge for them. What had been a perennial safe space is here stripped of its potential to protect and aid the Britons in their fight against the Germanic tribes. Dominion of Britain has passed from the native Britons.

Henry has expanded the trope found in the earlier traditions to define the Britons and to chart their resistance to the Germanic tribes. Not only does such a metaphor bespeak the superiority of the Germanic tribes—insomuch as they can force the native population to the margins of their own country—but Henry also uses it to suggest that the rightful possession of the island itself had passed beyond the control of the Britons before the Germanic tribes had arrived. For Henry, the Britons were from the beginning a dispersed population without any legitimate claim to their own island. In contrast, the Germanic tribes are able to take an active role in the landscape itself. They can occupy a centralized position, and cleanse the marginal spaces of any inherent threat. While, then,

we can point to the providential and cyclical structural principle in Henry's account, embedded therein is also an inherently rhetorical and figurative description of Britain more generally that Henry uses to map invasion and resistance.

*Henry of Huntingdon and the Metaphor of Conquest:
Hengist, Horsa, and the Germanic Tribes*

This marginal description of the Britons and the concomitant destruction of the safety this space afforded to them is given a very literal and graphic corollary when Henry relates how the Britons stood against the Germanic tribesmen after the death of “flos iuuenum Gortemerus” (85) [Vortimer, the flower of youth]. Herein the Britons meet with a gruesome death; “Recentes quippe qui superuenerant et uiri electi erant, securibus et gladiis horribiliter corpora Britonum findebant, nec tamen cesserunt, donec quatuor duces eorum prostratos et cesos uiderunt” (86) [those fresh troops who just arrived and those chosen men cleaved the bodies of the Britons horribly with their axes and swords, nor did they cease until they saw their four leaders knocked down and smote]. On a purely superficial level, this event explicitly links bodily mutilation with dominance and subservience and effectively symbolizes the sheer power and might of the Germanic warriors in a way that recalls the fall of the forest spaces. Within such a description, however, is encoded a kind of metonymic description of the Germanic warriors that persists throughout Henry's recounting of the *adventus Saxonum*. Here, for instance, Henry parses the very means through which the Germanic tribes carry out their slaughter of the Britons; for they do not simply mow down the Britons but gash them *securibus et gladiis*.

From the very beginning of the *adventus Saxonum* narrative, Henry clearly marks this dual weaponry—axes and swords—as the key trait of the Germanic tribes; in fact, he

reserves this pairing solely for the Germanic warriors. It recurs once again when the Germanic warriors face the Picts and Scots; as Henry relates, when the Picts and Scots “pilis et lanceis pugnant, isti uero securibus gladiisque longis rigidissime decertant, nequierunt Picti pondus tantum perferre, sed fuga saluti sue consuluerunt” (78-80) [fought sternly with javelins and lances, whereas {the Germanic tribes} fought sternly with axes and long swords, they were unable to endure such a force, and so sought to save themselves in flight]. Whereas it would be tempting to see the technological advantage going to the long-range weapons of the Picts and Scots, Henry counters these expectations. In Henry’s depiction, the close-combat weapons of the Germanic tribes are not a hindrance. They perfectly suit the Germanic warriors who wade into battle equipped only with weapons of brute force. In this instance and the preceding, these axes and swords become material symbols of the might of the Germanic warriors and, by extension, the means through which they can overcome the native Britons—through brutality and force.

Similarly, Henry describes the Germanic army in hyperbolic terms to highlight their military might. Although Henry retains Bede’s description of the Germanic armies as inherently invincible initially, he nevertheless expands on it throughout the *HA*. Bede, for instances, relates that the combined Germanic forces amassed by Hengist and Horsa represent an “inuincibilem...exercitum” (80) [invincible army] that then takes up residence in the land allotted to them by the Britons. Henry not only preserves this sentiment, but he also describes the army that was amassed by Hengist and his son Æsc as a similarly “inuictissimum...exercitum” (88) [unconquerable army]. While the language here shifts a bit, the description carried to an extreme by the superlative. Once

again, when the Germanic armies join with the Picts to attack the Britons, Henry describes their army as “innumerabilus” (82) [innumerable]. Henry repeats this depiction once again when describing the army that Hengist and Æsc have amassed in the wake of Vortimer’s death: indeed they succeed because their enemies “numerum Saxonum maiorem solito male ferebant” (84) [poorly bore the accustomed greater numbers of Saxons]. While the language in these four instances changes slightly, the overall impression is consonant; not only do the Germanic tribes possess weapons that cannot be matched by their insular counterparts, but their army poses a significant challenge to any who would stand against it, whether it be invincible, unconquerable, or simply too numerous to count.

Even when faced with defeat at the hands of Aurelius Ambrosius and Vortimer, two leaders of the Britons who lead them to military victories all but unmatched in the rest of the *HA*, the Germanic tribes—and their leaders Hengist and Horsa in particular—are treated to a superlative characterization. Henry narrates the events as follows:

Principio igitur percussit Hors aciem Categirni tanto uigore ut admodum pulueris dispersa prosterneretur, et filium Regis prostratum cecidit. Gortemer autem, frater eius, uir uere strenuissimus, ex obliquo aciem *Horsi* dirupit, et ipso Horso interfecto uirorum fortissimo, reliquie cohortis ad Hengstum fugiunt, qui cum Ambrosii cuneo inuicte confligebat. . . . non sine mango detrimento Britannorum, uictus, qui numquam fugerat *fugit*. (84)

[First Horsa charged the battle line of Cateyrn with such force that it, having been dispersed to the point of dust, was overturned and the son of the king, having been knocked down, fell. Moreover Vortimer, his brother, in truth a man most active, broke the battle line of Horsa from the flank and with Horsa himself, the bravest of men having been killed, the remnants of his army fled to Hengist, who fought invincibly with Ambrosius’s squadron. . . . not without great losses of the Britons, he was conquered, he who never before had fled, fled.]

While Henry here must narrate the fall of Horsa, his description of the surrounding events and of Horsa himself depends on a memorializing tone because of the emphasis placed on

the fallen warriors' acumen in battle. He describes, for instance, Horsa as a *fortissimus* man who could only be overcome by a *strenuissimus* man. More than that, Henry also suggests that this moment of flight for Hengist represents a key aberration in his pattern of behavior; he had *numquam* been forced to flee before.

In these instances, Henry emphasizes the military superiority of the Germanic tribes by drawing attention to the effectiveness of their warlike spirit—which he encodes in their weapons, the strength of their army more generally, and by mitigating any sense of failure that would have inhered in the death of Horsa and Hengist's flight. Whereas Horsa's death had been narrated with rather stunning speed in Bede, here such a trope has been inverted in a way that systematically connects it with Henry's consistent aims—to emphasize the clear rectitude of the Germanic ascension and the implicit nobility of their leaders.

While undoubtedly Henry does at times describe the strength and might of the Britons, he does so only to amplify the ultimate triumphs of the Germanic warriors. I have already mentioned the Henry's description of the inroads made by Ambrosius and with Vortimer; while they meet with some success, it is only transitory as the Germanic warriors continually reclaim any gains made by the Britons. Perhaps more importantly, Henry spends much time discussing two separate battles wherein the Britons face off against the combined armies of Hengist and his son Æsc: the battle at Crayford and the battle at *Wippedes flede*. In each of these battles, Henry divides the forces of the Britons. At Crayford "Britanni uero quatuor phalanges maximas quatuor ducibus munitas fortissimis bello prostituunt" (84) [The Britons, however, put forward four great divisions, defended by four leaders—bravest in battle]; similarly, at the battle of

Wippedes flede against the Germanic tribes “*omnis Britannia uiribus congregatis duodecimo phalanges nobiliter ordinatas opposuit*” (88) [all Britain, with its strength collected, placed opposite them twelve phalanxes—nobly arrayed]. In many ways this partitive element lends a particular numerical quality that seems to emphasize the strength of the Britons; each army is led by a vast contingent of the most noble warriors, whether that be comprised of four or twelve. Additionally, in the first instance Henry further subdivides the army to suggest that it is not made up not of a single collection of British warriors, but of four *phalanges maximas*, using the superlative to clearly mark their strength. Similarly, the biblical number twelve lends a certain prestige to the forces arrayed against the Germanic warriors in the second instance that is fitting of an army of united Britons.

Instead, however, of putting up some sort of grand resistance that might have been read as a rallying cry for any contemporary nationalist feeling, Henry retells the complete and total destruction of these armies. At Crayford, as I mentioned above, “*Recentes quippe qui superuenerant et uiri electi erant, securibus et gladiis horribiliter corpora Britonum findebant, nec tamen cesserunt, donec quatuor duces eorum prostratos et cesos uiderunt*” (86) [those fresh troops who just arrived and those chosen men cleaved the bodies of the Britons horribly with their axes and swords, nor did they cease until they saw their four leaders knocked down and smote]. Similarly, the battle of *Wippedes flede* does not end until “*Hengistus duodecim principes cuneorum prostrauit, et uexillis eorum deiectis, et manipulis proturbatis, in fugam coegit*” (88) [Hengist laid low the twelve leaders of the divisions, and, with their banners cast down, and with their companies repulse, he put them to flight]. In each instance, there is almost a gleeful

quality to Henry's narrative; the armies themselves are not simply defeated nor beaten, but utterly and completely abolished—even the bodies of the Britons are subject to the violence with which the Germanic warriors carry out their conquest; the Britons are truly *prostrati*.

*Conclusion:
Reimagining the Adventus Saxonum*

Twelfth-century historians inherited from their forebearers like Gildas, Bede, and Nennius not only the basic historical details of the *adventus Saxonum*, but as Tiller and Hanning would remind us, a providential structure that emplotted this moment within a narrative of divine retribution. According to this structural model, the *adventus Saxonum*, and the eventual spread of the Germanic tribes throughout England, was a result of God's will enacted to cleanse the island of its sin. Under the auspices of this historical model, individual historians then altered their narratives according to the exigent pressures—like the proximity of these events as well as the ethnic and generic affiliations of the authors—in order to integrate this inherently disruptive moment into a productive view of history; even though the indigenous Britons were conquered and displaced by violent Germanic invasions, historians could argue that this was done according to God's will and would eventually lead to a stable, twelfth-century England.

Removed from the constraints operative on these early English historians and with more temporal distance, this structural framework and the narrative therein could be employed to explore more pressing contemporary issues. While William of Malmesbury, for instance, still employs a largely providential scheme to encode the *adventus Saxonum*, its purpose is no longer to recuperate the fall of the Britons. Instead William uses this providential scheme to chart the ascendancy of the Anglo-Normans in a post-Conquest

Britain. For him, the Germanic tribes are the forebearers of his current society, and the *adventus Saxonum* is the foundational moment of a perdurable reign that endures because of the Norman Conquest of 1066. The Normans are, after all, the descendants of the Germanic tribes that conquered fifth-century Britain and thus their current reign is legitimate. Invasion and conquest, then, mark not a moment of rupture, but create continuity.

Instead of constructing a kind of model that culminates with the reign of the Anglo-Normans, Henry of Huntingdon couples this providential narrative structure with a cyclical pattern; herein, the *adventus Saxonum* is just one instance of God's will enacted throughout the world--or as he would put it, simply one of five plagues. Ultimately, however, such a pattern strips this moment of its inherent power insomuch as it is a pedestrian occurrence and not something inherently foundational. In both instances, the *adventus Saxonum* becomes a tool through which other moments of conquest can be understood and rehabilitated; for in both the Norman Conquest and the reign of the Normans becomes natural and even justified.

Concomitant with a reevaluation and repurposing of this structural model is a transformation of the description of both the Britons and the Germanic tribes. Both William and Henry's narratives marginalize, whether figuratively or literally, the population of the Britons. While such a drive may have been implicit in the accounts of the early English historians, William's symbolic portrayal of a marginal population of Britons enacts a colonial fantasy wherein the Britons and their history can be expunged from Britain itself; the rise of the Germanic tribes is total, complete, and lawful—there can be no resistance. Henry, on the other hand, uses this marginal representation to

encode resistance. For him, the marginal spaces that the Britons inhabit are sites where rebellion can be formed and, thus, inherently dangerous; until these spaces are pacified, dominion over Britain cannot be achieved. This marginal discourse, then, is inherently productive and intimately tied with the way that each narrative thinks about conquest.

Whereas the Germanic tribes had been largely vilified in early English histories, in William of Malmesbury's *GRA* a much more positive, and complete, narrative articulation emerges for these progenitors of the twelfth-century English nation. Not only are they wise, astute, savvy, and militarily powerful, but even their vices—and their violence—can be forgiven because they are faults that belong to everyone. While Henry eschews this kind of revisionary tendency, he nonetheless correlates the rise of the Germanic tribes with their fortitude in battle; for him, the Germanic tribes persevere because of their ability to control the landscape, their innate military superiority, and their sheer domination of the Britons. While these changes represent key moments in the development of the *adventus Saxonum* narrative, they were far from monolithic and would be revised once again in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*HRB*) and later in Layamon's *Brut*.

Chapter 3

Nova Proditio: Vortigern and the Germanic Tribes in Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae

Not only are Henry of Huntingdon's *HA*, William of Malmesbury's *GRA* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB* contemporary, but in many ways they function as units of a single cohesive history of Britain. Whereas William and Henry focus their histories on the Germanic tribes that would dominate the British Isles before the Norman Conquest, Geoffrey's *HRB* complements their work with a recounting of the Britons and their history. His work, in fact, fills a void first pointed out by William of Malmesbury, who notes that "Hic est Artur de quo Britonum nugae hodie delirant, dingus plane quem non fallaces somniarent fabulae sed ueraces predicarent historiae" (26) [this is the clearly worthy Arthur about whom the fables of the Britons today rave, whom false fables ought not to dream of, but true histories ought to praise].

While Geoffrey might seek to insulate his history from his fellow historians and to assert its veracity on the basis of his now-famed "ancient book,"⁷⁵ the insinuation of a

⁷⁵ "Reges autem eorum qui ab illo tempore in Gualii successerunt Karadoco Lancarbanensi contemporaneo meo in materia scribendi permitto, reges uero Saxonum Willelmo Malmesberiensis et Henrico Huntendonensi, quos de regibus Britonum tacere iubeo, cum non habeant librum illum Britannici sermonis quem Walterus Oxenefordensis archidiaconus ex Britannia aduexit" [Moreover I give leave to my contemporary, Caradoc of Llancarfan, to write in subject matter on those kings who followed in Wales from that time, and the Saxon kings I leave to William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon, whom I order to remain silent on the kings of the Britons because they have not that book in the British language which Walter archdeacon of Oxford bought from Brittany]. *Geoffrey of Monmouth: The History of the Kings of Britain: An Edition and Translation of De gestis Britonum [Historia Regum Britanniae]*, ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 280. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically; the translations are my own. Geoffrey mentions at the outset of his narrative that one of his primary sources was "Britannici sermonis librum uetustissimum" (5) [a very old book in the British language].

more complete insular history that fleshed out the fate of the Britons had an almost immediate impact. As Diane Greenway notes, “on Henry’s visit to Le Bec in 1139 that he encountered with amazement, Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britannie*.”⁷⁶ He then quickly sought to integrate this historical matter into his own history, albeit as an epistle to “Warine Brito” (558) [Warin the Briton]. Concomitant with this new historical material, Geoffrey’s *HRB* also radically destabilized the conventional periodization of insular history. Whereas Bede’s traditional dating of the *adventus Saxonum* to 449 had become dominant, for instance, Geoffrey shifted it to the later seventh century.⁷⁷

Because Geoffrey’s *HRB* covers this period in unprecedented detail and—as R. William Leckie Jr. has pointed out—its chronology offers a direct challenge to the orthodox, Bedan periodization, it was met almost immediately with critical appraisals. Contemporary historians, like William of Newburgh, questioned its veracity; Geoffrey was, as William would claim, guilty of “ridicula...figmenta contexens” [weaving ridiculous fictions].⁷⁸ More recently, scholars like Jean Blacker have gone so far as to suggest that “most...modern historians and literary scholars would agree that there is very little factual information to be gleaned from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*.”⁷⁹ And yet, the sheer number of manuscripts that remain today, the translations undertaken, and the continued proliferation of material on Arthur attest to the power of this text; as Robert Hanning long ago put it, “almost at once the story and the

⁷⁶ Introduction to Henry’s *Historia*, lxvi.

⁷⁷ As Kenneth Tiller, for instance, states that, among the many innovations that Geoffrey’s text makes, one of the most important is that it “pushed the date of the Fall of Britain into the end of the seventh century, radically destabilizing the periodization of insular history documented by Bede and accepted by Anglo-Norman historians, including William [of Malmesbury], Henry [of Huntingdon], and Orderic [Vitalis].” Tiller, *Layamon’s*, 65.

⁷⁸ *William of Newburgh*, 29. The translation is my own.

⁷⁹ Blacker, *Faces*, 17.

heroes of the rise and fall of Britain became matters of excitement and controversy, not only on the island itself, but throughout much of western Europe as well.”⁸⁰

While undoubtedly Geoffrey’s subject matter and periodization represent perhaps the most visible departures from his contemporaries, the overarching structural framework of his narrative is also fundamentally different. Historians like William and Henry depended ultimately on a providential scheme—which I argued in the previous chapter, could be articulated in different ways—as the primary structural model. As Robert Hanning has noted, Geoffrey’s history depends on a cyclical vision of history, which he likely inherited from Henry of Huntingdon.⁸¹ Whereas Henry’s narrative was nonetheless still constrained by divine will, Geoffrey’s focuses almost exclusively on the “*rise and fall of Britain*”—something far more indebted to the turning of Fortune’s wheel.⁸² Tiller has suggested more recently that “Geoffrey is the first to challenge the entire notion of history as the unfolding of divine will.”⁸³ Concomitant, however, with this structural view, is Geoffrey’s fixation on—or as Hanning terms it, his “near-intoxication”—with the human greatness of national leaders” (139); without the pressure of a providential scheme, in Geoffrey’s narrative “the individual begins to emerge as a person from the pattern of history, a person moreover whose extrapolitical relationships, especially kindred ones, determine his actions, even if the result is national chaos.”⁸⁴

Freed from the confines of well-documented history and from strict adherence to a providential structural model that had conditioned his contemporaries’ accounts of the

⁸⁰ Hanning, *Vision*, 121.

⁸¹ Or as Hanning describes it, this cyclical vision “intrigued Geoffrey, and led him to retreat to the more remote past to reconstruct the *rise and fall of Britain*.” *Ibid.*, 136-37

⁸² *Ibid.*, 137.

⁸³ Tiller, *Layamon’s*, 67.

⁸⁴ Hanning, *Vision*, 143.

adventus Saxonum, Geoffrey's *HRB* presents a radical reformulation of the traditional narrative. As I will demonstrate through a two-part analysis of the Britons and the Germanic tribes, Geoffrey vitiates Nennius's recuperation of Vortigern in order to cast the British leader as the sole perpetrator of the Germanic incursion; in so doing, the Britons as a people are all but absolved of their responsibility and become, simply, the victims of tyranny in a manner not dissimilar from Gildas. To accomplish this reorientation, Geoffrey emphasizes Vortigern's unlawful seizure of religious and secular power, and, ultimately, his treachery. This concept—treachery—is particularly important for understanding how the Germanic tribes are made to function. While recent scholars—like Margaret Lamont—⁸⁵ have pointed out Hengist and Horsa's initial nobility as indicative of their eventual conversion to Christianity, I will suggest that Geoffrey first portrays them and their Germanic followers in this way in order to offer a pointed contrast to Vortigern; they represent a return to a kind of Roman rule that maintained the definitive borders of Britain itself and that is not available to the treacherous Vortigern. Instead of being static, however, this portrayal collapses in treachery and, Geoffrey seems to claim, that is the reason that they deserve reprobation.

Geoffrey of Monmouth: A King and His People?

Geoffrey's drive to create a narrative that would restore the native Britons' place in history was, from the outset, fraught with ideological consequences. To emphasize the glory of the Britons, who were linked genealogically with the contemporary Welsh, was to risk producing a subversive narrative that would do little to placate Geoffrey's patrons, many of whom fought to quell the Welsh rebellions taking place in Britain at roughly the

⁸⁵ Margaret Lamont, "Hengist," in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartledge (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 47.

same time that the *HRB* was produced.⁸⁶ Scholars have long sought to reconcile Geoffrey's unique history with his contemporary, Anglo-Norman moment.⁸⁷ Most recently, scholars like Michael A. Faletra have suggested that he was, in fact, fully compliant with the contemporary, Anglo-Norman array of power.⁸⁸ As he states, "despite the fact that he seems to glorify the kings and heroes of the ancient Britons, the *HRB*, though appearing to embrace the contradictions of competing histories, finally supports the Normans in their tenure of an *imperium* over all of Britain."⁸⁹ In this, Faletra argues that Geoffrey "like William of Malmesbury...too narrates the past of the isle of Britain in a way that ultimately legitimates Norman sovereignty."⁹⁰ In its broadest sense this is undoubtedly true; Geoffrey's text in many ways insulates the Britons' past from the present by firmly locating it in a completed moment and thus serves the Norman network of power. Such an assertion, however, obfuscates the very real difference that exists between Geoffrey's work and that of his contemporaries. Whereas Valerie Flint has seen Geoffrey's work as a conditioned, parodic response to contemporary historiography in a way that challenges the fundamentals of monastic life,⁹¹ John Gillingham has, for instance, argued that Geoffrey's narrative represents an explicit challenge to an emerging anti-Welsh/anti-Briton discourse that had its foundation in other historians of the twelfth century like William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntington. Undoubtedly Geoffrey's

⁸⁶ As Gillingham notes, for instance, the death of Henry I in 1135 was greeted in Wales with "outbreaks of revolt in several different parts of Wales at once." John Gillingham, "The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*" *Anglo-Norman Studies* 13 (1990): 111.

⁸⁷ Long ago, J. S. P. Tatlock, for instance, saw his sympathies align with the colonizing Bretons, and with, at least in part, a kind of Celtic revivalism. J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey's "Historia Regum Britanniae" and Its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), *passim*.

⁸⁸ Michael A. Faletra, "Narrating the Matter of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Norman Colonization of Wales," *Chaucer Review* 35, no. 1 (2000): *passim*.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Valerie Flint, "The *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Parody and Its Purpose. A Suggestion," *Speculum* 54, no. 3 (1979): *passim*.

HRB was conditioned by the Anglo-Norman reality of the twelfth-century for whom it was written; and yet, because of the subject matter and the way that it was constructed, it could be read as inherently subversive. As Gillingham points out, one of the early readers of the *HRB* downplayed Geoffrey's account of the resurgent potential of the Britons found in the prophecies and modulated the text to avoid any possible sense of Welsh-revivalism.⁹²

Instead of definitively answering the question posed by Faletra's and Gillingham's work—namely, was Geoffrey's work subversive or compliant with the Anglo-Norman reality of twelfth-century England?—I will argue that the tension between these two ideological positions itself conditions Geoffrey's retelling of the *adventus Saxonum*. As I will demonstrate, Geoffrey works to absolve—at least in part—the native Britons of their responsibility in the *adventus Saxonum*, thereby challenging the trend in both the early sources like Bede's *HE* and Nennius's *HB* and their twelfth-century counterparts like William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon. In order to do so, he relies on a technique not unknown to Gildas's *DEB* and places much of the blame at Vortigern's feet. Instead, however, of depersonalizing the king of the Britons and transforming him into a monument to tyranny, Geoffrey constructs an elaborate representation that showcases the changing dynamics of narrative and characterization in twelfth-century historiography.

⁹² As Gillingham notes, “one very early reader of the *HRB* revised the text both in order to play down the theme of the treachery of the Saxons and also in order...to put an end...to the ambiguity which had surrounded Arthur's fate after the Battle of Camblann.” Gillingham, “Context,” 117. Accordingly, “no medieval Welshman made the mistake of thinking Geoffrey anti-welsh.” Gillingham, “Context,” 110.

From the outset Geoffrey is at pains to emphasize that Vortigern's rule—and thus any actions that he takes as king—is not legitimate. Geoffrey describes Vortigern's role in convincing Constans to take the crown as well as the ceremony itself as follows:

Cepit itaque eum Vortegirinus duxitque regiis ornamentis indutum Lundonias atque uix annuente populo in regem erexit. Tunc defunctus fuerat Guithelinus archiepiscopus nec affuit alter qui ipsum inungere praesumpsisset, quia ex monacho transferebatur. Nec tamen iccirco postposuit diadema, quod ipse Vortegirinus uice episcopi functus manibus suis capiti suo imposuit. (119)

[And Vortigern took him and led him, having been dressed in the royal robes, and with the reluctant assent of the people he was raised into the kingship. At that time Archbishop Guithelinus had died and there was no other present who would presume to anoint him because he had been transferred from being a monk. And yet the diadem was withheld; Vortigern himself performed on behalf of the bishop and placed it on his head with his own hands.]

Gildas's (*DEB*) and Bede's (*HE*), agree insomuch as the Germanic invasion and settlement were precipitated by Vortigern as the legitimate king of the Britons; moreover these sources also assert that his actions were undertaken with the—at least implicit—consent of the Britons themselves. Here, however, Geoffrey clearly marks out two distinctive critiques of Vortigern's actions. On the one hand, the decision for Constans to rule meets only with mild acceptance from the people he is to rule—*uix annuente populo* [with the reluctant assent of the people]—largely because of the dubious nature through which he left the monastery. Perhaps more importantly, however, he has been crowned without ecclesiastical authority. The anointing of the king, and the very literal investiture of Constans, takes place entirely without religious oversight; as Leckie Jr. has described it, this scene as a whole represents a “highly irregular ceremony.”⁹³ In this moment, Geoffrey emphasizes that Vortigern functions illegitimately in this capacity—*uice episcopi functus* [performed on behalf of the bishop]—despite the fact that he has no

⁹³ R. William Leckie, Jr. *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 52

authority to do so. Of course, ultimately Constans's rule is instrumental in Vortigern's assumption of the throne; not only does it immediately precede his assumption of the throne, but because of his weak leadership—and his untimely death—Vortigern is able to secure power. By pointing out the illegitimacy of Constans' assumption of the throne, Geoffrey thus emphasizes that the very root of Vortigern's power was obtained improperly.

In fact, Geoffrey's account of Vortigern's assumption of the throne makes this critique even more explicit. After slowly accruing power throughout Constans's relatively brief and ineffectual rule, Vortigern invites a band of Scots and Picts, whose loyalty he had garnered, to a royal feast. After plying them with copious amounts of alcohol, he bewails his downcast state and implies that the only remedy is for the Constans to be overthrown and for him to assume the throne himself. Once the Scots and Picts have carried out Vortigern's implicit demands, Geoffrey relates that “Vortegirinus, cum neminem sibi parenem in regno conspexisset, imposuit capiti suo diadema regni et conprincipes suos supergressus est” (123) [Vortigern, when he saw no equal to him in the kingdom, placed the diadem of the kingdom on his own head and raised himself over his equals].⁹⁴ Once again, Geoffrey's version of Vortigern's coronation explicitly relates the lack of ecclesiastical sanction in Vortigern's actions. He is not an anointed king, nor does he act with the blessing of the church. He is, as Leckie Jr. once suggested, simply a usurper.⁹⁵

Perhaps most importantly, Geoffrey's elision of any mention of the Britons' consent here is particularly marked when compared to his retelling of Constantinus's

⁹⁴ In a short aside, Tiller, in fact, suggests that this narrative element serves as an analogue to Harold Godwinson's self-coronation just prior to the Norman Conquest of 1066. Tiller, *Layamon's*, 75.

⁹⁵ As he states, “Vortigern sits uneasily on the British throne primarily because he is a usurper.” *Ibid.*, 53.

ascension, which immediately precedes these events, and Constans's. With regards to the former, Geoffrey relates that "Britones...exregerunt Constantinum in regem regnique diadema capiti suo imposuerunt" (119) [the Britons raised him into the kingship and placed the diadem of the kingdom on his head]. Similarly, despite the lukewarm reception that Constans had, the Britons still—albeit reluctantly—accept his leadership. For Geoffrey, the root of their authority ultimately depends on the consent of the people themselves, something sorely lacking in Vortigern's assumption of the throne. In truth, the only people who we see clamoring for the ascension of Vortigern in Geoffrey's narrative are the foreign Picts who argue that "Dignus est Vortegirinus imperio dignusque sceptro Britanniae, Constans uero indignus" (121) [Vortigern is worthy of the empire and worth of the scepter of Britain, Constans, however, is not]. If any people are to be found responsible for Vortigern's rule and his actions in the *adventus Saxonum*, it is the foreign Picts, not the native Britons.

Although Vortigern's claims to ecclesiastical authority generally meet with little reprobation at the time, Geoffrey implicitly critiques them in the closing portion of his material on Vortigern. When describing the Germanic tribes' treachery and the seizure of Vortigern himself, Geoffrey relates that Hengist "detinuit [illum] per pallium" (135) [held him by the pallium]. While the Latin *pallium* can refer simply to a kind of coverlet and thus would not be unusual, it did also carry a more specialized meaning as an ecclesiastical vestment. Geoffrey even mentions this as such shortly following this episode; "Meneuia pallio Urbis Legionum induetur" (145) [St. David's will be clothed by the pallium of Caerleon]. With this meaning of *pallium* implicit, Hengist's capture of Vortigern encodes a subtle critique of his earlier actions. Literally here Vortigern

unlawfully wears the *pallium*, something which he metaphorically did during both his and Constans's crowning. While I do not want to make too much out of such a momentary reference, the very fact that Hengist captures him by this vestment seems to suggest its literal and metaphoric primacy in his fall to the Germanic tribes.

For Geoffery, Vortigern's unabashed assumption of ecclesiastical power is symptomatic of his primary flaw—his treachery. Initially, the primary characteristic that allows Vortigern to seize power is both his age and his experience. As Geoffrey relates, he is a source of counsel because “*proceres regni qui maiores errant natu defuncti fuerant solusque Vortegirrus astutus et sapiens magnique consilii uidebatur, ceteri autem paene omnes pueri errant ac iuuenes peremptisque in anteactis proeliis eorundum patribus atque auunculis honores utcumque possidebant*” (121) [the leaders of the kingdom, who were of greater age, were dead and Vortigern alone seemed astute, wise, and of great counsel; the others were nearly all boys or youths and, because their fathers and uncles killed in former battles, they took over whatever honors]. Britain itself, in this formulation, has been stripped of its capable leadership by the near constant continental wars that predate this moment; those leaders that remain lack any sort of demonstrable experience, and are simply composed of untried youths—*pueri ac iuuenes*—whose only claim to their prestige is their lineage. That Vortigern is able to accrue power is almost understandable. Free of able leadership through no fault of its own, Britain has no choice but to turn to one who *uidebatur* [seems] to embody those qualities necessary in a leader.

That Vortigern takes advantage of these leaders by creating a trustworthy façade, however, speaks to the larger question of his character in Geoffrey's *HRB*; Geoffrey makes clear that he is wholly and unabashedly treacherous. When Vortigern first decides

to seize power, Geoffrey relates that “Vortigernus meditabatur quo ingenio tectius et callidius Constantem monachum deponeret” (121) [Vortigern plotted a sly and secret trick wherein he would depose the monk Constans]. Similarly, after taking command of the king’s treasure and walled cities, he “praemeditatam prodicionem machinans” (121) [devising the premeditated treachery] brings the Picts in and eventually slays Constans. Geoffrey interjects an editorializing comment just after the Pictish plot: “Ecce occulta incauti amici proditio” (121) [lo, the hidden treachery of this incautious friend]. The repetition of this language of treason—*proditio*—combined with Geoffrey’s editorializing tone, which is unique to this particular account, both emphasize its import.

Similarly, in Geoffrey’s retelling of the so-called Pictish plot, he once again has recourse to this specific discourse. As he relates, Vortigern invited the Picts to a royal feast, “quia sciebat Pictos gentem esse instabilem et ad omne scelus paratam; inebriati ergo siue in iram inducti, commoueri possent facile aduersus regem ita ut absque cunctamine ipsum interficerent” (121) [because he knew that {they} were an unstable people and prepared for every sin; therefore whether they were drunk or induced to anger, they would be easily able to be agitated against the king so that they would kill him without delay]. After getting them drunk and hinting that they ought to do something to make him the rightful king, the Picts behead Constans and bring their trophy back to Vortigern himself. Instead of meeting with support from the presumptive king, however, Vortigern has them swiftly executed and claims the throne for himself. Thereafter, Geoffrey relates that “fuerunt ergo qui aestimabant prodicionem illam per Vortgeirnum fuisse machinatam” (123) [there were those who thought that this this treacherous plot was hatched by Vortigern]. And once again when Vortigern takes the

throne, Geoffrey relates that “Proditione tandem eius diuulgata, insurrexerunt in eum comprouintialium populi insularum” (123) [with his treachery {in the Pictish plot} having been made plain, the people of the islands rose up against him]. In this short selection, Geoffrey has made reference to Vortigern’s treachery some six times; five of which explicitly describe his actions as *proditio*. This kind of rhetorical emphasis is unprecedented in Geoffrey’s source material and, in many ways, contributes to a minimization of the responsibility of the Britons as a people. Their leadership was inexperienced and understandably trusting of one who seemed worthy; given their limited experience, they never could have expected Vortigern to change his colors so quickly and thus ought not be blamed for his rise to power. In Geoffrey’s narrative vision, Vortigern alone hatched this plan, precipitated Constans death, and ultimately, brought the Germanic warriors to England.

These personal failings come to a head in Geoffrey’s retelling of the moments immediately preceding the *adventus Saxonum* itself. Whereas in the early English tradition there were notable attempts, I have argued, to rehabilitate Vortigern—at least to an extent, Geoffrey dismantles these changes and demonstrates that the *adventus Saxonum* is the result of one man’s personal actions. In the *HB*, for instance, the author outlines the external threats that faced Vortigern and his rule and made the invitation of the Germanic tribes somewhat understandable; as he relates, Vortigern “urgebatur a metu Pictorum Scottorumque et a Romanico impetus, nec non et a timore Ambrosii” (26) [was driven by fear of the Picts and the Scots, and by a fear of Rome, and not the least by a fear of Ambrosius]. In order to secure his personal reign and to ensure the endurance of the Britons, he had no choice but to invite the Germanic warriors. In contrast, Geoffrey’s

retelling of the invitation immediately follows the Pictish plot; here he alludes to Nennius's statement while simultaneously transforming it into a damning account of Vortigern's actions to date: "Anxiabatur igitur Vortegirrus cotidie dampnumque exercitus sui in proliando perpetiebatur. Anxiabatur etiam ex alia parte timore Aurelii Ambrosii fratrisque sui Uther Pendragon, qui ut praedictum est in minorem Britanniam propter ipsum diffugerant" (123) [Thus Vortigern was anxious daily and his army endured losses in battle. He was even troubled on the other side by fear of Aurelius Ambrosius and his brother Uther Pendragon, who as was told, fled into lesser Britain on account of him]. No longer does Vortigern stand against the combined, external forces of Rome, the Picts, and Ambrosius who seek only to conquer his kingdom; now he must face enemies of his own making—a Pictish force, who had once adored him, incited to rebellion by Vortigern's treachery and the possible return of the rightful heirs Uther and Ambrosius whom he had forced into exile.

Perhaps accordingly, Geoffrey removes much of the extreme language of fear that had originally been in Nennius and plays down Vortigern's response. In Nennius, Vortigern was "urgebatur a metu Pictorum Scottorumque et a Romano impetu, nec non et a timore Ambrosii" (26) [driven by a fear of the Picts and the Scots, as well as an attack from Rome, and not the least from a fear of Ambrosius]; the repetition of words for fear suggests that Vortigern's actions engender a sympathetic reading of the king himself. In Geoffrey's account, however, only one reference to fear, to *timore*, remains. Moreover, Vortigern is not *urgebatur* [driven] by fear, but simply *anxiabatur* [anxious]. The cause for his fear has been lexically transformed; he is no longer actively pressured

by external forces—driven—but exists in a personal state of anxiety brought about only by his own treacherous actions.

Whereas William of Malmesbury worked to collapse the ethical and political divide in order to characterize Vortigern as a villain, Geoffrey provides us with an extensive narrative that reconditions the tendencies in Nennius's narrative in order to absolve the Britons of their responsibility in the *adventus Saxonum* and characterize the coming of the Germanic tribes as punishment for the personal failings of a single king, Vortigern. The threat that he faces from the Picts, from the Romans, or even from Ambrosius is solely of his own making and he must, Geoffrey seems to suggest, reap the consequences himself. More importantly, this threat is neither insurmountable nor of a national level; these externalized threats do not offer a challenge to the sovereignty of the Britons more generally, but only to Vortigern. His response—bringing in the Germanic tribes—is thus no longer a sympathetic decision.

The Germanic Tribes: Parallelism

Geoffrey, however, does not reserve this treacherous tendency for Vortigern, but extends it to the Germanic tribes. Ronwein, the daughter of Hengist and subsequent wife of Vortigern, is, for instance, overcome with jealousy and poisons her stepson Vortimer—the British leader whose victories alone had nearly returned the Britons to power (102).⁹⁶ Similarly, Hengist turns on his hosts—and even Vortigern himself. After amassing a horde from the continent, Hengist returns to Britain in the hopes of recovering those territories that had been lost to Vortimer. After setting up a peaceful meeting with the Britons, whom he has convinced that he only returned to help, he ultimately

⁹⁶ On Ronwein's role, and the portrayal of women after the *adventus Saxonum*, see Martin B. Shichtman and Laurie A. Finke, "Profiting from the Past: History as Symbolic Capital in the *Historia Regum Britanniae*," *Arthurian Literature* 12 (1993): 24-27.

slaughters them wholesale. While narrating this turn, Geoffrey makes reference to Hengist and links him specifically with that Latin term for treachery that he had previously linked with Vortigern—*proditio*—on four separate occasions in the space of just over fifteen lines of prose: the event, according to Geoffrey, represents a “nova proditio” (135) [unheard-of treachery]; Hengist moves when he senses that “horam proditio sui idoneam” (135) [it was a suitable time for his treachery]; without their weapons the Britons posed no threat to those “qui propter proditorem accesserant” (135) [who had come to betray {them}]; and finally the Britons seek to strike down the “proditores” (135) [betrayers]. The continued repetition of this term for treachery in such close proximity registers the Britons’ outrage by emphasizing the Germanic tribes’ unprecedented perfidy. Ultimately, and perhaps even more importantly, the use of this Latin term creates a symbolic connection between Vortigern and the Germanic tribes.

For a text that, as other critics have asserted, is “virulently anti-Saxon,” emphasis on the treacherous nature of the Germanic tribes is not a surprise.⁹⁷ As Margaret Lamont has most recently mentioned, however, the Germanic warriors do not appear as such when first introduced; they are, in fact, treated much more favorably. Whereas Lamont has argued that their initial noble bearing and handsome appearance presages their later conversion to Christianity,⁹⁸ I will argue that Geoffrey’s description of them as such is ultimately connected with his characterization of Vortigern. In fact, Geoffrey portrays the Germanic tribes in a positive manner initially in order to replicate the conflict between appearances and reality that allowed Vortigern to assume the throne of the

⁹⁷ Margaret Lamont, “Hengist,” in *Heroes and Anti-Heroes in Medieval Romance*, ed. Neil Cartlidge (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), 46.

⁹⁸ Margaret Lamont, “Becoming English: Ronwenne’s Wassail, Language, and National Identity in the Middle English Prose *Brut*,” *Studies in Philology* 107, no. 3 (2010): 292.

Britons; this characterization functions as a narrative doubling that at once emphasizes Vortigern's failure to discern a plot remarkably similar to his own, but also connects him intimately with the Germanic tribes themselves; just as he would later join their pagan religion, they both share a precipitous descent into treachery.

In much the same way, Vortigern first “astutus et sapiens magnique consilii uidebatur” (121) [seemed able, wise and experienced], the Germanic tribes first appear physically impressive, militarily strong, and decidedly noble—the ideal army to help Vortigern defend himself. When, for instance, the Germanic tribes first arrive, Geoffrey emphasizes their physical prowess. Their *ciulae* land uninvited in Britain precisely at Vortigern's moment of need. These war ships were filled with “ignotos uiros magnaue staturae homines” (125) [unknown men and men of large stature]. Similarly the two leaders of this band, who are in fact named by Geoffrey, stand out from their compatriots as particularly “nobilitate et decore” (125) [noble and handsome]. Whereas this trope of the “arrival without invitation” was first retold by Nennius and ultimately served to reduce Vortigern's responsibility, here Geoffrey has constructed a narrative parallel that undercuts such a reading. Just as Vortigern is here surrounded by enemies on all sides only to have a band of tall, noble warriors appears out of nowhere to save him, Vortigern himself first seemed destined to save his country by offering much needed leadership and by divesting Constans of his monkish responsibilities so that he could take up the throne and put an end to the discord that had emerged among the nobles after Constantius's death. Vortigern, Geoffrey seems to imply, ought to have been wary of the Germanic warriors who seem to arrive as miraculous saviors.

Whereas Geoffrey replicates Nennius's detail that the Germanic tribes were driven into exile, he seemingly modulates this detail to explain the reason for their arrival in Britain; in truth, his explanation only calls into question their motives. As part of a lengthy speech that Hengist offers to Vortigern, he states that he and his followers arrived because they were "expulsi a patria nostra nec ob aliud nisi quia consuetudo regni expetebat" (125) [were driven from our homeland not on account of anything else except because the custom of our kingdom demands it]. Not only were they obeying the *consuetudo regni* [custom of the kingdom], but also their religious obligations—as Hengist phrases it, they were "obedientes ergo decretis ab aevo sanctis" (125) [submitting, therefore, to the holy decree of the age]. That this explication arrives unasked for and depends on an overzealous—and grandiose—explication is suspicious. While any exiled warrior would have met with suspicion—exile does carry a decidedly negative tone as we saw in Nennius's account—Hengist's explanation only draws attention to that which he attempts to explain away, that *ob aliud* that interrupts the explanation itself.

Hengist continues to prepare a carefully crafted narrative that attempts to dispel any notion that they might simply be a marauding band. His men are not simply castoffs from a stressed population but—as he relates it—"potiores atque fortiores" (125) [the most important and the bravest]. This comparative seems to confirm the descriptive details that Geoffrey first put forward; they are in Hengist's formulation the best that their country has to offer. Even their leaders, as Hengist relates it, are noble; they are "ex ducum progenie progeniti" (125) [descended from the children of dukes]. In this, Hengist seems to attack, point by point, any aspersions that might be cast against them:

they have not been exiled, nor are they ignoble castoffs of their homeland, but simply noble warriors who have left their home, as was the custom and their holy duty, to find their place in the world. And yet, the continued repetition of terms associated with this custom, the unasked for explanation, and the superlative description of these exiles seems to belie such a characteristic.

Hengist's rhetorically conditioned speech continues and appears to confirm their noble and illustrious lineage. After mentioning Mercury in passing, Vortigern presses the leader of this Germanic band further about just which gods he and his people worship. To this he responds that they worship "Deos patrios Saturnum, Iouem atque ceterus qui istum gubernant...maxime autem Mercurium, quem Woden lingua" (125) [the gods of their fathers, Saturn, Jove, and the others who guide this world; mostly, however, Mercury, who is Woden in {their} language]. Here Hengist noticeably does not rely on the native formulation of these deities, but transposes them into the Roman cosmography. In this, he links his people not with some pagan band of Germanic tribesmen, but with the Romans themselves who had previously controlled Britain and even aided the Britons in their times of need. While the true Romans could no longer be bothered to aid the Britons, here a set of "new Romans" seems to arrive to give aid to the beleaguered Vortigern. They even agree "foedere confirmato" (127) [with a signed treaty], thus abiding by the legal systems of the Britons. In these descriptions, the Germanic tribes appear to be noble saviors, reminiscent of their Roman forebearers, who only seek to aid the Britons.

In his description of Hengist himself, Geoffrey not only emphasizes his superlative qualities once again, but implicitly connects him to Vortigern. As Geoffrey

relates: Hengist was “uir doctus atque astutus (127) [an experienced and astute man]. His description here is from Nennius’s *HB*, wherein he is “vir doctus atque astutus et callidus” (69) [an experienced and astute and crafty man]. While Nennius’s *HB* offers a precedent for this description, in Geoffrey’s work it echoes quite closely that of Vortigern that he had already provided; *astutus*, for instance, is a quality that both leaders have in common. In this formulation, however, Geoffrey also noticeably suppresses Nennius’s term *callidus*. By eliminating such a term with decidedly negative connotations, Geoffrey preserves the illusion that these Germanic warriors are in fact genuine in their attempts to aid Vortigern.

Perhaps most importantly, when the Germanic tribes attempt to settle more troops in Britain, Geoffrey explicitly links their settlement with Vortigern’s invitation to the Picts. Here Hengist stresses the impending invasion that Aurelius Ambrosius intends to mount and asks that he be allotted more knights to defend the realm; Vortigern responds with the following: “mitte ergo legatos tuos ad Germaniam et inuita quos uoleris” (127) [send, therefore, your messengers to Germany and invite whoever you wish]. Not only is this moment the first wave of settlement, but it is startlingly similar to Vortigern’s earlier request of Constans which led to an influx of Pictish warriors. Therein Vortigern, “praemeditatam prodicionem machinans, adiuit Constatem dixitque ille oportere numerum familiae suae augmentare ut securius superuenturis hostibus resisteret” (121) [plotting the premeditated treachery, approached Constans and said that he required the number of his retainers to be augmented so that he would be safer in standing against the coming enemies]; to this, Constans responds “fac quaecumque uolueris” (121) [do whatsoever you wish]. Just as Constans here cedes power to Vortigern due to an external

threat, Vortigern himself cedes power to the Germanic hordes. While Geoffrey does not replicate the language of treachery—nowhere does he mention that this invitation was part of a *praemeditataam prodicionem*—the repetition of events as well as the quotation of *uoleris* and the eventual outcome clearly links these two events.

Geoffrey's portrayal of the Germanic tribes as initially noble, handsome, and even Roman in their bearing ought not to be understood only as a device to foreshadow their ultimate conversion to Christianity, but also as a tool through which Geoffrey creates a parallel between them and the initial portrayal of Vortigern. That this veneer of nobility would quickly give way to treachery should not, in this formulation, be a surprise; indeed, Vortigern's inability to see the Germanic warriors' potential for *proditio* is a strident condemnation of his own leadership. Vortigern becomes no better than Constans who "nisi pro umbra principis astabat" (119) [stood but as the shadow of a leader]. In this, Geoffrey erodes the binary that would push Vortigern and the Germanic tribes apart. Not only is Vortigern the epitome of treachery who has obtained the throne unlawfully, but he is no better than the Germanic tribes whose depredations had been well documented throughout his narrative. Importantly as well, such interpretative moves and amplifications, in the end, reverse a trend that had been developing in Bede and even Nennius that would cast the blame for the Germanic invasion on the Britons as a whole; for here Geoffrey has returned to a decidedly Gildasian position and located the root cause for the *adventus Saxonum* at Vortigern's feet. The Britons were merely pawns who were subject to the tyranny of a usurper. Not only has Geoffrey provided one of the most extensive retellings of the *adventus Saxonum* to date, but his accounting marks a

decidedly different strain of the tradition that would continue to influence narrative retellings well into the future.

Conclusion

From the outset, scholarship on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB* has been vexed by the question of his ideological affiliations. Was he, as Tatlock long ago argued, inherently pro-Breton? Or perhaps, as Gillingham has more recently argued, was he decidedly pro-Briton and therefore pro-Welsh? Contemporary readings would support such an assertion. Or perhaps, as Faletra has suggested, was the *HRB* inherently compliant with the contemporary Anglo-Norman array of power inasmuch as it is an agonistic retelling of the rise of the Britons that captures their triumphs in the safety of a past moment?⁹⁹ While these questions may never be satisfactorily settled, what seems to be of particular import is Geoffrey's text can be read in so many different ways.

This multiplicity of interpretative possibilities is, in many ways, a result of Geoffrey's synthesis of prior texts and traditions. His *HRB*, for instance, depends on the vituperations of Gildas, the objectivity of Bede, and the subtle recuperations of Nennius. Like Gildas, Geoffrey's Vortigern emerges as the arch-villain; like Bede, the Germanic tribes can be positive forces, especially when contrasted with Vortigern; like Nennius, the Britons play no active role in the *adventus Saxonum*. To assert a particular ideological bent in Geoffrey's text, then, is to elide the particular and complex relationship that exists between Geoffrey and his historiographical forbearers.

Perhaps more importantly, such a focus obfuscates the very real and explicit ways in which Geoffrey's *HRB* innovates and develops the *adventus Saxonum* narrative. For

⁹⁹ On Geoffrey's text as inherently agonistic instead of antagonistic, see particularly Faletra, "Narrating," 69-85.

instance, Robert Hanning argued that one of the predominant elements in Geoffrey's *HRB* is a fixation on the personal at the expense of the national. In many ways, such a narrative element is not without its precedent. Gildas, for instance, fixates on Vortigern in his retelling of the *adventus Saxonum*. In the *HRB*, however, Gildas's two-dimensional representation of Vortigern gives way to a fully-realized character—a corrupt personal and political leader—who precipitates the coming of the Saxons at the expense of his own people; such a characterization is then carefully contrasted with a portrait of those arch-usurpers, the Germanic tribes, in a narrative patterning that only reinforces Vortigern's failures. Concomitantly the Britons slowly recede into the fabric of history and, as a result, are subsequently absolved of their responsibility in the *adventus Saxonum*. The coming of the Germanic tribes is no longer the result of a national miasma, but of the corruption of an individual; in this, the *HRB* remembers the *adventus Saxonum* anew.

Postscript: Beyond the Twelfth Century

Although my main focus is on the twelfth century, what of Layamon's early thirteenth-century *Brut* and its contribution to the literary tradition of the *adventus Saxonum* narrative? At its most basic level, Layamon's *Brut* is a poem fraught with competing ideological pressures. It is a rather liberal translation of an Anglo-Norman text—which was itself a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's putatively historical *HRB*; it is written in a verse form that shares much with its Anglo-Saxon antecedents, and its very language—reminiscent of a form of Old English—has been called archaic;¹⁰⁰ it

¹⁰⁰ As E. G. Stanley has suggested, the *Brut* is written in “an archaic, perhaps archaistic idiom consciously.” E. G. Stanley, “Layamon's Antiquarian Sentiments,” *Medium Ævum* 38 (1969): 34.

retells the history of a dispersed peoples, the Britons, whose role in a contemporary, Anglo-Norman England is far from secure. More recently, further critical discussions of the manuscript tradition of the *Brut* have problematized the text even more; Elizabeth Bryan and Michelle Warren have, for instance, treated each of the extant manuscripts that contain Layamon's *Brut*—the Cotton Caligula A.ix and the Cotton Otho C.xiii—as separate authorial productions.¹⁰¹ To account for all of these important linguistic, stylistic, and cultural dynamics demands a lengthy and comprehensive study, something which is beyond the scope of this project.

As a text that deliberately recalls the past and employs it for the contemporary Anglo-Norman present, however, the *Brut* is of key importance in understanding the shifting position of and response to the *adventus Saxonum* in the period that just post-dates the twelfth century. Accordingly, I will turn here to a brief discussion of the principle innovations undertaken by Layamon in light of those elements I have heretofore discussed, his contribution to the continuation of this literary tradition, and suggest some possible implications of these decisions.

Whereas early narratives typically linked Vortigern with Britain more generally, Layamon's text situates his demesne more particularly in Wales. Both Gildas and Bede are rather unclear as to his actual regnal domain; Nennius simply states that he "regnavit in Brittonia" (67) [reigned in Britain]. In each of these texts, however, his authority over Britain as a whole seems assured; he is able to dole out applicable lands to the Germanic tribes and serves as the figurehead for the collapse of the Britons. In the twelfth century, however, Geoffrey carefully delineates his realms and his ascension to a more senior

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) and Elizabeth J. Bryan, *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture: The Otho Layamon* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

position. Initially the only regnal claim he holds is that over Gewissei; it is not until the Pictish plot that he wrests control of the whole island from Constans.¹⁰² Wace relates much the same narrative, once again remarking that Vortigern is “Uns forz huem, en Guales maneit” [a man of power, who dwelt in Wales].¹⁰³ Vortigern’s explicitly Welsh holdings, then, are not clearly articulated until the twelfth century; prior to this point, his *regnum* is much more general.

Layamon expands on this twelfth-century trend by explicitly, and repeatedly, linking Vortigern with Wales. When first describing Vortigern, Layamon mentions that he “hafde Walisc lond þat haluen-dæl an his hond” (336) [had half the land of Wales in his hand];¹⁰⁴ immediately thereafter, Vortigern himself quotes the narrator’s editorial comment while outlining his qualifications and states that he has “Walsce lond haluen-dæl” in his “hond” (338). Not only does he lead in Wales—as in Geoffrey and Wace—nor is he simply a *forz huem*, but he holds wholly half of the nation itself. At its most basic level, such a statement updates the original tradition by linking Vortigern with a contemporary nation, well known to the twelfth-century Anglo-Normans since the establishment of the marcher lords just after the Norman Conquest of 1066 and their putative resurgence in the twelfth century.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps more importantly, Layamon’s decision to situate Vortigern in Wales specifically participates in twelfth-century discursive practices. Layamon’s repetition of Vortigern’s kingdom is consonant with the

¹⁰² He is initially, “consul Gewisseorum” (119) [leader of the Gewissei].

¹⁰³ Text and translation taken from Judith Weiss, *Wace’s Roman de Brut: A History of the British* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 164. Subsequent references will be noted parenthetically.

¹⁰⁴ Layamon Brut: or *Hystoria* Brutonum, ed. and trans. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (New York: Longman, 1995), 336. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically. For a discussion of Layamon’s particular phrasing here—that Vortigern had the land in “hand”—and its relationship to chorographic vision, see Christopher Canon, *The Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61–62.

¹⁰⁵ As Warren has succinctly written, “throughout Stephen’s reign...the Welsh expressed themselves as a resurgent power.” Warren, *History*, 61.

tendency by some twelfth-century historians to link Welsh and barbarism,¹⁰⁶ as well as the political tension between England and Wales more generally throughout the twelfth-century; for not only is one of the greatest traitors of British history clearly linked with the contemporary Welsh, but this move places the burden of the *adventus Saxonum* on that people by suggesting that it was a leader of their nation—and a prominent one at that—that was the root cause for the coming of the Germanic tribes and the destruction that they would bring. In this, Layamon seems to participate in the twelfth-century historiographical trend that would describe the contemporary Welsh as inherently barbarous, inasmuch as this particular forbearer deserves such a reprobation.

Perhaps more generally, but no less importantly, the Britons themselves are reenvisioned in Layamon's *Brut*; here Layamon shows them violating the both natural and gender boundaries in order to demonstrate their potency as a people. When, for instance, discussing their resurgence under Constantine against Manis and Welga, Layamon relates that

Pa comen ut of muntē Moni þusend monnen;
 Heo lepen ut of þan wuden swulc hit deor weoren.
 Liðen toward Lundenne moni hundred þusend,
 Bi straten and bi walden al hit forð hælden;
 And þa æhte wifmen wæpmonnes claðes duden heom on;
 And heo forð wenden toward þere uerde. (328)

The divide between civilization and humanity here gives way as the men are compared to, and thus metaphorically transformed into, *deor* [beasts]; the divide between women and men, typified in their clothes and their might, is overridden. Yet far from negative associations, these boundary crossings are empowering. The mens' fleetfootedness gives

¹⁰⁶ John Gillingham, for instance, has suggested that this trend is in evidence particularly in William of Malmesbury and other twelfth-century historians' work. John Gillingham, "The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*" *Anglo-Norman Studies* 13 (1990): 106-112.

them an edge over their adversaries. Similarly, in the guise of men the women act with an unaccustomed ferocity. As Layamon relates,

Whærswa heo funden æine mon atwunden
 Ðe weore mid Melga, þan hæðene kinga,
 Ða quenen lude loghen and al hin todroʒen,
 And beden for þere seole þat hire neuere sæl nere. (328)

In a kind of bacchic ecstasy, the women, dressed as men, show their adversaries no mercy.

This type of boundary crossing, however, is not reserved for the Britons alone; and yet they alone are able to derive any real power from it. When discussing Vortigern's betrayal of the Picts, for instance, Layamon relates the following unprecedented narrative details:

Ða spæc Vortigerne —þe swike we ful deorne;
 Swiðe he gon to wepen and særiliche siken,
 Ah hit wes an hafde and noht an his heorte.
 Ða axeden hine þa burh-men, þe swiðe balde weoren;
 “Lauerd Vortigerne, whæht is þat þu murnest?
 Nert þu na wimman swa sære to wepen.” (353)

Undoubtedly this narrative episode of Vortigern's feigned sorrow has its roots in Geoffrey, wherein he “quasi contristatus in fletum erupit, nec unquam prius maiori gaudio fluctuauerat” (123) [erupted in tears as if he were wracked with sorrow, when not at any time before had he swelled with greater joy]. And yet, not only does Layamon reinscribe this duality—the tension between feigned sadness and true happiness—within a personal bodily metaphor that is caught by the duality of the *hafde* and *heorte*, but he also includes mention of the response Vortigern's outpouring of tears elicits from his compatriots. Here his tears are met immediately with disdain and suspicion, which is grafted into a comment about Vortigern's violation of the gender norms. That he *wepen* suggests for his fellow soldiers that he is less of a man, more of a *wimman*. In many

ways, this depiction represents a parody of that earlier moment wherein the Britons could willfully violate the gender boundaries in defense of their kingdoms. Whereas in that instance, however, women were seemingly transformed into men, and men into beasts, Vortigern's violation more closely allies him with women. In this case, that kind of violation is neither empowering nor positive; it is simply unnatural and indicative of Vortigern's treachery more broadly.

Similarly, when relating the reason for the Germanic tribes coming to Britain, Layamon once again relies on a kind of animal imagery that would recall that earlier instance involving the Britons. As he relates, the tribes have no choice but to seek out other lands because "Pa wif fareð mid childe swa þe deor wilde; æueraleche 3here heo bereð child þere." This kind of imagery is quite different from that found in Geoffrey's *HRB*; therein the primary descriptor used for the arriving Germanic warriors is their basic nobility. When arriving at the court, for instance, Vortigern is quick to recognize that they stand out because of their "nobilitate et decore" (125) [nobility and propriety]. Indeed, the Germanic brothers' narrative about their exile confirms such a reading; only the "potiores atque fortiores" (125) are chosen to leave their homeland. In Layamon, however, such distinctive marks of nobility are stripped away. While Layamon does retain the positive physical markers to describe Hengist and Horsa, there is no explicit personal martial virtue nor inherent nobility that predetermines who will leave the Germanic lands. Instead, only those who happen to be chosen by lots seek their fortune in other lands (358). Perhaps more importantly, such an expulsion is dependent on the continued and uncontrollable breeding of the Germanic women. While this prolific

capacity is nonetheless present in Wace,¹⁰⁷ Layamon is far more specific inasmuch as he labels the women as *deor* [beasts] and in so doing explicitly recalls the fleet-footed Britons earlier described. As with Vortigern's violation of gender norms, however, this description is far from positive. For not only does this animal behavior represent for Layamon a violation of the human/animal binary, but it leads to the expulsion of Germanic tribesmen from their native land.

Many of the tropes mentioned here are essentially expansions of material and trends in evidence long before Layamon's twelfth-century text was written. The tendency, for instance, to reinscribe Vortigern's role has long been in evidence. That we see here, however, his holdings specifically limited to those areas in Wales shows a unique take on this trend that, on the one hand, updates this characterization for thirteenth-century audience while, on the other, suggests Layamon's reliance on a twelfth-century anti-Welsh discourse. Similarly, to describe the peoples and places of Britain, Layamon relies on a trope of boundaries. While I have drawn attention here to those metaphorical boundaries, namely those between men and women as well as those between the natural and unnatural worlds, undoubtedly other binary narratives endure. In this instance, the violation of these traditional boundaries is something that can be both positive and negative; it can encode the power left to the Britons in their fights against a usurping population, or it can be used to emphasize the negative attributes of the fallen Vortigern and the unnatural Germanic tribesmen. While much work remains to be done, the pervasive quality of these tropes, and their contextual malleability, allows us to

¹⁰⁷ "Noz genz merveilles fructifiant / E li enfant trop multipliant" (170) [Our people are exceedingly fertile and there are too many children]

understand just how they could be used to reenvision such a crucial moment in twelfth-century England—the *adventus Saxonum*.

Chapter 4

De verbo in verbum? Translating the *Battle of Brunanburh* into Henry of Huntingdon's *Historia Anglorum*

In his twelfth-century *HA*, Henry of Huntingdon translated the Old English verse—the *Battle of Brunanburh*—found under the annal entry for 937 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC)* into Latin; in the Old English poem, Athelstan—king of Wessex—Edmund, and a combined force of West-Saxons and Mercians repel an invasion of Norse and Scots warriors.¹⁰⁸ In his decision to translate this Old English verse account, Henry, in many ways, inherited not only many of those rhetorical tropes common to his source, but also much of its ideological weight. While many of the historical details of the events of that day in 937—like the exact location of the battle itself—¹⁰⁹ have been lost in time and the memory of this event no longer has the intellectual currency of comparable battles like the Battle of Hastings, for the Old English poet this battle was not simply another one in a long train of skirmishes. It was a single, punctuated moment of slaughter that had never been matched; as Michael Livingstone has suggested, “for generations afterward, the raging, bloody hours that culminated in a victory for the English forces under King Athelstan would be called ‘The Great

¹⁰⁸ For the convenience of the reader, I have appended both poems—along with translations—at the end of this chapter: see Appendix. Additionally, while the *ASC* is not principally prosimetrum in its form, the inclusion of this particular verse, as Thomas A. Bredehoft has suggested, sets “the stage for the increasing presence of poetry within the *ASC* pages that continued right through the rest of the tenth century and all of the eleventh.” Thomas A. Bredehoft, “*The Battle of Brunanburh* in Old English Studies,” in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingstone (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 287.

¹⁰⁹ For a survey of the discussion concerning the location of the battle of Brunanburh, see Paul Cavill’s “The Place-Name Debate,” in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook*, ed. Michael Livingstone (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2011), 327-349.

Battle.”¹¹⁰ This battle would live on in the historical consciousness of Britain for years to come.

And while it has oftentimes suffered in its comparison to more explicit literary works, like the *Battle of Maldon*, the import of the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* itself cannot be denied.¹¹¹ Not only have scholars pointed to it to chart the development of Old English verse because of its rather precise date,¹¹² but—as recent work has argued—this particular poem is also explicitly connected to the idea of conquest more generally. In the final moments, for instance, the poet relates that

Ne wearð wæl mare
 On þis eiglande æfre gieta
 Folces gefylled beforan þissum
 Sweordes ecgum, þæs þe us secgað bec,
 Ealde uðwitan, siþþan eastan hider
 Engle ond Seaxe up becoman,
 Ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan,
 Wlance wigsmiþas, Wealles ofercoman,
 Eorlas arhwate eard begeatan.¹¹³

[Never was there a greater slaughter of men on this island before this—and even yet—of which the books tells us—old historians—by the edges of the sword since from the east hither the Angles and the Saxons, proud war-smiths, noble warriors came up, sought Britain over the broad sea, overcame the Welsh, valiant nobles conquered the land.]

¹¹⁰ Introduction to *A Casebook*, 1.

¹¹¹ As Dolores Warwick Frese phrases it, “*The Battle of Brunanburh* has invariably been compared to *The Battle of Maldon* and it has suffered by comparison.” Indeed, “Brunanburh is typically assigned secondary status as commemorative battle verse whose enthusiastic maker produced, in place of an annal entry.” Dolores Warwick Frese, “Poetic Prowess in Brunanburh and Maldon: Winning, Losing, and Literary Outcome,” in *Modes of Interpretation in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield*, ed. Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton, and Fred C. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 83.

¹¹² As Bredehoft states, this poem—because it can be rather securely dated to a narrow time-frame from the battle itself in 937 to its appearance in the A version of the ASC—“occupies a very important position in our understanding of tenth-century developments in Old English verse.” Bredehoft, “*The Battle of Brunanburh*,” in *A Casebook*, 288.

¹¹³ Alistair Campbell, *The Battle of Brunanburh* (London: W. Heinemann, 1938), 65-73. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically by line number; the translations are my own.

In its mention of that *adventus Saxonum*, Janet Thormann has argued that “the present battle [of Brunanburh poem] rehearses repetition as reversal—that is, the invaders of the past defend the land against the invaders of the present—that the present becomes precisely historical”; in the implicit connection drawn between the *adventus Saxonum* and the *Battle of Brunanburh*, the past has been written over, the *adventus Saxonum* transformed into an illustrious repulsion of foreign invaders.¹¹⁴

Perhaps more importantly, the poet’s historical vision depends on a certain political and regnal unity that some scholars have seen as propagating an early form of nationalism. Stefan Hall, for instance, has suggested that “*The Battle of Brunanburh*, the entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for the year 937, is a nationalistic poem, one that promoted English nationalism and reinforced nationalistic ideologies that had been fermenting since at least the time of King Alfred the Great.”¹¹⁵ The poem itself, for Hall, was instrumental in the dissemination and strengthening of a “national identity which, it seems by all accounts, had been developing in England for some time before the Battle of Brunanburh.”¹¹⁶ In the poem the triumph of Wessex and Mercia over their foreign enemies is only complete when the leaders of their respective armies “*begen ætsamne, / cyning and æpeling, cyþþe sohton, / Wesseaxena land*” (57-59) [both together, king and prince, sought out their native land, the land of the West Saxons]. As Thomas A.

¹¹⁴Janet Thormann, “The Battle of Brunanburh and the Matter of History,” *Mediaevalia* 17 (1994): 11. Cf. Thomas Bredehoft, who argues that “the end of the poem thus suggests that the victory at Brunanburh is a fitting resumption (or inversion) of the Migration-age conquest, this time directed by Æthelstan.” Thomas A. Bredehoft, *Textual Histories: Readings in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 101.

¹¹⁵ Stefan Thomas Hall, “Did Anglo-Saxons Have a Sense of National Identity?: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and The Battle of Brunanburh*,” in *Proceedings of the 14th Northern Plains Conference on Earlier British Literature*, ed. by Bruce E. Brandt and Michael S. Nagy (Brookings: English Department, South Dakota State University, 2007), passim. For a survey of a pre-Conquest English identity, cf. Hugh Thomas, who suggests that the “construct of Englishness was well in place before the Norman Conquest.” Hugh Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility and Identity 1066-c. 1220* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Bredehoft has suggested, Wessex in this moment “thus becomes the familiar homeland of both West Saxons and Mercians, at least as the *Battle of Brunanburh* poem presents things.”¹¹⁷ Ultimately the deliberative pairing, as well as the shared destination of an ascendant West Saxon polity, suggests, for scholars like Hall and Bredehoft, the preeminence of Alfred’s house in England.

It is with these very issues and ideological pressures that Henry of Huntingdon, working from the *ASC* two centuries later in the twelfth century, had to contend. Of course, the simple fact that Henry of Huntingdon translated the Old English original itself is key. As Tiller notes, Henry’s verse translation of this moment in particular “is one of the first attempts to render this Old English poetic verse in the Latin for post-conquest readership”;¹¹⁸ more importantly, for Tiller, his “translation of the Anglo Saxon poem into Latin rhyme and alliteration as part of his text is perhaps his most innovative versification.”¹¹⁹ Similarly, A. G. Rigg has demonstrated that in his translation Henry “produced an almost unique hybrid of Latin and vernacular poetic techniques”;¹²⁰ herein “he tried to retain the structure of the half-line, using the rhythmical equivalents of adonics or pairs of dactyls, and he linked them (or marked them off) by means of alliteration and rhyme.”¹²¹

While Rigg has done much to elucidate Henry’s metrical practices, little substantive analysis has been undertaken regarding the translated poem that he produced,

¹¹⁷ Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*, 100.

¹¹⁸ Kenneth Tiller, “Anglo-Norman Historiography and Henry of Huntingdon’s Translation of *The Battle of Brunanburh*,” *Studies in Philology* 109, no. 3 (2012): 174.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ A. G. Rigg, “Henry of Huntingdon’s Metrical Experiments,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 1 (1991): 68.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 66. On his metrical practices, cf. Diane Greenway, who notes that “in the course of the first ten books of the *HA*, Henry has occasion to incorporate lines of his own poetry and no fewer than twenty-four points in the narrative.” Introduction to Henry’s *Historia*, cvii. While I use this text, I follow Rigg’s lineation as found in his article, “Henry of Huntingdon’s,” 69-70.

with the exception of Tiller's most recent article. Tiller correctly points out that Henry's version, as a translation of Old English verse, "has a great deal to tell us about Henry's consciousness of the translator, the nature of historiography, and the reception of Old English poetry by Anglo Norman court and clerical officials during the third generation after the conquest."¹²² In the course of his analysis, Tiller explicates some of Henry's apparent misreadings, but also explicitly identifies the ways in which the Old English poetic tropes, figures, and ideas could be manipulated to meet the exigencies of Henry's literary and cultural milieu. The beasts of battle, for instance—long a standard of Old English verse—become a black crow, a livid toad, an eagle, a kite, a dog, and a tawny wolf.¹²³ Additionally, Henry's debt to a providential model of history—wherein "insular history as cyclical, a recurrent pattern of conquest, settlement, and defeat dictated by divine providence"¹²⁴ is particularly important for Tiller.¹²⁵ In his view, such a historiographical conception conditioned, for instance, Henry's translation of the closing moments of the battle and its connection with other moments of conquest; according to Tiller, under such a conception makes the *adventus Saxonum* could become a "precedent for the Norman Conquest."¹²⁶ In so doing, Tiller replicates Thormann's claim for a new, twelfth-century audience; just as in the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, Henry's

¹²² Tiller, "Anglo-Norman," 176.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 184. Cf. Robert Hanning, who has discussed this structural motif at length; indeed, he claims that "if [for Henry of Huntingdon] the overt regulating factor in the succession of reigns in Britain is God's Providence, there is nonetheless a covert, even unconscious recognition of a cyclic pattern in history, a pattern which remorselessly regulates the life and death of realms in a manner analogous to fortune's regulation of the lives and deaths of great men." Hanning, *Vision*, 136.

¹²⁵ In his recent work, he expands this formulation to other twelfth-century historians: Tiller, *Layamon's*, *passim*.

¹²⁶ Tiller, "Anglo-Norman," 181.

version “also renders Brunanburh as a site where victorious English repulsed a seaborne invasion of ‘Normans.’”¹²⁷

In many ways, Tiller’s claim depends on a kind of typological reading that would collapse the temporal, racial, and political differences between the *adventus Saxonum*, the battle of Brunanburh, and the Norman Conquest. In what follows, however, I suggest that such a reading fails to properly account for the Old English original which Henry was working from and—when taken in context with the other prose and verse material in Henry’s *HA*—does not acknowledge Henry’s explicit anxiety about just such a reading practice. Instead, I will demonstrate that Henry labors to deconstruct just such a reading and, in so doing, suggests that the constituent units of his cyclical structure are not simply interchangeable. His translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh*, in fact marks this moment as one key cog in the evolutionary development an English polity that would see its fruition in Henry’s twelfth-century present. In his Latin translation of an older poem, Henry articulates a new vision of England wherein the country itself depends not on the joint authority of a variety of political and racial peoples, but on the ascension of the house of Wessex. Subtending this political reformulation is a conception of the land which, I argue, functions as a transcendent category that can remain intact despite the rather inevitable changes in social and political climate.

Henry of Huntingdon’s Invaders: Twelfth-Century Normans or Tenth-Century Northmen?

In my previous chapter, I outlined the ways in which Henry adhered to a providential model and the import it had on his narrative of the *adventus Saxonum* in the *HA*. Ultimately, this structure emplots history as a series of invasions that serve as divine punishment for a wayward populace—a punishment from which even the Normans are

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

not exempt. As he states, for instance, “quinque autem plagas ab exordio usque ad presens immisit diuina ultio Britannie, que non solum uisitat fideles, sed etiam diiudicat infideles” (14) [from the beginning all the way up to the present, divine vengeance sent against Britain five plagues, which did not visit the faithful alone, but even judged the unbelievers]. Henry correlates each of these plagues with an invading, extra-insular force that arrives in response to the fall of a populace. As Partner has suggested, “the theme of the five plagues serves to control the historical materials Henry selected from his authorities, to organize them into intelligible segments of a reasonably intelligible whole without, however, having much effect on the narrative.”¹²⁸ In book seven of the *HA*, Henry even relates that “patebit amodo quomodo et ipsos Normannos uindices quidem suos uariis cladibus afficere inceperit” (412) [from hereon it will be clear how He began to afflict the Normans themselves, his own avengers, with various disasters]. The Normans, just like all those who came before them, are subject to a dynamic not dissimilar from Fortune’s wheel. Each and every people has been, and will continue to be, subject to divine judgment.

In such a narrative formula, the “plagues” themselves operate with divine mandate; they are sent as noble *uindices* [avengers] to cleanse the land. From the outset of the *adventus Saxonum* Henry encodes this kind of privileged position in the terminology that he uses for the Germanic tribes. After Vortimer’s fall and the all but eventual collapse of British resistance, Henry describes the tribesmen at the battle of Crayford as being composed of “Recentes quippe qui superuenerant et uiri electi erant” (84-86) [those fresh troops who just arrived and those chosen men]. While the terminology applied to the Germanic forces, *recentes* and *electi*, undoubtedly relates to

¹²⁸ Partner, *Serious*, 25.

the influx of Germanic forces called for by Hengist,¹²⁹ it also subtly suggests the new station of the Germanic invaders; because of the fall of the Britons, they have become the *electi*—chosen to carry out God’s will.

Similarly, in his translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh*, Henry uses this very same terminology. When relating the triumph of the combined Mercian and Wessex forces, Henry describes the men of Wessex as “*prius electi, post indefessi*” (312) [first chosen, afterwards unconquerable]. Undoubtedly, Henry’s word choice here depends on the *Battle of Brunanburh*, wherein the poet relates that the “*Wesseaxe forð ondlongne dæg eorodcistum on last legdun laþum þeodum*” (93) [West-Saxons went forward the whole length of the day in troops, pressed on in the tracks of the people]. Here the West-Saxons proceed in a series of individual *eorodcistum* [troops]. As a whole, this kenning can be literally translated to “chosen troops”; as it no doubt presages Henry’s Latin *electi* [chosen]. And yet, Henry’s use of *electi* is substantively different.¹³⁰ Whereas the amassed, West-Saxon army is broken down into smaller “*eorodcistum*” [troops] in the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, in the *HA* the whole body of West-Saxons operates just as those Germanic warriors of the *adventus Saxonum*. They have been chosen to fulfill Providence and, by extension, operate with a divine mandate. Perhaps more importantly, the specific, rather amorphous adverbial *post* resists any definitive closure; the triumphs of the men of Wessex seem to stretch beyond this tenth-century moment and into every moment *post*, stretching even into Henry’s present.

¹²⁹ Preceding this material, Henry notes that Hengest “*et Esc filius suos receptis auxiliis a patria sua, et morte uiienis freti, bello se preparant apud Creganford*” (84) [and his son Æsc, along with the troops they had received from their homeland, having been encouraged by the young man’s {Vortimer’s} death, prepared themselves for war at Crayford].

¹³⁰ On this word more generally, see the *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. “eored-cystum,” accessed June 6, 2013, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/floyd.lib.umn.edu/doe/>. On its particular manifestation here, cf. Campbell’s edition of *Brunanburh*, 104.

There is no doubt that Henry's translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh* depends on the structure afforded by this providential order which influences the way that he describes each people; in many ways this invites Tiller's type of reading. In fact, Henry applies the very same term for the tenth-century Scandinavian Northmen of the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* as the twelfth-century Normans; both are *Normanni* in Henry's *HA*. While, as Tiller points out, Henry's use of this term for both parties stands on firm etymological ground,¹³¹ it could have nonetheless created a rather uneasy parallel between those early enemy Vikings and the contemporary Normans who had come to England and conquered its populace all too recently. Because of this lexical connection, the Norman Conquest of 1066 could seemingly be overwritten, transformed into a battle wherein the English can repel their foreign conquerors and thus be symptomatic of a radical subversion of the dominant Anglo-Norman ideology of the present. From the *adventus Saxonum* to the Norman Conquest, this particular recounting of the *Battle of Brunanburh* could be read as reinscribing all those moments when England was conquered as triumphs.

As I will argue here, such a reading, however, obfuscates the difference necessary to Henry's cyclical vision of history. In Henry's historical model, it is key that each event is not the same and thus interchangeable, but that each and every different people at each particular historical moment is subject to God's will, to providence itself. In fact, while his lexical choice registers a certain slippage between the tenth-century Northmen and the twelfth-century Normans, Henry's translation practices resist this leveling of historical difference. Henry's use of the term "Northmen," for instance, is quite parsimonious and reflects, very precisely, the Old English original in the *Battle of*

¹³¹ Tiller, "Anglo-Norman," 188.

Brunanburh. In the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, the term “Northmen” appears only twice. These are as follows:

Pær geflemed wearð
Norðmanna bregu, nede gebeded,
to lides stefne litle weorode. (32-34)

[There the chief of the Northmen was routed, compelled by might, into the prow of his ship with his small troop.]

And:

Gewitan him þa Norþmen nægledcnearrum,
dreorig daraða laf, on Dingesmere
ofer deop wæter Difelin secan
eft Ira land, æwiscmode. (53-56)

[Then the Northmen went away from them in nailed ships, the dreary remnant of the spears, into Dingesmere over the deep water they, disgraced, sought Dublin, Ireland again.]

In each of these instances, the poet employs the term in concert with a description of the invaders’ intentions to return home and thus both emphasizes their very foreignness and counterpoises it against the English in a way that reaffirms the national triumph that the battle of Brunanburh represents for Athelstan and Edmund.

Although it may appear otherwise at first, Henry’s translation of this event remains faithful to the Old English original. At the close of the poem, for instance, there is a very distinctive correlation between Henry’s version and the Old English original; just as “Gewitan him þa Norþmen nægledcnearrum” (53) [Then the Northmen went away from them in nailed ships] in the Old English, the “Normanni nauibus clauatis... terras suas...repetissent” (312) [the Normans returned to their lands]. His translation of the second passage seems, at first, to be a bit more lax than the original. When discussing the fall of the “bregu Norðmanna,” he states that “Deperiitque Normannorum tumor” (132) [the pride of the Normans died]. By translating *bregu Northmanna* into *Normannorum*

tumor, Henry, in Tiller’s reading, effects two important changes: the tenth-century Vikings seem to become twelfth-century Normans, and Henry makes sly reference to his Normans’ “pride.”¹³² This translation seems to represent a rather radical shift from the Old English original, wherein the concrete Old English *bregu* [leader] becomes the abstract Latin concept *tumor* [pride]. To explain such a lexical shift, Tiller suggests that Henry must have misread the Old English original; instead of glossing *bregu* properly, Henry must have thought of it “as a form of OE *brægen* (brain).”¹³³ Not only would this understanding of *brægen* as pride be unprecedented in the Old English records, but it depends on a metaphorical reading of the Latin term *tumor* that is largely unnecessary.¹³⁴ There is no reason that the more abstract *tumor* could have been intended for the original concrete; the leader of the Normans could certainly have been the “pride” of their army. There is, then, no reason to think that Henry misread his original, nor that he imputed here an emotion that would be unprecedented.

In between these two passages, Henry includes a single, unprecedented mention of the *Normanni*. As he states,

Simul et Froda, ductor Normannus,
cumque suis notis dux Constantinus,
de martis congressu iactare nequierunt,
ubi coginationis se fragmen appauit. (312)

[Likewise both Froda, leader of the Northmen, and duke Constantine, were not able to boast of this battle, where a fragment of their men remained].

This passage corresponds to the Old English which reads as follows:

Swilce þær eac se froda mid fleame com
On his cypþe norð, Constontinus
Har hildering; hreman ne þorfte

¹³² Ibid., 185.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The Old English term *brægen* was typically used only for physical brain itself. DOE s.v. *brægen*.

Mecga gemanan. (37-34)

[Likewise there too the wise Costontinus came into his native northern land in flight, the grey-haired warrior need not boast of a well-matched struggle]

As Tiller correctly points out, where the term *froda* [wisdom] in the Old English original was used as an appositive adjective to describe the Norse leader, Henry personifies it and creates an entirely new character.¹³⁵ That Henry would then qualify this person with mention of his station among the Norse, however, operates as an interpretative move that serves only to elucidate the Old English original and perhaps reduce the rather uncharacteristically positive epithet for Costontinus; it is not, however, an attempt to augment the role of the Northmen nor to solidify their correlation with the twelfth-century Normans.

Each of these instances, then, faithfully translates those found in the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*. In no demonstrable way does Henry exploit the etymological connection between the twelfth-century Normans and the tenth-century Northmen by including unprecedented and gratuitous references to the *Normanni*; even that instance that comes closest, perhaps, to encoding a twelfth-century interpretation of the Normans and their pride depends, as I've suggested, on a metaphorical reading that elides the concrete nature of Henry's Latin terminology. To impute, then, that Henry's use of the term *Normanni* for both tenth-century Northmen and the twelfth-century Normans creates an uneasy parallel that is meant to challenge the dominant Anglo-Norman ideology belies the way that Henry has carried out his translation.

In fact, the prose material that surrounds Henry's translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh* actively works to disengage just such a reading. When discussing Edmund's

¹³⁵ Tiller, "Anglo-Norman," 185.

assumption of the English throne—when he “suscepit in regno”—he mentions that at the same time it was “Willelmus filius Rollionis qui terram que uocatur Normannia a rege Francie conquisierat. A Rollione autem gens Normannorum duxit originem” (314) [William, the son of Rollo, who took over that land which is called Normandy from the king of France. From Rollo, moreover, the Normans took their origin]. Not only does this narrative detail relate and inscribe the origin of the “gens Normannorum” and the land “que uocatur Normannia,” but it also marks the disjuncture between the Anglo-Norman people of twelfth-century England and the army of “Northmen” who had earlier sought to claim England at Brunanburh. They have an origin, and a homeland with its own history, that is starkly separate from the armies described by Henry in his translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh*.

This is not, however, the only time when Henry mentions this ethnic disjuncture. In his translation of the Old English *Conquest of the Five Boroughs* poem that follows almost immediately the *Battle of Brunanburh*, Henry relates that the Danes were “penitus extirpauit” (314) [thoroughly rooted out]. He is careful, however, to note with an added relative clause that these were the Danes who “etiam Normanni eo tempore sunt uocati” (314) [even in that time were called Normans]. This statement collapses the ethnic divide that is brought to the fore in the Old English *Capture of the Five Boroughs*. Herein the

Dæne wæran ær
 under Norðmannum nyde gebegde
 on hæþenra hæfteclommum
 lange þraga, oþ hie alysde eft
 for his weorþscipe wiggendra hleo,
 afera Eadweardes, Eadmund cyning.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Janet Bately, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 3, *MS A* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), 73. References to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically by page number; the translations are my own.

[the Danes were formerly subjected by the might of the Northmen, in the fetters of the heathens, for a long time until the leader of the warriors, the son of Edward—king Edmund— released them for his honor.]

In this version, not only are the Danes subjected to the authority of the Northmen, but there is a clear disjuncture between the Danes and the Northmen of the *Battle of Brunanburh*; historically speaking, these Danes are the settled residents of the Danelaw. Henry's *HA*, however, elides such a distinction; the Danes and the Northmen become, for this twelfth-century historian, indistinguishable ethnic categories. Perhaps more importantly, though, such a distinction ultimately serves to prevent the correlation between the Normans of Henry's present and those Northmen of the past. By suggesting that the Danes "sunt uocati" [were called] Northmen, Henry creates a temporal disjuncture that insulates his present day Normans from any implication in either this poem or the previous one. Those Northmen are not the Normans of today, he suggests, but the Danes of the past. While Henry's need to explain away the correlation between these two peoples might be said to represent a certain anxiety about the national origins of the Normans and their ties to earlier Danish invasions, Henry is careful in these two instances to make a distinction between the contemporary Normans and the historical Danes. Although they may share a common name in twelfth-century England, in Henry's *HA* they are very much two separate peoples, with two separate histories.

Henry of Huntingdon's Invaders: Irish, Scots, and Danes?

If in this moment, then, Henry displays a particular historical sensitivity that would resist reducing his twelfth-century Normans to tenth-century Northmen, his understanding and representation of England's tenth-century opposition is not so carefully constructed. As I will demonstrate, while at first Henry's translation of the

Battle of Brunanburh seems to be even more historically sensitive than its Old English counterpart, such a depiction quickly evaporates; the Irish Scots, Northmen and Danes become, in Henry's retelling simply "invaders" over and against which the people of England can define themselves. Thus Henry transforms Athelstan and Edmund's victory from a singular military struggle to a monumental moment wherein England can be made whole and can stand against any external threat.

The Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs* poem display a complex rhetorical and historically contingent ethnic picture of tenth-century England. Although the invading army was likely composed of three factions, the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* poet emphasizes the role of the Northmen and Scots alone in order to suggest a certain rhetorical parity between them and their English counterparts; just as the English forces are composed of two factions—Mercians and West-Saxons—their antagonists are simply Northmen and Scots. As Diane Frese has suggested, "the fact that the historical coalition of invaders involved a third party... does not enter the poem, for the artist's concern here is to formulate the experienced sense of interchangeable equivalence that has something psychologically palindromic at its base."¹³⁷ Whereas Frese sees the retreat of the invaders "on Dingesmere / ofer deop waeter Difelin" (54-55) [into Dingesmere, Dublin over the deep water] paralleling the brothers' return to Wessex, I would suggest that each faction is relegated to its own land. In fact, only Anlaf—leader of the Danes—who returns to Dublin; his compatriot, Constantinus of the Scots returns "on cyþþe north" (38) [into his native north]. While there can be no doubt that there is a certain narrative doubling operative here that reduces the invading contingent—such that the armies of Æthelstan and Edmund can be matched

¹³⁷ Frese, "Poetic Prowess," 88.

by those commanded by Anlaf and Constantinus—the poet does maintain the difference between the Northmen and the Scots.

In much the same fashion, the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* further complicates this ethnic vision of England in the *Capture of the Five Boroughs* poem; here that tag—Northmen—contrasts with those Danes who inhabit the Danelaw; in this poem,

wæran ær
 under Norðmannum nyde gebegde
 on heathenra hæfteclommomum
 lange þraga. (73)¹³⁸

[formerly the Danes were subjected by the might of the Northmen, in the fetters of the heathens].

It is only with Edmund's coming and his defeat of the Northmen that they once again achieve the peace promised to them under Alfred's accords. England's enemies, then, are noticeably composed of a variety of forces, led by distinctive personages, and with their own individual homelands; more than that, the poet also subdivides that ethnic category, Northman, into those who reside in the Danelaw and those unlawful, unsettled men who exist beyond its reach.

In his translation of these two poems, however, Henry refuses these ethnically sensitive distinctions by the close of his poem. In the beginning, Henry is deliberate in locating the invading armies in their respective homes. He notes, for instance, that the invading hordes are composed of three specific factions: the "gens...hibernensium," those "multi a Dacia oriundi," and the "Scoti" (312). In his choice to include these three factions Henry seems to offer a more ethnically diverse, and likely more historically accurate, picture and refuses the symbolic parallelism that Frese has drawn attention to.

¹³⁸ As part of a constellation of evidence that points to the likely connection between this poem and the *Battle of Brunanburh*, Scragg notes that this particular phrasing, "nyde gebegde," occurs in the *Battle of Brunanburh* poem as well. Scragg, "A Reading," 114.

And yet, this specificity quickly collapses. Whereas in the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* the Scots and Northmen return to separate and clearly definable locations—whether that be Difelin, or their native northern lands—¹³⁹Henry simply relates that the combined forces “*terras suas...repetissent*” (312) [returned to their homes]. In the end it is only that they are not native to England that matters for Henry.

Similarly, in his retelling of the *Conquest of the Five Boroughs*, Henry elides any difference between the settled Danes and their marauding counterparts. Instead of relating that Edmund moved into the Danelaw and freed those lawful, settled Danes, Henry relates simply that he “*Dacos uicit*” (314) [conquered the Danes]; in fact, he “*Dacos igitur qui etiam Normanni eo tempore sunt uocati, penitus extirpauit*” (314) [completely rooted out the Danes, who were called Normans at that time]. While I drew attention to this moment previously inasmuch as it offers a sharp break between the contemporary Normans and their etymological forbearers, here the relative clause also serves to reduce all the Danes to *Normanni*. There is, in Henry’s work, no lawful and settled population of Danes, but only *Normanni*; to Henry, all Danes are Northmen, and all Northmen are Danes.

These two decisions, then, represent marked variation from the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* and have profound effects on our understanding of Henry’s historical vision. In recognizing his understanding of the marked difference between the *Normanni* of his poem and the Normans of his historical moment, we can come to a new, more complicated understanding of his structural patterning. While it can be tempting to see this cyclical patterning, governed by Providence and repeated throughout the *HA*, as

¹³⁹ On the location of Dingesmere, cf. Cavill, “Place-Name,” 336-337 as well as Stephen Harding, “Wirral: Folklore and Locations,” in *A Casebook*, 358-362.

inherently leveling all distinction between racial and social groups and their historical moment and reducing them to types, Henry, at least here, resists just such a reduction. While each moment is connected inasmuch as it enacts God's will in time, each fall—each moment of invasion, resistance, and conquest—is unique; they are connected simply by the reality that no polity or empire lasts forever; each eventually succumbs to its own vices. Additionally, his decision to elide any difference between the tenth-century Northmen and the Danes allows their defeat in the *Capture of the Five Boroughs* at the hands of Athelstan and to become the opening salvo in a long line of military victories that would lead to the pacification of the Danish population in England and would close out Henry's fifth book of the *HA*. The Northmen of Henry's *Battle of Brunanburh*, then, become important only inasmuch as they are an extra-insular force whose defeat can chart the rise of the English.

Henry of Huntingdon's West-Saxons and Mercians: The Rise of Wessex

One of the hallmarks of the original *Battle of Brunanburh* poem and the following *Capture of the Five Boroughs* poem is the crafting of a national identity that subsumes West-Saxons, Mercians, and even the Danes of the Danelaw under one construct; Henry's translations and innovations resist such a vision.¹⁴⁰ Just as was the case with the invading forces, Henry's vision of the English contingent in the *Battle of Brunanburh* appears to maintain the same diversity as the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* original. This gives way rather quickly, however, as Henry shifts his retelling of events to support an evolutionary vision of England that depends on the prioritization of the house of

¹⁴⁰ On the incorporation of the Danes in the Danelaw in the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, Bredehoft suggests that "if *Brunanburh* hinted at the significance of cooperation, alliance, and even national identity as linking West Saxons to Mercians, this poem goes a step farther and includes the Danes of the Five Boroughs within that polity." Bredehoft, *Textual Histories*, 103.

Wessex. In fact, Henry's account of that fateful day foregrounds the creation of a stable English polity, founded in Wessex, that privileges a pattern of lineal descent, and a unified sense of England; to authorize this political model, Henry emphasizes the transcendent nature of the land itself. In this, Henry's Latin *Battle of Brunanburh* reflects an enduring legacy that could see the English—and England more generally—emerge as a more unified category.

While Henry's translation method delimits the range of changes that he makes, his alterations nonetheless reflect his particular, twelfth-century moment. From the outset, Henry states that the “Anglici scriptores quasi carminis modo proloquentes, et extraneis tam uerbis quam figuris usi translatione fide donandi sunt. Ut pene de uerbo in uerbum eorum interpretantes eloquium ex grauitate uerborum grauitatem actuum et animorum Gentis illius condiscamus” (310) [English authors, speaking as if in a kind of song, use strange words as figures which ought to be given a faithful translation so that we, translating their eloquence almost word for word, might know the gravity of their deeds and the spirit of that people from the gravity of their words]. However, the possibility of maintaining a translation identical to the original, of proceeding “de uerbo in uerbum eorum,” is a fiction that can never be achieved. Henry knows, for instance, that the “regnum Westsexe” would come to “cetera omnia sibi processu temporum subiugauit et monarchiam totius Britannie optinuit” (96) [subjugate all the others to itself in the advance of time, and took hold of the monarchy of all Britain]. His account, then, cannot be separated from his own historical moment and his own historical consciousness.

In the opening lines of his Latin translation, for instance, Henry reorients regnal authority as deriving primarily from lineage in a way that recalls the predominant trend among the Anglo-Normans. In the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, for instance, the poet places primary stress on the martial victories achieved by Athelstan and his brother Edmund:

Her Æthelstan cyning, eorla dryhten,
 beorna beahgifa, 7 his broþor eac,
 Edmund æþeling ealdorlangne tir
 geslogon æt sæcce sweorda ecgum
 ymbe Brunanburh. Borweal clufan,
 heowan heaþolinde hamora lafan,
 afaran Eadweardes, swa him geæpele wæs
 from cneomægum. (1-8)¹⁴¹

[Here King Athelstan, the lord of men, ring-giver of men, and his brother too, Edmund Ætheling, won life-long glory by the edges of swords at Brunanburh. They clove the shield wall, hewed the linden-shields with the remnants of hammers, sons of Edward, as was natural for them because of their lineage.]

In addition to the typical rhetoric of chronicle narration, inasmuch as the poem opens with *Her*,¹⁴² and the traditional Old English poetic topos of ring-giving, this version of the poem also prioritizes the martial virtues of Athelstan and his brother; in a move

¹⁴¹ Taylor makes particular note of the hapax legomenon “geæpele,” and its function in this moment. As he suggests, “Aethelstan “noble-stone/altar/gem” accomplishes on the battlefield an etymological potential in his name.” Paul Beekman Taylor, “Onomastics and Propoganda in *Brunanburh*,” *American Notes and Queries* 7 (1994): 67. This particular word-play, for Taylor, runs throughout the poem itself and is key to our understanding of its import.

¹⁴² The function of “Her” and its inclusion or exclusion from the poem has often been debated. Campbell’s edition of the poem excludes it because it is, as he argues, un-metrical and thus clearly a later addition. As he states, “The word *her* is omitted in the critical text, as it is not a part of the poem, but refers to the date which opens the entry in the Chronicle. It is metrically unnecessary, and would not appear in the original copy, unless the poem were specially written for the Chronicle.” Campbell’s edition of *Brunanburh*, 96n1. More recently, however, scholars like Bredehoft have questioned this stance; as he suggests, “there is zero metrical difficulty in “Her Æþelstan cyning” from a late Old English metrical perspective, and the desire to remove “Her” from the text may be intimately related to a desire to see the verse forms as thoroughly classical.” Additionally, in many ways that “the opening verses of *Bruannburh* and *Capture* (including “Her”) fit almost too perfectly within the pattern set by Parker Scribe 3’s annals to justify reading them as poems not written for the ASC.” Bredehoft, in the *Casebook*, 287. On the connection between the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Capture of the Five Boroughs*, cf. Donald Scragg, “A Reading of *Brunanburh*,” in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.*, ed. Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), passim.

typical of Old English literature more generally, the poet links *ealdorlangne tir* through the alliterative meter directly with Edmund; more than that, this glory pivots directly around the following martial descriptors: the brothers are united as compound subjects who “geslogon” the invaders “æt sæcce sweorda ecgum.” This then leads explicitly to a recounting of the battle itself that focuses primarily on the “sæcce sweorda ecgum” and the other martial exploits of the two brothers. More than that, it is this martial virtue, this explicit ability within a battle, that characterizes their lineage; it is this prowess which “him gæthele waes” and which they inherited “from cneomægum.”

As Tiller has noted, however, Henry recasts this particular vision of regnal authority in his translation;¹⁴³ it is not the brothers’ martial virtue that characterizes their particular right to rule, but their paternal lineage. The corresponding passage in the *HA* reads as follows:

Rex Adelstan,
decus ducum, nobilibus torquium dator, et frater eius Edmundus,
Longa stirpis serie splendentes,
percusserunt in bello acie gladii apud Brunebirih. (310)

[King Athelstan, glorious lord, noble giver of rings, and brother of Edmund, men distinguished by the long unbroken line, struck with the edges of swords in the battle at Brunanburh.]

As Tiller notes, this moment does retain that traditional ring-giving motif from the original Old English verse.¹⁴⁴ Henry’s translation also recaptures the alliterative meter of the original, although perhaps only sporadically; he pairs *decus ducum* with *dator*, and similarly links “stirpis serie splendentes.” Instead, however, of foregrounding the martial virtue of the two brothers by linking them with eternal glory via the alliterative meter, Henry suggests that it is that they are “longa stirpis serie splendentes” [distinguished by

¹⁴³ Tiller, “Anglo-Norman,” 181.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

their long, unbroken line] that primarily defines them and their rule by extension. By inverting the placement of their glory and their lineage, Henry suggests that their personal prowess is subordinate to their lineage—to their connection with Edward and with Alfred—and their embodiment of a perdurable descent pattern. As Tiller states, in this moment “subtly—perhaps even below his own conscious register as a writer—Henry evokes both a genealogical tradition and an emphasis on father-to-son lines more characteristic of Norman than of Anglo-Saxon ruling families.”¹⁴⁵

I would expand on Tiller’s insight and suggest that this reorientation is not confined to this instance, but influences Henry’s “mistake” in the prose selection that follows the *Battle of Brunanburh* poem and is ultimately key to understanding Henry’s vision of England. In recounting Athelstan’s death, Henry relates that “Adelstan rex, cum regnasset quatuordecim annis, hominibus ultra non apparuit. Successit autem ei in regno Edmundus filius suus, et regnavit nouem annis.” (314) [King Athelstan, when he had reigned for 14 years, no longer appeared to men. His son, Edmund, succeeded him to the throne and ruled for nine years]. Apart from the oddly euphemistic phrasing of Athelstan’s death,¹⁴⁶ this particular moment also creates an erroneous relationship between Edmund and Athelstan. As Diane Greenway notes, Edmund is correctly the brother of Athelstan, and the very same man who joined Athelstan at Brunanburh.¹⁴⁷ Henry’s attribution here could simply be a mistake; such things are not unusual,

¹⁴⁵ In support of this claim about the patrilineal descent pattern as fundamental to the Normans, Tiller cites Bloch, who has claimed that “linearity is the defining principle of the noble house, dynasty, and . . . of lineage.” R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 69.

¹⁴⁶ Henry repeats this trope when describing Archbishop Tatwine’s passing. As he notes, “Ædelhardi regis anno octauo, Tadwinus archiepiscopus uir religione et prudentia insignis, sacris quoque litteris nobiliter instructus, hominibus ultra non apparuit” (230) [in the eighth year of king Æthelhard, archbishop Tatwine, a man notable for his prudence and sanctity, and nobly instructed in the holy writings, no longer appeared to men.

¹⁴⁷ Greenway, *HA*, 314n144.

particularly when we consider the chronology of Athelstan's reign. Regardless, this particular moment seems to suggest the priority that Henry places on lineage in this battle and in the subsequent formation of a stable England. As before, this change—or mistake—codifies the value of a single, unbroken lineage that bespeaks the formation of a stable England and creates maintains a patrilineal descent pattern that had its origins with Alfred. For instead of ending with his death in 939, Athelstan's line continues in his newly-created son Edmund.

For Henry, however, it is not simply an unbroken, paternal lineage that is important; instead, as his translation demonstrates, the ascendancy of Wessex is paramount. In the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, there is a certain parity established between both Wessex and Mercia in the events of the *Battle of Brunanburh*. As the poet relates,

Wesseaxe forð
 Ondlongne daeg eorodcistum
 On last legdun laþum þeodum,
 Heowan herefleman hindan þearle
 Mecum mylenscearpan. Myrce ne wyrndon
 heardes hondplegan hæleþa nanum
 þæra þe mid Anlafe ofer eargebland
 On lides bosme land gesohtun,
 Fæge to gefeohte. (20-28)

[The West-Saxons went forward the whole length of the day in troops, pressed on in the tracks of the people, hewed those in retreat from behind severely with file-sharpened swords. The Mercians refused not the hard hand-play to any of those men who sought the land with Anlaf over the ocean in the bosom of a ship, doomed to fall in battle.]

While the poet does place some emphasis on Wessex's individual virtue—insomuch as they fought “ondlongne daeg”—the actions of both factions are largely consonant; just as the West-Saxons “heowan herefleman” so too the Myrce—with characteristic

understatement—“wyrndon heardes hondplegan”; each engages in brutal, close combat—a point that the poet emphasizes by the alliteration in line twenty four that links the West-Saxon’s swords, *mece*, with the *Myrce* themselves. In a basic sense, England for the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* poet is a series of separate, yet equally potent, kingdoms whose individual elements can be combined under the sword for the mutual defense of the land.

Henry, however, reimagines these moments in order to emphasize the primary role of the West-Saxons; he does so by minimizing the impact that the Mercians have in the battle and by reducing any possible criticism of their actions. In translating this passage, Henry relates that

Gens uero westsexe tota simul die,
 prius electi, post indefessi,
 inuise gentis globos strauerunt,
 uiri elegantes hastas cedebant,
 uiri Mercenses acuta iacula
 mittebant duro manus ludo (312)

[likewise all through the day the West-Saxons—first chosen, afterward indefatigable—laid low those crowds of hateful people, fine men hewed down the spears, the Mercian men threw sharp spears in the harsh hand-play].

Here Henry keeps the tension of the original by emphasizing the role that both ethnic groups played in the events of that day; both West-Saxons and Mercians are active in the battle. In so doing, however, he has marginalized the active role that the Mercians played. While Henry maintains the *hondplegan* of the original with his literal translation of it as *manus ludo*, he pushes the Mercians away from the center of the battle. Instead of the close-combat that the Old English *hondplegan* suggested, here the Mercians operate from the relative safety of distance where they “acuta iacula mittebant” [threw sharp spears]. In contrast, Henry underscores the role of the West-Saxons. Not only did they

fight the entire day, but they were also “*prius electi, post indefessi.*” As I’ve suggested, the term *electi* functions on two levels. Undoubtedly it is meant simply to denote those who moved forward first in the battle; and yet, its connection with the Germanic tribes of the *adventus Saxonum*, and the underlying structural motif that relies on the operation of God’s will, augments its connotations. Henry, however, reserves this term for the men of Wessex alone; they, and not the Mercians, are the *electi* who have been chosen to drive out the Scots and Northmen.

Finally, in this particular moment, Henry also downplays any potentially negative actions that the West-Saxons might have taken in the course of this battle. Where in the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, they noticeably “*heowan herefleman hindan þearle Mecum mylenscearpan*” [hewed those in retreat from behind severely with file-sharpened swords], Henry elides such a depiction. The destruction of an enemy already in retreat could potentially undercut the particularly noble character of the West-Saxons and thus vanishes from Henry’s narrative. In this moment, then, Henry overrides the kind of balanced approach to the historical narrative that was the hallmark of the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*. Instead of being mutually potent kingdoms who came together for the defense of their homelands, Henry prioritizes the role that the West-Saxons had and, in so doing, suggests that their reign was authorized by their inherent nobility and martial virtue; they were *electi*.

In this particular moment, then, Henry’s understanding of England depends on a simplified historical vision. England, for Henry, is synonymous with Wessex and thus it is the rise of this singular kingdom that Henry here charts. In many ways, this conception of a simplified England influences the way that he describes and characterizes the very

land. In the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, the poet suggests that the land itself is part of the provenance of Athelstan and Edmund who “æt campe oft / wiþ laþra gehwæne land ealgodon / hord and hamas” (8-10) [often at battle with each of their enemies defended the land, the treasure and the homes]. These individual elements, the *land*, the *hord* and the *hamas* are bound in a serial relationship and here make up the collective—and literal—homeland that the two brothers are to defend against the *laþas* [enemies].

Henry’s translation of this particular section, however, belies this partitive construction of England. Instead of relying on distinctive elements to be defended as a whole, Henry describes the duty of the two brothers, Athelstan and Edmund, as such: “Sic namque eis ingenitum / fuerat a genibus cognationum, / ut bellis frequentibus ab infestis nationibus / defenderent patrie thesaurus et domos, pecunias et exenia” (310) [thus it was ingrained in them from their kinsmen, that they ought to defend the treasure, the homes, the money and the gifts of their homeland from the hateful nations]. Henry augments the elements which comprise the homeland itself, as he would similarly do with his interpretation of the beasts of battle motif, by adding “pecunias et exenia” [money and the gifts]; he also translates the Old English *land* as *patria*. There are two particularly important interpretative moves that this decision underscores: first, it reinforces the primacy of Æthelstan and Edmund’s lineage by linking the land itself with their paternal line; the term *patria*, after all, literally refers to the land of one’s father. Second, it augments the import of the land in the Old English original by formulating the *patria* as the container of those elements that typify one’s home. The genitive here—*patrie*—subtends all those elements that had, in the Old English original, been distinctively separated; unlike the Old English *land* in the original, this *patria*, for Henry, can bind all

together in an irreducible whole. The land, the *patria*, becomes, then, not a single element of the collective identity of those who would defend it, but the element that binds everything together.

This conception of the nature of the *patria* is once again important in the way that Henry closes out his translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh*. In the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, the poet makes mention of the *adventus Saxonum*, only to close with the realization that the Angles and the Saxons “eard begeatan” (73) [conquered the land].¹⁴⁸ In this formulation, while the terminology is slightly different—and perhaps even more specific—the invading hordes have nonetheless overtaken one of those constituent elements that comprised the sense of the Anglo-Saxon homeland at the outset of the poem.¹⁴⁹ Instead of describing the conquest of England as the taking of the whole English *eard* [land], however, Henry relates that the Angles and the Saxons “reges fugauerunt, regna susceperunt” (314) [put the kings to flight and took up the kingdoms]. They did not take possession of the *eard* [land] itself, but simply those political figures and institutions responsible for its governance. In this, Henry articulates a very different vision for England. The land itself, the *patria*, is free from the casual changes of leadership; only those man-made constructions and political institutions can ultimately be overtaken. For Henry, the *patria* will always endure.

In his translation of the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*, then, Henry articulates a vision of kingship that depends not on martial victory alone, but on a patrilineal

¹⁴⁸ As Taylor has suggested, this, along with the opening lines—Æthelstan cyning—“circumscribe the event of the battle and its celebration: “King Aethelstan conquered the homeland.” Taylor, “Onomastics,” 67.

¹⁴⁹ According to the *DOE*, the term *eard*, for instance, can mean a dwelling-place or even one’s native land. *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. “eard,” accessed June 6, 2013, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/floyd.lib.umn.edu/doe/>.

bloodline that has its ultimate roots in Wessex; this descent pattern, in many ways, authorizes Athelstan and Edmund's right to rule. Subtending the creation of this political institution is a transcendent vision of the land itself as a *patria* that is both comprised of all those elements of a collective identity and is able to endure despite the vicissitudes of war and even fate. For a narrative predicated on the continuous, cyclical shifting of rulership and peoples, the *patria*—the land—remains unchanged.

Conclusion

No matter how strict or literal a translation one intends to make, the very act itself often demands a transformation, whether that be stylistic in nature—like shifting from poetry to prose—or lexical—replacing particular idioms with oftentimes clearer phrases. In his *HA*, Henry of Huntingdon sets out to provide a literal translation of the Old English *Battle of Brunanburh* that nonetheless captures something of the *gravitas* of the original. In so doing, however, the subtle changes that he makes in the shift from Old English to Latin—whether those be intentional or subconscious—can tell us much about his historiographical vision, his vision of England, and the role that the past has in his twelfth-century present. While undoubtedly Henry's narrative is underpinned by a structure that sees history as divinely ordained and cyclical in nature, his translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the material surrounding it suggests that each moment, each fall, is nonetheless unique and accretive. While his twelfth-century Anglo-Norman England is avowedly different from that tenth-century England, they are nonetheless interconnected. Not only are they subtended by the land itself—which in Henry's vision becomes a transcendent category that obtains despite the changes in English social and political environment—but his twelfth-century reality depends on certain developments

which are made manifest in his translation of this particular moment. Here we see the privilege that Henry places on a patrilineal descent pattern, the emergence of an ascendant—and chosen—Wessex, and, at least in part, a collective identity that can stand and endure against any and all others. Henry's version of these events displays not the paeon of a single, gifted ruler, but charts the emergence of Henry's own, twelfth-century England.

Chapter 5

1066: Harold Godwinson, the English, and England in the Early Accounts of the Battle of Hastings

In the twelfth century, accounts of the Norman Conquest of 1066, and specifically the death of Harold Godwinson, loom large. And yet, portraits of these events and their repercussions are far from stable—with variations ranging from the minor to the dramatic. Considering this, scholars have dealt variously with these narratives. Some texts—particularly those produced by the English themselves—oftentimes exhibit a distinctive lacuna, failing to explicate the events as clearly as their Norman counterparts. Such lacunae, Elisabeth Van Houts argues, are a result of the “very deep sense of loss and shame, which had which had a national dimension, an institutional dimension, and a personal dimension as well.”¹⁵⁰ Accordingly, authors “could not bring themselves to write down their memories.”¹⁵¹ Such a process, Van Houts argues, is symptomatic of the historiographic trend in the twelfth century, wherein “first comes the epic event, a moment of triumph or disaster according to one’s point of view. About two generations later comes the realisation that aspects of the event which were once common knowledge are common knowledge no longer; hence the urge to collect information and pass it on, usually by oral communication to younger people, but sometimes in writing.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Elisabeth Van Houts, “The Memory of 1066 in Written and Oral Traditions,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19 (1996): 171.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 168.

While both points are true—namely that there is a general dearth of material about the Conquest produced by the English shortly after the event, and that the general reason for the proliferation of historiography in the twelfth century might be the result of a desire to reclaim what had been lost—such a description does not necessarily register the explicit means through which individual authors themselves dealt with narratives of the Conquest and the ascendancy of the Normans.

In contrast to this more general claim, Penny Eley and Philip E. Bennett have recently shown that accounts of 1066 in the Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, Wace's *Roman de Rou*, and Benoît de Sainte Maure's *Chronicque de Normandie* vary significantly and have sought to understand just “how rhetorical resources are deployed to produce three very different visions of the same event, and how the choice of those resources may have been shaped by the political context within which each writer was working”,¹⁵³ in sum, their analyses ultimately “demonstrate how history is constructed rhetorically within a certain political context, but also reveal the wealth of cultural allusion and compositional skills which their authors brought to bear on the task assigned them.”¹⁵⁴ Accounts from 1066, then, are conditioned by their compositional context as much as by the historical reality.

While Eley and Bennett's work is primarily concerned with vernacular representations of the Conquest, Monika Otter examines William of Malmesbury's *Vita Wulfstani* and the anonymous author of the *Vita Æwardi*'s Latin texts in order to understand how they register the trauma of 1066 stylistically. She contends that in these instances the authors utilize the biographical mode of writing in order to use their subject

¹⁵³ Penny Eley and Philip E. Bennet, “The Battle of Hastings According to Gaimar, Wace, and Benoit: Rhetoric and Politics,” *Nottingham Mediaeval Studies* 43 (1999): 47.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

matter as a “bridge” that can be formed “across the crisis of the Norman Conquest.”¹⁵⁵ With particular regards to the *Vita Wulfstani*, Otter suggests that William seeks “to accentuate both the continuity and discontinuity, the survival of the old Anglo-Saxon ways and the need to translate them into a new cultural idiom”,¹⁵⁶ similarly, the anonymous author of the *Vita Ædwardi* “tells the story of his loss and bereavement, and his struggle to find new things to sing about.”¹⁵⁷ Biographical writing, then, can in fact register—or be made to register through various stylistic and linguistic changes—larger social or cultural pressures. For “by tying their conquest narratives to the biography of a major figure, both authors can convey the experience of a real, incisive interruption, as well as the experience that individual lives, and therefore communal life, do continue.”¹⁵⁸

In many ways, tales of Harold, the last king of the Anglo-Saxons who was vanquished by William the Conqueror during the Battle of Hastings in 1066, epitomize the ways in which biography is tailored according to just such pressures. In the famous Bayeux tapestry, for instance, we get the all but unique account of Harold, killed by an arrow to the eye. In contrast, no such arrow is present in the eleventh-century *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* of William of Jumièges wherein “Heroldus etiam ipse in primo militum congressu occubuit uulneribus letaliter confossus” [Harold himself was struck down in the first advance of the soldiers, having been lethally struck with wounds].¹⁵⁹ Similarly in William of Poitiers’s *Gesta Guillelmi* no arrow is present and the death scene itself is all but absent—the body, found after the battle, is the only hint that he has

¹⁵⁵ Monika Otter, “1066: The Moment of Transition in Two Narratives of the Norman Conquest,” *Speculum* 74, no. 3 (1999): 585.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 579.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 586.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 585.

¹⁵⁹ *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, ed. and trans. Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 169. Subsequent references to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically by page number. The translations are my own.

perished. It is not until the twelfth century that narratives about the “blinding” of Harold proliferate; Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury, for instance, both suggest such an end for Harold. As David Bernstein has rightly pointed out, we must then ask “why did the artist of the Bayeux Tapestry depict Harold as blinded by an arrow at the Battle of Hastings when not one of the contemporary written accounts mentions this extraordinary detail?”¹⁶⁰ Considering the “meaning attached to blinding in medieval art and thought” it is highly likely, as Bernstein suggests, that we ought to understand the blinding of Harold Godwinson here as a motif; as he argues it was not intended to be “reportorial”¹⁶¹ but “is an iconography invented by the artist because it had historical and cultural associations which were present in the minds of Englishmen and Normans, and could be related by them to the main theme of the Tapestry,”¹⁶² which was that the “English defeat” was “punishment by the saints of Bayeux and by God for Harold’s perjury.”¹⁶³ The perceived incongruity of accounts, then, has its basis in the artistic aims of the individual producer of the Bayeux tapestry, if we accept Bernstein’s account.

While the blinding of Harold is perhaps one of the most memorable of variations, thanks in large part to the tapestry, many other changes surrounding Harold, his death, and his burial are prevalent in accounts of 1066. If, as Bernstein’s work suggests, such changes might be the result of the symbolic aims of one’s creator, why then were these changes made? In response to such a question, Robert Stein—in *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180*—has argued that narratives of Harold’s death specifically and the changes made thereto can be largely be classified

¹⁶⁰David Bernstein, “The Blinding of Harold and the Meaning of the Bayeux Tapestry,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* V (1983): 4.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 64.

into two categories—complicity with or opposition to the Normans.¹⁶⁴ And yet, I would suggest, such a clear binary—as well as the very specific focus—limits our understanding of the rhetorical effects at play in narratives about Harold, his death, and the landscape of England especially in the twelfth century.

In what follows, then, I will seek to understand the variation explicit in accounts of 1066, specifically in the portrait of Harold Godwinson; in so doing, however, I intend to be sensitive to the intricate composition of the individual narratives and avoid relegating each work to a single term of a binary. In order to accomplish this task, my analysis will be divided into two chapters. In the first I will examine accounts of Harold's death, his burial, and the surrounding moments in the Norman Conquest in the following early eleventh-century narratives: William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi*, the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. This will then be coupled with a second chapter devoted solely to an analysis of the ways that this early understanding was reformulated in the following twelfth- and thirteenth-century narratives: William of Malmesbury's *GRA*, Henry of Huntingdon's *HA*, the *De inventione sancte crucis* or *Waltham Chronicle*, and the *Vita Haroldi*.

My choice of these texts is, of course, in no way meant to be exhaustive. For each period I have sought to collect those which might be said to be representative. Thus what might be called the continental tradition is in evidence with the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, the *Gesta Guillelmi*, and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, which are then coupled with the English tradition found in the D and E versions of the *Anglo-Saxon*

¹⁶⁴ As Stein suggests, he examines those “narratives in the service of Norman centralizing administration together with narratives written in opposition to it.” Robert Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025-1180* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 65.

Chronicle. In my choice of twelfth-century sources, I have sought—in William of Malmesbury’s *GRA*—a rather hybrid narrative that incorporates both continental and insular traditions and another text—Henry of Huntingdon’s *HA*—that is largely indebted to the English tradition. These two texts will allow me to examine the ways in which the memory of this event has changed and the extent to which these two traditions can be said to be still separate. Finally, the *Waltham Chronicle* and the *Vita Haroldi*, both distinctly separate from the others in their generic constraints, will allow me to extrapolate to what extent genre can be said to condition the responses of these twelfth-century and early thirteenth-century narratives’ authors. As an *inventio*, how exactly does the narrative of Harold’s death and the Conquest become altered and why are those changes made; more than that, as a near-hagiographical text, what changes are in evidence in the *Vita Haroldi* and why have they been made?

Although those texts in the early tradition were composed at roughly contemporary moments, and are propagandistic in nature, each manifests a different version of the events under consideration here and each of the changes made in these narratives, I will argue, have clear and distinct ramifications for the reception of the memory of Harold in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries. More specifically, William of Jumièges’s *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* offers a brief, prosaic account of the events of that day, while still emphasizing the clear superiority of the Normans over their English counterparts—although such a stance would later see revision under Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni. While similar in tenor, William of Poitiers’s narrative works to emphasize the disparity between William the Conqueror and Harold Godwinson by offering a pointed contrast of their character traits; in so doing, William’s claim to the

throne is again proven to be just. More than that, he constructs a narrative of Harold Godwinson—which is extrapolated to the English themselves—that depends on the articulation of the landscape and in so doing emphasizes the clear dominance of the Norman troops.

This focus on the landscape itself is developed further by the epic *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. This text, I argue, aims to construct a narrative of the Conquest that depends on the geographic marginalization of the English and the subsequent pacification of their resistance. In order to do this, it grafts the bodies of both Harold Godwinson and the English onto the landscape itself, making them passive objects to be encapsulated and tamed. This narrative of the Conquest, however, fails from the outset; for the boundaries are never truly stripped of their potential, nor can the violence of the Conquest be erased or overwritten. Finally, in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* certain linguistic choices, both with regards to the actions of Harold and to the terms in which the landscape is discussed, differ markedly from the other, continental traditions; while such changes might be subtle, they nonetheless emphasize the success of the English and the continued English character of the land itself despite the coming of the Normans.

The Early Tradition of 1066 in William of Jumièges, William of Poitiers, the Carmen de Hastingae Proelio, and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (versions D and E)

According to Van Houts, the recent editor of William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, the timeline for the production of the chronicle has been misunderstood. As she states, "the traditional date of William's *Gesta* is 1070-1, and it is commonly assumed that he did not start writing until after the conquest of England"; this tradition, as Van Houts suggests, "however, is wrong."¹⁶⁵ Instead, she would posit the

¹⁶⁵ Introduction to the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, xxxii.

creation of the text in a span of some twenty years. In her view, William of Jumièges undertook a revision of Dudo of Saint-Quentin's *De moribus et actis primorum Normannorum ducum* in the 1050's. During this period he "revised abbreviated and updated [Dudo's] *De moribus* and added an account of the reigns of Dukes Richard II, Richard III (1026-7), Robert I (1027-35), and William II."¹⁶⁶ While he finished this first stage shortly before 1060, he "later added...an account of the conquest of England up to c. 1070"; this new creation is that which now remains for us in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*.¹⁶⁷

As Van Houts rightly suggests with reference to this dating, "William of Jumièges is the earliest author of a prose account of the Norman Conquest," and he wrote "it within four years of the Battle of Hastings."¹⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the entries detailing Harold's death and the events at Hastings are noticeably truncated. As Van Houts notes, "the chapter dealing with the battle of Hastings is distinctly shorter and more vague than those describing the battles of Val-es-Dunes, Mortemer, or Varaville"; moreover, "his information seems to be based on general hearsay rather than on specific eyewitness reports," and at times appears to be incorrect; for when compared with other accounts it is clear that William "is wrong in saying that Harold was slain during the first encounter of the two armies on the battlefield."¹⁶⁹ Regardless of these problems, as an early prose account, this text becomes invaluable when considering just how the legend was manifested in later narratives. Although short, some important stylistic choices are made

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, xx.

¹⁶⁷ For a more complete discussion of this process of revision, *ibid.*, xxxi-xxxv.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, xlvi.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, xlviii.

in the narrative that are particularly relevant for later historiographers. The text of this moment reads as follows:

Dux uero nocturnos precauens excursus hostis incoantibus tenebris ad gratissimam usque lucem exercitum iussit esse in armis. Facto autem diluculo *sabbati* legionibus militum in tribus ordinibus dispositis horrendo hosti intrepidus obuam processit. Cum quo sub hora diei tertia comitens bellum in cedibus *ab utraque parte* morientium usque ad noctem protraxit. Heroldus etiam ipse in primo militum congressu occubuit uulneribus letaliter confossus. Comperientes itaque Angli regem suum mortem oppetiisse de sua diffidentes salute iam nocte imminente uersa facie subsidium appetierunt fuge. (169)

[The duke, guarding against a night attack by the army, ordered his men to be armed from dusk until welcomed dawn. At dawn on Saturday, he, undaunted by the dreadful army, advanced against them with his legions of soldiers arranged in three divisions. Joining with that army at the third hour, the battle drew on until night with the slaughter of the dying. Harold himself, having been lethally pierced with wounds, died in the first charge of the soldiers. Thus the English, learning that their king had met death and fearing for their safety, now, with night nearing, turned about and sought relief in flight.]

The italics included in the text are Van Houts's own and designate the later interpolations by both Orderic Vitalis and Robert of Torigni who were writing in the twelfth century; in short, the text that Van Houts presents in her edition is a hybrid, which represents a document which "never existed in any manuscript."¹⁷⁰ These interpolations, however, in many ways change the character of the text produced by William of Jumièges, if only slightly. The one interpolation—"Saturday"—and the other—"on both sides"—are of two very different sorts. The first simply provides a temporal component that allies the text with the agreed-upon date of action; in contrast, the second inordinately asserts a balanced approach to the matter of the battle itself. What we can see in this brief moment is the extent to which William of Jumièges chose to accent the ultimate failure of the English. As he relates, they "greatly feared" and "turned about at nightfall and sought refuge in flight." Additionally, in a statement likely incorrect, or so Van Houts reminds

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., cxxxi.

us, he has Harold killed in the first skirmish. Finally, he eschews an emphasis on mutual slaughter that later redactors more than saw fit to interpolate. To include that a great slaughter took place “on both sides” would run contrary to the main substance of the narrative. It would, in other words, undercut the clear propagandistic nature of William’s prose to add such material to the base text. Such an interpolation, as we will see later, is something that would be typical only later in the twelfth century.

William of Poitiers

While the triumphalist tone of William of Jumièges’s account remains in William of Poitiers’s *Gesta Guillelmi*, little else is the same. Perhaps most notably, William of Jumièges’s brief account gives way in William of Poitiers’s text to an elaborate, classically-indebted narrative. R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall note, for instance, that William of Poitiers often “used Sallust as well as Caesar for battles, Cicero and St. Augustine for moral dissertations; he also made use of the Satires of Juvenal, the Agricola of Tacitus, the Thebaid of Statius, the *Lives* of Suetonius and Plutarch, Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, and Justin’s *Epitome*.”¹⁷¹ Despite these classical innovations and the extent to which “the judgement of individuals and their purpose in writing were bound to influence the handling of fluid and variable sources,”¹⁷² William “claimed that, unlike the poets, he did not wander over the fields of fiction, but stated only what was true history.”¹⁷³

Considering the sources and influences, it is no surprise that his version of events would differ significantly from William of Jumièges’s nearly contemporary account.

While tracking the differences between these accounts holistically would be a monumental task, certain details deserve more attention because of their importance for

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, xviii.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, xxx.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, xxii

the narrative more generally as well as their ultimate connection with twelfth-century narratives; these are William of Poitiers's description of Harold's body at the close of the Battle of Hastings, his ultimate burial, and the ways in which the landscape is employed. In what follows, I will center my discussion on these narrative elements. I will argue that these changes are symptomatic of William of Poitiers's narrative, inasmuch as they seek to eviscerate Harold Godwinson's fame and character and his right to possess the English landscape. In so doing, William of Poitiers's text initiates a narrative tradition that depends on an antithetical relationship between William and Harold, as well as the English and the Normans more generally.

When Harold is first described in the *Gesta Guillelmi*, he is clearly someone steeped in honor. Under the reign of Edward, he had been "cunctorum sub dominatione sua diuitis, honore, atque potentia eminentissimum" (68) [of all the men under his [Edward's] dominion the most distinguished in wealth, honor, and strength]. In sharp contrast to such a noble figure, when Harold is portrayed after his death at the Battle of Hastings we see that his body "carens omni decore, quibusdam signis, nequaquam facie, recognitus est" (140) [stripped of all ornament, was recognized not by his face, but by certain marks]. On the surface, such an account of Harold's body is clearly different from William of Jumièges's; no mention of the "wounds" that Harold received is present here, nor is any mention of his actual death-scene as such. What is important for William of Poitiers is the condition of the body; certainly that it "carens omni decore" is key in this formulation. The term, *decor* [ornament], here, serves not only to delimit the physical markers of his position which had surely been stripped from his body—the ornaments of his station or even his more general appearance—but also functions

symbolically. For concurrent with a material interpretation, I would suggest, this term is also intended to convey the loss of his wealth, of his honor, of his strength—those very things that he had been known for under Edward’s reign. In death, all *decotes* [ornaments] have been stripped from the fallen Harold, thus confirming William’s right to rule; for William has shown that such markers were misplaced.

In addition to the condition of the body, the events surrounding the burial of Harold Godwinson also receive substantial innovation in William of Poitiers’s account. Before the actual burial itself, Harold’s mother had offered “pro corpore dilectae prolis auri par pondus offerenti” (140) [gold equal to his weight for the body of her beloved son]. As has long been noted, such a claim recalls the events of the *Iliad* where Priam begs Achilles for the body of his son; indeed he states that “it’s all for him I’ve come to the ships now, to win him back from you—I bring a priceless ransom” (604). For a text so steeped in classical traditions, an allusion to the events in the *Iliad* would not be unexpected. Instead, however, of accepting the ransom as Achilles does, the narrator relates that William “sciuit enim non decere tali commercio aurum accipi” (140) [knew that it was not proper to accept gold for such an exchange]; more than that, “Aestimauit indignum fore ad matris libitum sepeliri, cuius ob nimiam cupiditatem insepulti remanerent innumerabiles” (140) [he reckoned that it would be an indignity for him, on account of whose excessive greed innumerable men remain unburied, to be buried according to his mother’s wishes]. Why are these changes to the classical narrative made? What emphasis is the author implying?

In fact, the way that William of Poitiers has constructed this scene is intimately connected with how he characterizes William the Conqueror and why he portrays Harold

as he does later. For by denying Harold's mother's gift, he is shown to be restrained and not overly greedy. More than that, he is also conscious of the cost of war and is unwilling to treat who he sees as a traitor with respect. Likewise, William was willing simply to trust in God and fight Harold in single combat so that, as a "vir strenuus et bonus" (122) [brave and good man], he could prevent "multos occumbere" (122) [many from falling in death]; more than that he was "Heraldi caput, pro quo minor fortitude, aequitas nulla staret, casurum confidens" (122) [confident that Harold's head would fall because his strength was less and no justice remained for him]. Had Harold acceded to such a claim bloodshed could have been avoided. In order to emphasize William's character, the *Gesta Guillelmi* depends on the denigration of Harold Godwinson himself.

While I am here pointing to one specific location at which this phenomenon takes place, the way that William the Conqueror's prudence is shown to be in evidence ultimately functions similarly and is, in fact, symptomatic of William of Poitiers's narrative method more generally. After landing first in England, for instance, a Norman envoy states the following: I "Nunc tibi consule, prouide labora, ne per temeritatem in discrimen unde non euadas temet ipse praecipites. Suadeo: intra munitiones mane; manu ad praesens conflagere noli" (116) [advise you [William], act with forethought, so that you cast not yourself down into crisis through rashness from which you cannot escape. I urge you: remain among your fortifications; refuse to contend with the band of men at the present]. William, however, will not fall into such a trap but vows to fight Harold as soon as possible; for he does not expect "fortitudine meorum cum suis eum contritum iri, uoluntate diuina non resistente, tametsi decem sola millia uirorum haberem, quales ad sexaginta millia adduxi" (116) [that he is about to be destroyed, along with his men, by

the valor of my men, with the will of God not opposing, if I had only 10,000 of the men of the quality of the nearly 60,000 I led forth]. What had been viewed as a move of rashness, *temeritas*, or a lack of prudence by William is here transformed into an act of fortitude; more than that, it is supported by William's faith in the justice of his cause and that he does God's will.

This idea of prudence, however, is not limited to this single scene, but is in fact key to our understanding of William more generally. When, for instance, an envoy approaches William and states that he has invaded King Harold's land, "qua fiducia, qua temeritate, nescit" (118) [whether partly from confidence or rashness he does not know], this familiar term, *temeritas* [rashness], recurs once again. In a carefully worded reply, William offers a distinctive and clear rebuttal of such an accusation; he emphasizes that he acts neither "temere neque iniuste" (120) [rashly nor unjustly], but acts according to justice. Such a reading, more importantly, is emphasized by the narrator who includes this speech such that "Pulchre colligetur et ex ea, quod uere prudens, iustus, pius ac fortis extiterit" (122) [it is to be deduced beautifully from these words, that he proves to be prudent, just, faithful, and brave]. In short, the burial scene, and the expansion therein, serves to confirm the underlying character traits at issue throughout much of the narrative. William is shown to act prudently, not rashly nor greedily; he is also acting, as the narrator describes, in accord with the legal pattern of descent that was established by Edward. To bury Harold with honor would be to reward a man who had "stained [himself] with [his] brother's blood" and seized the crown of England "perfidiously" (141) [Atqui tu fraterno sanguine maduisti, ne fratris magnitudine te faceret minus potentem].

Just as in the burial scene, however, such a characterization of William necessitates a concurrent dismissal of Harold Godwinson. For instance, when presented with William the Conqueror's speech on the rectitude of his claim (121-122), Harold refuses to change his plans to battle William; instead he "regnandi siquidem cupidine caecatus, simul ob trepidationem oblitus iniuriae, conscientiam in ruinam sui rectum iudicem optavit" (122) [blinded by the desire to rule and yet forgetful of his injustice on account of his agitation, chose his conscience as his proper judge to his own ruin].

Editorializing on Harold's choice, the narrator similarly emphasizes that he "ruisti dein furiosus in alterum conflictum, ut adiutus patriae parricidio regale decus non amitteres" (140) [insane, raced into another conflict so that [he], having been aided by treason to your country, might not lose royal dignity]; it is this action that ultimately confirms his destiny in Hastings. While the term *temeritas* [rashness] itself might not appear in these instances, its tenor remains. For it is Harold's irrational, cupidinous desire for fame and the markers of kingship—or the *decors* that were stripped from him in his death—his rashness—that he was *furiosus*—and the injustice of his claim that lead to his destruction at Hastings. While it might not be a surprise to see that William the Conqueror's portrayal was manifestly positive in contrast to Harold's—especially because the narrator asserts that he desires for him to be praised "plurimorum perpetuo fauore eum" (122) [with the perpetual favor of many]—understanding the dualized nature of this portraiture is key to understanding Harold's burial; for it is this drive to emphasize the negative qualities of Harold and the supreme munificence of William that the burial scene is portrayed as it is. More than that, such a moment, as I have attempted to show, is clearly connected with the narrative method William of Poitiers employs. Throughout his

narrative he chooses to emphasize the success of the Normans; the only way that this can be done, however, is by marginalizing Harold and the English by extension. In this construct, William of Poitiers relies on a careful doubling that foils both parties in the narrative in order to construct a narrative of domination. Harold and the English are not meant to be honored, to be buried in with honor, but to be pushed out of existence by the clearly superior Normans.

This narrative strategy is given a physical corollary in the burial of Harold Godwinson. After the finding of the king's body, William Malet was entrusted to bury him; although "dictum est illudendo, oportere situm esse custodem littoris et pelagi, quae cum armis ante uesanus insedit" (140) [it was said in ridicule that he ought to be placed as a sentry over the shore and sea, which previously he, insane, had seized with his arms," Harold does in fact lie "in littoreo tumulo" (140) [in a tumulus on the seashore]. The reason for such a burial, however, is immediately apparent in the lines that follow. As the narrator suggests, Harold will stand there as "posthumae generatione tam Anglorum quam Normannorum abominabilis" (140) [as much an abomination to future generations of English as the Normans]. The burial of Harold at the seashore serves to memorialize the triumph of the Normans, the subjugation of Harold, and the complete rectitude of William's claim to the throne by creating Harold's tumulus as an infamous symbol for just how perfidy will be met. The ideological import of such a burial has often long been noted;¹⁷⁴ instead, however, of treating it as a local phenomenon, I would suggest that it becomes part of a metaphoric complex. For just as Harold is shown to be under the complete mastery of the Norman invaders in this burial scene, the English—

¹⁷⁴ Stein, for instance, discusses it as the "official Norman version" of the battle and couples this with a description of the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*'s companion piece as well. Stein, *Reality*, 68.

through William of Poitiers's description of the land itself—are shown to be under the dominion of the Normans. When discussing the flight of the English, the narrator relates that “multi siluestribus in abditis remanserunt cadaauera, plures obfuerunt sequentibus per itinera collapsi” (136) [many left their corpses in remote woods, many having collapsed were a hindrance for those who followed in their paths]. Moreover, “a mortuis etiam equorum ungulae supplicia sumpsere, dum cursus fieret super iacentes” (138) [even the hooves of the horses exacted punishment on the dead as their course was made over the fallen]. Here the *abditis siluestribus* [remote woods] serve not as places of refuge, nor as sites where resistance can be formed. Instead, the woods and their very remote quality are used to emphasize the power of the Normans; indeed, their victory is so total that it can even overrun the natural hiding places. While the English might have sought flight in an attempt to hide within the deep places, such places no longer exist; the Normans control everything and their power extends to even the remotest of locations.

In this example the English themselves become innately tied to the forest and the landscape more generally. They leave their bodies behind and form a kind of road, a *cursus*, over which the Normans tread with impunity. In much the same way, the English and the landscape are made to merge in the description of the battlefield. Here the land is described as follows: “Late solum operuit sordidatus in cruore flos Anglica nobilitatis atque iuuentutis” (138) [far and wide the flower of the English nobility and youth covered the ground in the flow of blood]. Even at the close of this narrative no mention of the removal of these bodies is made. Instead William of Poitiers only mentions the Norman: William the Conqueror moves on “humatis autem suis” (142) [with his own men having been buried]. Although it might simply be that the English burial is not worthy of

comment, the final picture of the English landscape, both the forests and the battlefield, has become populated by the corpses of the English. Very literally, the English, although dead, inhere in the landscape. Their bodies become a kind of road for the Normans, and the battlefield is made up of a grotesque menagerie of English bodies and rivers of blood.

Certainly it is fair to state that William of Poitiers's narrative explicitly functions as propaganda; to suggest such is not a revelation. And yet, by examining the ways in which the fundamentals of the narrative are constructed, it becomes apparent that the dominance of the Normans is enacted by means of certain, key changes to the narrative that surrounds Harold Godwinson. The position of William the Conqueror, depends on Harold Godwinson; it is only through his treason, his imprudence, and his cupidinous desire that we can understand William's greatness, or so the *Gesta Guillelmi* would seem to suggest. Moreover, this dominance is enacted in this text with particular reference to the land of England itself. The Normans erect the body of the king as a kind of ritualized marker that denotes the edge of England itself, suggests the creation of centralized Norman polity in which the English are pushed to the fringes, and articulates the mastery of the Anglo-Saxon king who is forced to guard the sea. This relationship, however, is not simply part of a local phenomenon; for in much the same way, the narrative works to link the English and the land, over both of which the Normans can preside. Although the English might inhere in this landscape, composed as it is of their very bodies, they have no explicit power; they are simply a *cursus* [road] over which the Normans can travel. While such narrative moves are ultimately meant to overwrite the English, William of Poitiers's text clearly demonstrates that the Norman identity depends on the English inasmuch as it can only exist with reference to just such a past. It is ultimately this

uneasy relationship with the past—which here depends on its simultaneous disavowal of and insistence in the English—that will be important throughout the twelfth century.

Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio

Since its discovery by G. H. Pertz in 1826, the relationship between what has been termed the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* and the *Gesta Guillelmi* has been far from clear and is ultimately bound up with the question of its date of composition and authorship.¹⁷⁵ In general, two sides emerge in this debate. Frank Barlow, in “The *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*,” suggests that “it is clear that the poem and William of Poitiers’s history are intimately related: there is parallelism of varying degrees of closeness, and most likely one of the authors borrowed from the other.”¹⁷⁶ Such a position is clearly indebted to Seth Körner who suggests that the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* “shows such similarity to the Poitiers Chronicle, in both its general structure and individual phrases, that it must be assumed that one of the sources has copied directly from the other.”¹⁷⁷ The ultimate relationship between the two texts, however, is not clear. Did William of Poitiers borrow explicitly from the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*? Did the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* borrow from William of Poitiers? Or is there

¹⁷⁵ In his edition of the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*, Barlow notes Pertz’s discover of “an epic poem on the Norman invasion of England in two manuscripts in the Royal Library at Brussels.” Introduction to Guy of Amiens, *The Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*, ed. and trans. Frank Barlow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xiii. This is the poem that has traditionally been called the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* and that has been linked with Orderic Vitalis’s statements about a certain Guy, bishop of Amiens, who “described the battle of Senlac, reviled Harold, and praised William.” Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969), 2:185-6. Additionally, it is pertinent to note that there are two manuscripts in which the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* appears in date from the early twelfth-century and are designated as *Bibliothèque Royale*, Brussels nos. 10615-729 and 9799-809; the second is believed to be a copy of the first.

¹⁷⁶ Frank Barlow, “The *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*,” in *Studies in International History: Essays Presented to W. Norton Medlicott, Stenvenson Professor of International History in the University of London*, ed. K. Bourne and D. C. Watt (London: Longman, 1967): 40-41.

¹⁷⁷ Seth Körner, *The Battle of Hastings, England, and Europe 1035-1066* (Lund: C. W. K. Glerrups, 1964), 92.

ultimately a lost source, either oral or written, that might be the common source for these two works? Barlow suggests that, in fact, William of Poitiers borrowed explicitly from the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*; he contends that “at several points we get the strong impression that William of Poitiers had the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* before him.”¹⁷⁸ Ultimately, such a relationship leads Barlow to suggest that “although conclusive proof cannot be claimed, it is perhaps impossible, a strong circumstantial case can be made that the poem was written by Guy, Bishop of Amiens, between 1068-1070 and became one of William of Poitiers’s sources.”¹⁷⁹

Barlow’s claims, however, must be understood in the context of his aims, namely to rehabilitate the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* by asserting an early date for the work. For as he suggests, the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* ought not to “be ignored in any discussion of the early accounts of the duke’s invasion.”¹⁸⁰ In short, his work has sought to rehabilitate something “at which historians have usually looked askance.”¹⁸¹ Certainly such a claim about the direct influence each of these sources had on one another must be treated with some reservation. This is not to cast aspersions on Barlow’s claims, which Engels and others have found to be compelling, but simply to contextualize them.¹⁸²

The recent editors of the *Gesta Guillelmi*, R. H. C. Davis and Marjorie Chibnall, offer a more measured stance. As they claim, many of “the resemblances between the

¹⁷⁸Barlow, “*Carmen*,” 62.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 63. Cf. Körner, *Battle*, who suggests that “the *Carmen* is very old, and probably older than the *Poitiers Chronicle*” (97); more importantly though, Körner emphasizes that “the *Carmen* and the *Poitiers Chronicle* are not independent of each other” and that it is most probably the latter which has been the borrower (100).

¹⁸⁰Barlow, “*Carmen*,” 41.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 36

¹⁸² Engels, in “Once More: The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 2 (1980): 8-9, confirms Barlow’s position largely on the vocabulary that seems to be shared between the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* and the *Gesta Guillelmi*. As he suggests, there is some “linguistic evidence for the priority of the *Carmen*” as can be seen in the words which “both texts have in common” and which “fit better into the whole of the vocabulary of the *Carmen* than into that of the *Gesta Guillelmi*.”

two sources that appear, particularly in the early stages of the battle, could be explained by similar oral sources known to both authors”;¹⁸³ as such, in these two very different works “words and phrases common to both...might have been picked up from the works of Juvenal, Justin, or other earlier writers.”¹⁸⁴ Of course, Barlow is undoubtedly aware of such a medial position that ultimately depends on familiar oral or textual narratives that had been circulating and were current for both authors. This is that “least iconoclastic line” whereby one comes to regard “all these sources as based ultimately on popular opinion, but moulded by the literary accounts which were available, and given individuality by the special attitude and contacts of each writer.”¹⁸⁵

This claim is far more nuanced than the claims that Davis himself first made in his article “The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*”; here he argued that the date of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* must certainly be in line with the later twelfth-century manuscript and that it could not have been written as early as 1068. As he suggests, “it seems” that the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* was “composed as a literary exercise in one of the schools of Northern France or southern Flanders between 1125 and 1135 or 1125 and 1140.”¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, were the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* to be

¹⁸³ Introduction to the *Gesta Guillelmi*, xxxiv.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, xxix.

¹⁸⁵ Barlow, “The *Carmen*,” 48.

¹⁸⁶ R. H. C. Davis, “The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*,” *The English Historical Review* 93, no. 367 (1978): 261. Among other things, Davis claims that the dedication found in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* ought not to be understood as referring to Guy because many other options exist and the spelling itself (which depends on a ‘w’) is problematic; moreover, because of the number of specific names included in both the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* and William of Poitiers’s *Gesta Guillelmi*, the *Gesta Guillelmi* ought to be considered the source of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*; finally, the manuscript in which the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* appears is of a later date than had previously been considered and thus the claims that the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* is a later confection would be more apt (*passim*). Ultimately, Davis writes against the tradition that had seen the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* as produced almost immediately following the Battle of Hastings—a position which is espoused by Barlow, “The *Carmen*,” Seth Körner, in Catherine Morton and Hope Muntz’s edition of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*—*Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy Bushop of Amiens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). After the publication of Davis’s article, Engel in “Once More” and Barlow in his introduction to his edition of the

understood as the source for William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi*, which has been more firmly dated between 1071 and 1077, Davis's previous argument would be problematic.

As should be apparent, the date, authorship, and relationship between the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* and William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi* is a vexed question, and one which I will not weigh in on here. My purpose in this section is not to make a claim about literary influence, nor to resurrect the argument about the date and authorship of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. Suffice it to say these two texts share enough material to be closely linked and to envision a version of the battle that oftentimes overlaps with one another. Accordingly, we might then begin to look at just how these texts imagine a different version of the events. Barlow, for instance, suggests that "if the two authors had heard the same stories, they decided independently what was reliable and worth recording."¹⁸⁷ Whereas Barlow's aims, and the aims of other historians who used to look askance at the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, seek to remove the erroneous details of the Battle of Hastings in order to arrive at a more complete and historically accurate understanding of that particular moment, I am here primarily concerned with those changes themselves. If, as Barlow suggests, these authors "decided" what was "reliable

Carmen de Hastingae Proelio challenged Davis's claims and firmly reasserted the earlier date between 1066 and 1070 and the authorship of Guy of Amiens. Similarly, Elisabeth M. C. Van Houts—in her article "Latin Poetry and the Anglo-Norman Court 1066-1135: *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*," *Journal of Medieval History* 15 (1989): 55—claims on the basis of a contextual examination of poetry about William the Conqueror and the portraits of the knights involved in Harold's death that "the *Carmen* must have been written at the latest in September or October 1067"—that is, before Eustace of Bologne's rebellion; additionally, although R. H. C. Davis suggests that it would have been odd to dedicate the poem to Lanfranc, Van Houts suggests that, in fact, such a dedication might have been intended to mediate a dispute between Guy and Pope Alexander II. Accordingly, "The flattering poem about the Conqueror whose conquest of England had been supported by Pope Alexander II, may have served as a gift to obtain Abbot Lanfranc's cooperation," who was to visit the pope in late 1067 (56). Although Van Houts's early date of composition parallels the claim in Morton and Muntz's edition (xxii)—I will admit the possibility of the later date as well, and thus follow Barlow's introduction to his edition of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* where he suggests that the date of the composition ought to range from either ca. 1066-1068, or 1070 (x1).¹⁸⁷ Introduction to Barlow's *Carmen*, xxix. References to the text itself will be from this edition and will be noted parenthetically by line number; the translations are my own.

and worth recording,” why did they include the material that they did? What can the textual accretions surrounding the Battle of Hastings and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* tell us, ultimately, about the texts themselves? In short, I am concerned with matters of textuality and narrative, of what these changes mean for the narratives and how they manifest different versions of the events in order to portray the past.

In answering such a claim, I will argue that in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* the basic elements of the narrative surrounding the Battle of Hastings and Harold Godwinson are extrapolated and treated fully in an epic register that emphasizes the symbolic undertones present in the *Gesta Guillelmi*. In the *Gesta Guillelmi*, for instance, I noted the ways that the land itself was used to extrapolate what had been implicit in the characterization of William and Harold, namely the complete dominance of the Normans over the English. Such a concern over the role of the land resurfaces in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. Here, however, the land becomes a metaphoric reflex that can be made to register the Conquest; it stands in opposition to the Normans, works actively against them, and even thwarts their attempts to control it. In short, mastery of the land and its potential becomes the touchstone through which domination and subversion can be registered. Whereas my focus in the section on the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* was to outline the function and structure of early narrative characterization, here I will be concerned with the metaphoric aims, uses, and understanding of the land when discussing the stand of the English. Of course, as I would suggest, such a question of the role of the land is also intimately bound up with the narrative Harold’s death, his burial and the triumph of the Normans. While ultimately it is clear that this piece depends on the careful and sustained marginalization of the

English, to elide a consideration of the epic fabric of the narrative and its metaphoric impulse is to miss an important strain of narrative in the early tradition.

It is clear from the outset of the symbolic *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* that the landscape itself registers and emphasizes the disjuncture between the Normans and the English. At the battlefield, for instance, the Normans reside within their *castra* (209) [fortified camps] on the one side, and arrayed against them are the English, who reside within the forest. These fortified camps suggest a clearly bounded space that depends on the Normans' manipulation of the landscape and their possession of it. In contrast, the English permeate the land itself as they exist in the much more amorphous—and even natural—forest space. Perhaps more importantly, though, this forest space is not used simply as a synecdoche for the English or as a passive space that the English occupy. Instead it exhibits its own agency and comes to the aid of the English; the “*silva*” [forest] “*ex inproviso diffudit...cohores et nemoris latebris agmina prosiliunt*” (363-364) [without warning poured forth soldiers; columns sprang forth from their hiding places in the groves]. In this, it is clear that the English have a particular and unique relationship to the land that is further emphasized by the change of diction in these lines; for the forest—*silva* at first—transforms into a *nemus* in the second line. This term, *nemus*, often had a more specialized meaning. Isidore of Seville, for instance, links it with “a grove (*nemus*)” that “is named for divinity (*numen*), because pagans set up their idols there”; in contrast, “a thicket (*silva*) is a dense and small grove” where “wood is felled.”¹⁸⁸ While extrapolating a pagan sense to the forest in this context would be premature, we can understand the term as clearly differentiated from the more placid

¹⁸⁸ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 341. Such a reading is admitted by Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short's *A Latin Dictionary*, 1879 ed., s.v. “*nemus* I.B”

silva, perhaps even verging on a sense of the sacred. Initially, then, the English and the forest exist symbiotically; each is distinct, and yet when they come together a certain sacral relationship inheres and is clearly marked in the language applied to the space. More than that, it is a relationship that is meant to stand in direct opposition to the Normans and their built landscape—here noted in their occupation of the *castra*.

This distinction is carried out further during the battle between the Normans and the English. Here the *nemi* become in many respects liminal zones of English power and resistance that stand opposed to the Norman forces.¹⁸⁹ Not only do we see once again the *nemus*, but the English soldiers themselves become assimilated to the forest in the following conceit:

Anglorum stat fixa solo densissima turba,
 Tela dat et telis et gladios gladiis.
 Spiritibus nequeunt frustrata cadauera sterni,
 Nec cedunt uiuis corpora militibus.
 Omne cadauer enim, uita licet euacuum,
 Stat uelut illesum, possidet atque locum.
 Nec penetrare valent spissum nemus Angligenarum,
 Ni tribuat uires uiribus ingenium. (415-422)

[The thick crowd of the English stands fixed to the ground; they give spears for spears and swords for swords. Each body, robbed of their life, are unable to spread out. Nor do the dead make way for the living soldiers. For each body, although evacuated of life, stands just as if it were unharmed and holds that place. The attackers would not have been able to penetrate the dense forest of the English, had not ingenuity granted strength to the men.]

¹⁸⁹ The term liminal is of primary importance to the anthropological school of thought that interrogates the formation of ritual and its cultural efficacy; I am indebted to the work of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner for my use of it here. Arnold Van Gennep has treated the liminal space or zone as that place in the medial position within a rite of passage. This space of transition, according to Van Gennep, can be most clearly understood as that which is poised “physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: . . . [wavering] between two worlds.” Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), 18. Additionally, Victor Turner, later expanded this territorial focus to the function of figures who occupy this space, or those who might be said to be “betwixt and between.” Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1969), 95.

The use of the term, *nemus*, here is particularly apt, since the forest represents a threat to the Norman invaders and couples the living with the dead; for both *omne cadauer* [each body] as well as the living English soldiers stand arrayed to the attack of the Normans. This numinous space, then, embodies not simply a martial threat to the invading Normans, but also one to the natural cycle of life and death. Accordingly, a term like *silva* would be misplaced. Instead, the use of *nemus* serves to emphasize the alien quality of such a space. More than that, the image here created codifies what had only been implied earlier. The forest and the English have, in many ways, become one entity to oppose the Normans; it is as if the English and the very land stand against invasion.

In the next few lines, the threat that the English pose seems to collapse and the forest is transformed accordingly. Here the narrator states, “*amotis sanis, labuntur dilacerati, / Siluaque spissa prius rarior efficitus*” (427-428) [with the healthy having been removed, those torn to pieces fall, and the once dense wood is made thinner]. Not only are the English once again linked specifically with the wood, but with the defeat of the English the more symbolic *nemus* reverts to the more mundane *silva*. As the Normans exercise their strength against the lines of the English, removing the corpses, the forest becomes simply another space onto which William the Conqueror can exert his authority. Similarly, the narrator describes the destruction of the English as follows: “*Corruit apposita ceu silua minuta securi, / Sic nemus Angligenum ducitur ad nihilum*” (529-530) [just as the wood is thinned when the axe is applied, thus was the forest of the English brought to destruction]. Both the *silua* and the *nemus* have become one here. Instead, however, of building a symbolic resonance as I noted before, these terms have simply become interchangeable—a point emphasized by the poet’s simile which registers the

previously-ascribed disjuncture in meaning. The threat the English posed has collapsed, and thus the *nemus* has given way to the *silva*.

There is one final instance in which the Latin *silva* appears in the text of the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*, and this bears further scrutiny. When describing Harold's actions to William the Conqueror before the battle at Hastings, a Norman envoy warns the Conqueror:

Ex inproiso sperat te fallere posse;
 Per mare, per terram, prelia magna parat.
 In mare quingentas fertur misisse carinas,
 Ut nostri reditus prepediatur iter.
 Quo graditur silvas plani deducit ad esse,
 Et per que transit flumina sicca facit. (317-322)

[He {Harold} hopes to be able to drive you away without warning; he prepares a great battle by sea and by land. It's said that he has released five hundred ships into the sea in order to obstruct our return journey. Where he marches, he causes the forests to become plains, and those rivers which he crosses he makes dry up.]¹⁹⁰

As I have suggested is often the case, we might expect the more potent and symbolic *nemus* to be employed in this juncture. However, what is to be emphasized is not the threat that this space poses to the Normans. It is not rife with corpses, nor does it work as an active agent to impede Norman progress. Instead this forest, as the envoy's use the term *silva* would suggest, is merely a tract of land that Harold himself tames. They are simply passive objects onto which aggression can be mapped, and thus the term *silva* is apt.

¹⁹⁰ As Barlow notes, White has suggested that *planum* here carries a "technical sense of untimbered land, open country." "The Battle of Hastings and the death of Harold," *The Complete Peerage*, 12 (1953), 1:37ng, 1:39nj. Additionally, the parallel with the *Gesta Guillelmi* in this instance is particularly marked. Indeed, as the editors note, the following verse appears: "in eius transitu flumina epotata, silvas in planum reductas" (126) [in his crossing the rivers were drained and the forests reduced to untimbered land]. In the *Gesta Guillelmi*, however, the narrator draws particular attention to the classical tenor of such description, suggesting that this description would be fitting for "ueterum aliquis" (126) [any of the ancients] who was "scribens Heraldi agmen illud" (126) [writing about Harold's troops]. Such realization is missing in the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* account.

The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* ultimately articulates an image of the English that depends on their association with the forest—and the land by extension—and the numinal quality that inheres in such a symbiotic relationship; this tie stands in direct contrast to the Norman relationship with the land, which depends on explicit manipulation and sheer dominance. In fact, they strip the English of such a relationship through sheer force of will and transform the forests once again into *silvae*. While such a method of manipulation is inherently effective—the Normans do defeat the English—it cannot supersede the inherent symbiotic relationship between the English and the forest. When Harold perishes and the English have been routed, the remainder of the army flees into the woods. Instead of the placid *silvae* that bend to the conquerors' whims, however, the forests are described once again as *nemi* (560), whose “Solum deuictis nox et fuga profuit Anglis / Densi per latebras et tegimen nemoris” (560-561) [only night and flight through the hiding places and covering of the dense grove saved the defeated English]. What emerges in such a line is a kind of anxiety about the nature of the English, their natural relationship with the land, and their ability to stand in opposition to the Normans. While the Conquest might seem to be complete and the margins evacuated of their symbolic potential, the English and their forests still endure. The linguistic shifts here expose an anxiety at the heart of the Normans ideological enterprise. Although the tone of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* is avowedly triumphalist, it seems, at least in these moments, that the threat posed by the English still endures; the Conquest will never be complete, the English cannot be truly tamed.

This symbolic articulation of the landscape is once again employed in the portrayal of Harold Godwinson's burial. In the narrative, Harold's body is mutilated in

four distinctive acts: he is stabbed, decapitated, pierced in the stomach, and his hip/thigh is cut apart (545-550). Finally, William the Conqueror collects his body, wraps it in purple fabric, and buries it on the cliff. This burial receives extensive treatment and is described as follows:

Ergo uelut fuerat testatus, rupis in alto
 Precipit claudi uertice corpus humi.
 Extimplo quidam, partim Normannus et Anglus,
 Compater Heraldi, iussa libenter agit.
 Corpus enim Regis cito sustulit et sepeliuit;
 Imponens lapidem, scripsit et in titulo:
 ‘Per mandata ducis rex hic Heralde quiescis,
 Ut custos maneat littoris et pelagi.’ (585-592)

[Therefore, just as he had sworn, he ordered the body to be buried on the summit of the land. Immediately a certain man, a compatriot of Harold who was part Norman and part English willingly carried out the orders. Quickly he took away the body of the king and buried it; placing a stone, he wrote the inscription: “By order of the duke, you, king Harold, rest here, so that you might remain as a sentry over the shore and the sea.”¹⁹¹

Certainly this moment of the burial of Harold is not unique. As I discussed above, a very similar burial is meted out to the English king in the *Gesta Guillelmi*. Here, however, what had simply been hearsay—the joke about Harold serving as the guardian of shore and sea—is given a monumentalizing, and thus authoritative, textual component. The joke itself becomes stamped onto his very grave. The narrative thus labors to create an enduring symbol that clearly voices the triumph of the Normans.

And yet, we must understand this moment—and the work that the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* seeks to do more generally—not simply as a local phenomenon; I would suggest that it is intimately connected to the overriding cartographic process that I

¹⁹¹ As the editors of the *Gesta Guillelmi* note, this description of a man “partim Normannus et Anglus” might fit William Malet, who is mentioned as the one “entrusted” with Harold’s “burial” (141n2). For more on William Malet and his family, see Cary Hart’s “William Malet and His Family,” *Anglo-Norman Studies* 19 (1997): 123-165. Additionally, Vivien Brown—in *Eye Priory Cartulary and Charters*, vol. 2 (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1994), 4-7—discusses William Malet, his lineage as it relates to the foundation of Eye Priory, and the possibility of his portrayal in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*.

outlined above. For just as the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* attempted to transform the *nemi* into *silvae* and thus to overwrite the threat that the English represented, here the narrator links the body and land together once again in order to reinscribe England itself and subsequently reduce the efficacy of boundaries. For what had been a site of potential danger, the sea zone from which William the Conqueror first emerged, is now linked with the defeated English king who can pose no more threat. Even more than that, William's intention to make Harold the "guardian of the shore and sea" and the textual component therein suggests an explicit form of mastery that further emphasizes the stability of England with a tacit irony; for by forcing Harold to watch over the shores perpetually, William makes the English king do in death what he was not able to do in life—to guard the shore from invaders.

This ideological manipulation of landscape suggested by Harold's tomb, however, ultimately depends on the overwriting of the violence associated with the Conquest. For the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* emphasizes that the defeated simply *quiesci[t]* "rests" at the margins and that Harold's body can be reintegrated seamlessly simply by collecting the fragments of his body and wrapping them in a single cloth. And yet, such a rewriting is illusory. For this monument to Harold's death, the retention of his body at the sea, and the narrative itself—which retells the Conquest in graphic detail—all expose the reality of William's actions. In short, this monument, and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* more generally, depends on a complex metaphoric transformation that seeks to erase all those negative attributes of the Conquest in its attempts to pacify the English. And yet, try as the Conqueror, and the narrator, might to transform these memories into tributes to his greatness and create a vision of a unified England, a certain anxiety emerges, whether

that be inherent in the potential threat still posed by the English or impossibility of eliding the violence of Conquest. It is this anxiety, and the manipulation of the landscape, that will continue to be articulated throughout the twelfth century.

The English Tradition and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (D + E)

The annalistic *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, believed to have been initiated in the ninth century in response to the educational reforms under Alfred the Great,¹⁹² manifests the insular tradition of the events of 1066. Of the seven versions that are extant, only two specifically deal with the events of the Norman Conquest, the death of Harold Godwinson, and the reign of William the Conqueror; these are the D and E, or the Winchester and Peterborough versions respectively.¹⁹³ The D version is contained in the BL MS. Cotton Tiberius B;¹⁹⁴ the E version is preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS. Laud Misc. 636. As G. P. Cubbin notes, there are in fact “numerous innovations made jointly by D and E.”¹⁹⁵ More than that, concerning those entries for 1064-1080, Irvine suggests that “E’s correspondences with D...point to a shared source for their annals at some stage in transmission”; “this source was presumably a set of northern

¹⁹² As such, it becomes for Swanton “a reflection of both the ‘revival of learning’ and revival of English national awareness during the reign of King Alfred.” Introduction to M. J. Swanton, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), xviii.

¹⁹³ Although the Abingdon manuscript, or C version, of the text does retell the events of the battle at Stamford bridge, it then cuts off. As Swanton suggests, “halfway through the description of the Battle of Stamford Bridge the manuscript was mutilated, but a century later a twelfth-century hand added a few lines to complete the account of the battle.” Ibid., xxiv. According to Christopher Cannon, the abrupt ending of the Abingdon chronicle, in fact, registers the “next disaster” in so much as the “effects of the Norman Conquest are so severe that it “precludes their own recording.” Christopher Cannon in the *Grounds of English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 17.

¹⁹⁴ Introduction to G. P. Cubbin, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 6, *MS D* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1996), iv. References to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically by page number. The translations are my own.

¹⁹⁵ Cubbin, *Chronicle*, xviii.

annals, which has been altered in the course of its separate transmission to D and to E.”¹⁹⁶ Perhaps most importantly though, Irvine suggests that in fact “E’s correspondences with twelfth-century Latin chronicles suggest that a copy of the Chronicle very close to E but without the Peterborough material was available when the compiler of E was working around 1121.”¹⁹⁷

As Gransden has suggested, these two versions of the Conquest are quite different from those Anglo-Norman sources that I have discussed previously. Not only are these divergent accounts “probably entirely independent of the other,” but they also show a distinctive, and not unexpected bias, with the “English historians” being “too brief and unanalytical” when compared to the continental authors who were “too biased in favour of the Normans.”¹⁹⁸ Gransden is correct in noting that the English entries we have are relatively “brief,” but can we characterize them as “unanalytical”? I will now turn to the specific events of the death of Harold in order to examine how the insular tradition articulated its version of Harold and his death; far from being simply “unanalytical,” I would like to suggest that each entry carefully modulates its portrayal of the actions of William and Harold as well as its representation of the land itself.

When compared to the elaborate *Gesta Guillelmi* or *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, the entry for 1066 in the E version of the chronicle is quite terse. As the narrator states, “Harold com norðan and him wið feaht ear þan þe his here come eall, and þær he feoll and his twægen gebroðra Gyrð and Leofwine. And Willelm þis land geode” [Harold came from the north, and fought with him before his entire army came; and there

¹⁹⁶ Introduction to Susan Irvine, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 7, *MS E* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), lxxxiv. References to this text will be from this edition and noted parenthetically by page number. The translations are my own.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, lxxxiv.

¹⁹⁸ Gransden, *Historical*, 92.

he fell, and his two brothers, Gyrrh and Leofwine. And William conquered this land].¹⁹⁹

As is obvious, nowhere to be found in this account is Harold's symbolic castration, the monument to the dead king, the transfer of Harold's body either to the shore or to Harold's mother, nor the association between the English people and the land. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* leaves its audience simply to infer or construct their own narrative of the Conquest. In this sense, the author of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* has chosen not to construct Harold as a symbol for domination or even resistance, but simply avoid treating with him at all. An opposite view could be just as likely; perhaps the author of the chronicle simply chose not to place that much value on his death. The quick succession of details could suggest either treatment. While I want to be careful not to read too much into this short entry, what I can state is that this text does show another way that Harold's body could be treated.

In contrast to the E-text, the entry found in the D version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is much more detailed. This is particularly important because, as Gransden has suggested, it was likely "written very soon after" the Conquest.²⁰⁰ The account is as follows:

Ða com Wyllelm eorl of Normandige into Pefnesea on sancte Michæles mæsseæfen, 7 sona þæs hi fere wæron, worhton castel æt hæstingaport. Ðis wearð þa Harolde cyng gecydd, 7 he gaderade þa mycelne here, 7 com him togenes æt þære haran apuldran. 7 Wyllelm him com ongean on unwær, ær his folc gefylced wære. Ac se kyng þeah him swiðe hearlice wið feaht mid þam mannum þe him gelæstan woldon, 7 þær wearð micel wæl geslægen on ægðre healfe. Ðær wearð ofslægen Harold kyng, 7 Leofwine eorl his broðor, 7 Gyrrð eorl his broðor, 7 fela

¹⁹⁹ Susan Irvine, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 35.

²⁰⁰ Gransden, *Historical*, 93. Of course the matter of the dating of the chronicle is a bit more difficult than Gransden's suggestion would seem to imply. As Van Houts in "Memory" suggests, for instance while it may have been "written as contemporary comment on events immediately after the Conquest" such a claim is difficult to support because of "interpolations" and the simple fact that the only copy available was written after 1100 (172).

godra manna, 7 þa Frencyscan ahton wælstowe gewæald, eallswa heom God uðe for folces synnon. (80)

[Then Earl William of Normandy came into Pevensey on eve of the Feast of St. Michael, and as soon as they were able, they wrought a castle at the port of Hastings. This became known to King Harold, and then he gathered a great army, and came against them at the hoary apple-tree. And William came against him unawares, before his troops had been gathered. But the king nevertheless fought very heartily against him along with those men who wanted to follow him, and there was a great slaughter on either side. There King Harold was slain, and earl Leofwine his brother, and earl Gyrrh his brother, and many a good man, and the French took possession of that place, just as God desired for them on account of the sins of the people.]

Not only is this material much more detailed than that found in the E version, but it also employs some rather important innovations that ought not be overlooked or treated simply as “unanalytical.” First, the emphasis in this particular account is not solely on the valiant routing of the English by the Normans; instead, the author is careful to designate the parity of the situation and to draw a distinct comparison with the English. William’s advantage, that he was able to come against Harold “unawares,” is key in this respect. Just before recounting the Battle of Hastings, the narrator of the D version describes Harold’s victory at Stamford Bridge. This victory, the narrator suggests, was brought about because “Ða com Harold ure cyng on unwær on þa Normenn 7 hytte hi begeondan Eoforwic æt Steinfordbrygge mid micclan here englisces folces, 7 þær wearð on dæg swiðe stranglic gefeoht on ba halfe” (80) [Then Harold, our king, came unawares upon the Northmen and met them beyond York at Stamford Bridge with a great army of English folk, and there was that day a fierce battle on both sides]. When we reread the sections on William, his tactics and his success seem to follow the same rubric that Harold had used only a few lines before; his success is not a result of his national destiny, but his military tactics and might—which were, in fact, shared with “ure” king. In this, *unwær* [unawares] becomes a touchstone by which the military virtue of the English can

be tacitly hailed. For even though Harold might have been caught “unwær” and thus lost the Battle of Hastings, he was just as capable of accomplishing a military defeat of the Danes and accordingly a source of English pride. Thus culpability for defeat must be found somewhere other than simple ineptitude.

The narrator here also implies a certain equality by outlining how vicious a battle this in fact was. For, according to him, there was a great slaughter “on ægðre healfe” [on both sides]. This distinctive phrase, as I mentioned earlier, was noticeably absent from William of Jumièges’s account in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, although it would later appear in Orderic and Robert of Torigni’s interpolations. In avoiding such a term, I suggested, William sought to emphasize the superiority of the Norman knights and their one-sided success over the English. But in this insular source, just as with Orderic and Robert’s later interpolations, such triumph is subtly muted because valiant efforts are made on both sides. For the English are not simply routed, but also manage to inflict substantial casualties on the Normans.

Finally, the author of this annal also distinctly privileges the English landscape and moves the battle into the Old English legal register. As Gransden notes, this is the only account where the battle is described as taking place at “þære haran apuldran” [the hoary apple tree].²⁰¹ While this location might seem relatively trivial, such is not necessarily the case. Apple trees—and specifically *har* apple trees—are a distinctive marker of English boundaries. As John Niles points out, “a scanning of the charters of the Anglo-Saxon period will turn up no fewer than thirty-six references to *har* trees that served as boundary markers in local landscape...no fewer than nineteen,” in fact, refer “to

²⁰¹ Gransden, *Historical*, 93.

apple trees.”²⁰² By denoting space with just such terms, the D version of the chronicle marks the landscape in English terms, and clearly owes its intertextual relationship with Anglo-Saxon legal documents and customs. Although it might not be a surprise to see such a term in an insular account, we nonetheless see an English geographic lexicon inflect even the site of Norman supremacy. The land is firmly and distinctly English, the events of the day are mapped and described in English terms, and such markers endure despite the Conquest.

Just as in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, *Gesta Guillelmi* and *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, the English landscape and the actions of the English themselves are contested markers. While the author of the D version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* could not turn the tide of battle with his pen, some of the changes that he make clearly rehabilitate the English position in terms that are distinctively reminiscent of the Norman accounts. In this work the English martial virtue is emphasized through parallelism between William and Harold; the English valor is suggested by the slaughter on both sides; and finally, the landscape is formulated as English, even though the “Frencyscan ahton wælstowe gewæld” [French took possession of that place]. Just like the English, the hoary apple tree remains even though possession of the land has changed.

I have argued that in each of these narratives we see constellate around the figure of Harold Godwinson particular rhetorical strategies that complicate a simple pro-Norman or anti-Norman position. Although prosaic and brief, we see in William of Jumièges’s account the emergent of a triumphalist tone that is directly investing in marginalizing Harold Godwinson by removing him from the pages of history; similarly, although a different treatment was meted out later, the narrative of the Battle of Hastings

²⁰² John D. Niles, “Exeter Book Riddle 74 and the Play of the Text,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998): 187.

emphasizes the sheer military might of the Normans and the utter destruction of the English.

This brief account is treated more fully in the highly wrought *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. In the former, a narrative technique emerges that, while not unique, is particularly noticeable; more specifically, the *Gesta Guillelmi* works to praise William the Conqueror by creating an antithetical relationship with Harold Godwinson; what Harold lacks, William has in abundance. While many aspects of character and military strength are used to craft such an antithetical relationship, it is the prudence/rashness binary that emerges most clearly. The sheer rectitude of the Norman duke is then mapped to the Normans more generally because of their ability to control the English and the landscape that they use as their last refuge. Ultimately, however, it is this interdependence, this duality of a Norman identity, that at once must deny the English while still relying on them that becomes clear.

In service to just such a duality, we see in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* a kind of narrative method that relies on the careful articulation of metaphoricity at the moment of the Conquest in order to capture the general tenor of the English threat. Here, I argued, we see that the English and the land exist in a kind of symbiotic relationship that at first poses a very clear and very deadly threat to the Normans. While the Normans are finally able to conquer the English forest, a certain anxiety over the threat they continue to pose emerges. Similarly, the representation of Harold Godwinson and his burial manifests just such a cartographic impulse, inasmuch as the narrator places him on the fringe of England; once again, however, in the very act of burial, anxiety resurfaces in the narrator's concerns over the violence of the Conquest.

Finally, although we might note the discrepancy of accounts between the continental sources and the insular, the Old English *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is a carefully wrought document whose value ought not be derided. For here we see emerge a claim about the fall of Harold that depends not on his ineptitude as a ruler, nor on his failure to measure up to William; instead he becomes victim to the same kind of military strategy he had employed at Stamford Bridge. By emphasizing such a reciprocal relationship, Harold's leadership becomes something to be admired instead of simply derided. Similarly, the landscape becomes marked as distinctly English, and its endurance—despite Norman invasion—becomes implicit. In short, the narrative trajectory that had suggested the complete failure of the English and dominance of the Normans, despite any apparent anxiety, becomes inverted in a source like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

What emerges from my account of these narratives is a distinct and particular concern over certain narrative moments surrounding Harold Godwinson and the Conquest of 1066: his character, his death, his burial, and his command of the English landscape were all reinvented and altered to fit the various demands of the individual narratives. Perhaps more importantly, certain narrative tendencies emerge from an account of these moments and the changes made. These are: the antithetical relationship between Harold and William, the duality of the Norman identity that depended on the suppression of the Anglo-Saxon past, and the metaphoric description of the English and their landscape. These moments and narrative tendencies would once again see careful manipulation in historiography from the twelfth century.

Chapter 6

The Afterlife of 1066: Twelfth-Century Accounts of the Battle of Hastings

In the previous chapter I argued that in eleventh-century narratives the memory of the Battle of Hastings was intimately connected with the representation of Harold Godwinson and his last moments. While there is a certain general consensus that he was killed in William the Conqueror's assault—namely that his body was desecrated, and that he was buried—the explicit articulation of these facts is far from stable. More than that, the variations witnessed in these eleventh-century narratives generally have their root in three distinct causes: pure innovation, an intertextual relationship with other narratives, or, as I argued, on the contextual exigencies of an individual text. That William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*'s representation of Harold Godwinson and the Battle of Hastings, for instance, differs from both William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* has long been noted. What is a rather prosaic account in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* receives a full, epic treatment in the latter texts; as a result, innovation runs rampant. Indeed, in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* no explicit mention of Harold's final burial is made. And yet, both the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* assert that he was buried with dishonor at the border of England. The *Gesta Guillelmi*, for instance, entrusts his burial to William Malet who buries him in a tumulus on the seashore; in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, too, Harold comes to rest in a mound on the shores of England. As other scholars have

posited, this variance is due in large part to the interdependence of one narrative on the other.

And yet, such changes cannot be treated in isolation, but must be understood with particular reference to the whole text. For while the burial in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* is similar in tenor to that found in the *Gesta Guillelmi*, a reading of the ways that the former uses and embodies marginal spaces, particularly at the moment of the Conquest, forces us to read Harold's burial in a way that is fundamentally different from that which we find in the *Gesta Guillelmi*. What I have tried to account for in eleventh-century narratives is not only the basic differences between narratives themselves—dependent as they often are on intertextual relationships—but also the contextual nature of such elements within the narrative itself.

While such an accounting is no easy task, it is perhaps made simpler by the fact that continental and insular sources can be understood as inherently separate. Antonia Gransden, for instance, has asserted that Norman narratives—like William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* and William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi*—were largely independent from their insular counterparts, like the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, both in their source material and arguably in their political affiliation.²⁰³ While this is no doubt the case, these oftentimes disparate eleventh-century sources were conflated in twelfth-century historiography. William of Malmesbury's *GRA*, for instance, couples the continental tradition with material culled from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; similarly, while more heavily dependent on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Henry of Huntingdon's *HA* is nonetheless indebted to a set of Norman annals.²⁰⁴ Not only would the choice of

²⁰³ Gransden, *Historical*, 92.

²⁰⁴ On Henry's sources more generally, see the Introduction to Henry's *Historia*, lxxxv-cvii.

source material, then, alter the tenor of their narratives, but such sources were also susceptible to the kinds of generic and narrative pressures that so influenced retellings of the Conquest which I outlined in the previous chapter. Given this, it is no surprise that these syncretic narratives of the twelfth century demanded the careful negotiation of past traditions and oftentimes resulted in startlingly new narratives of Harold Godwinson, his death, his burial, and the landscape of England.

In this chapter, I will contend with the narratives of the twelfth century in order to understand the root of such variation—whether that be purely original, influenced by intertexts, or based on context—and the implications of such changes. To begin, I will examine William of Malmesbury's *GRA* and Henry of Huntingdon's *HA*. Of course, to examine all the variations that exist between these twelfth-century texts and their eleventh-century counterparts would be impossible. What I examined in the first chapter of this section, however, were certain narrative elements: Harold's character—and the antithetical relationship with William that depended on the idea of imprudence—his death, his burial, and the ways that the landscape is used. Once again, these narrative elements are contested; a close examination of them will allow us to understand the ways each narrative manifests its concerns over the violence of the Conquest, and the status and role that the Anglo-Saxon past had in the twelfth-century Anglo-Norman present. William of Malmesbury, for instance, works to incorporate Harold into the English ecclesiastical system by tying his body firmly to Waltham. In addition, his narrative also amplifies William of Poitiers' concern over the proper qualities of a king and Harold's inability to live up to such notions. At the same time, William of Malmesbury concocts a narrative that seeks to suppress the violent reality of the Conquest and thus to free the

Conqueror from claims against his prudence. Just as William's narrative is concerned with spatial matters, especially with reference to Harold's burial, Henry of Huntingdon's account manifests a similar concern. Here, however, the landscape isn't merely the locale into which the body of Harold Godwinson can be interred; instead, Henry uses an explicit metaphoric description of Harold and the land in order to emphasize the key turning point, that of the built landscape and the technological advantage of the Normans; in so doing, Henry is able to reclaim the valor of the English while still recounting their demise.

From here I will turn to two texts which are explicitly related: the twelfth-century *Waltham Chronicle*—otherwise known as *De Inventione Sancte Crucis*—and the thirteenth-century *Vita Haroldi*. Although the *Vita Haroldi* was almost certainly produced after the *Waltham Chronicle*, each was produced by someone with Waltham connections;²⁰⁵ additionally, both texts were later copied into the same manuscript, BL Harley 3776. And yet, each of these narratives manifests a drastically different portrait of the events of 1066 and Harold's death. Ultimately I will contend that the changes made in the *Waltham Chronicle* serve to assert the primacy of the church by reformulating the death and burial of Harold; at the same time the narrative attempts to disavow the violence explicit in the Conquest by overwriting the tradition of corporeal mutilation that had first inhered in the early continental accounts of 1066. While the narrative of the *Vita Haroldi* differs from the *Waltham Chronicle* in its basic premise that Harold in fact lived through the Conquest, it is perhaps the more subtle changes that have the greatest

²⁰⁵ As Michael Swanton notes, "the anonymous compiler of the Life of King Harold was clearly a man with Waltham connections, and the obvious religious interests which color his thinking suggest that he may have been a monk or canon." Introduction to Michael Swanton, *Three Lives of the Last Englishmen*, *Garland Library of Medieval Literature* 10 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), xxvi.

effect. Indeed, I will argue that in this text the margins of England become invested with a power not previously available to Harold or the English in the early tradition, that Harold's body is claimed as a model for spiritual redemption, and that the audience is asked to engage in this new tradition surrounding Harold. Ultimately by examining these accounts, I intend to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the role the Anglo-Saxon past had in the Norman present of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

William of Malmesbury

William of Malmesbury's text has long been of interest. In the Middle Ages, for instance, some twenty-five manuscripts were produced; even in the present day Gransden has noted that his works continue to be "repositories of information and views of value to the historian today."²⁰⁶ Of course, Gransden's primarily excavative approach—one that seeks to determine the verifiable historical material encased in William's *GRA*—has been complemented by those accounts that seek to understand William's writings from a more literary perspective. Stein, for instance, provides the most recent, if quite brief, account of William's portrayal of Harold's death. As part of a summation of twelfth-century responses to the eleventh-century tradition that had witnessed Harold Godwinson's death, he suggests that William of Malmesbury's "account of Harold's death specifically is in the form of what seems to be a narrative synthesis of these various [earlier] accounts."²⁰⁷ While true inasmuch as William's account relies on a number of early sources, such a term ultimately belies the complex hermeneutic and inventive practice that William employs when writing about Harold and the Conquest.

²⁰⁶ Gransden, *Historical*, 167.

²⁰⁷ Stein, *Reality*, 72.

That is not to say that William of Malmesbury's text is not indebted to the earlier traditions; while he did rely on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* for parts of his narrative, his account of the Conquest derives primarily from sources like William of Jumièges's *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* and William of Poitiers *Gesta Guillelmi*. Gransden, for instance, notes that William was "well acquainted with the works of William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers."²⁰⁸ Similarly, W. Stubbs suggests that the William of Poitiers's *Gesta Guillelmi* was used for substantial portions of William's text, like the sections just before his narrative of Conquest.²⁰⁹ Even in the battle at Hastings itself, Stubbs argues, "the influence of William of Poitiers [sic] may be traced here and there in the account of the Conquest."²¹⁰ Additionally, the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*'s narrative must also be considered as representative of the tradition on which William drew; although this narrative has not been clearly linked with William's text, the close relationship between it and the *Gesta Guillelmi*—a point which I discussed above—suggests that William would have been at least knowledgeable of the tradition found therein.

While William's dependence on such narratives is clear, his text does nevertheless show marked innovation, particularly in his description of Harold's burial and the treatment his body received after the Battle of Hastings. In William of Jumièges, for instance, no mention of his final resting place is made. Instead, Harold's very body is, in fact, made to disappear from the record of history in order to make way for the emerging Norman authority, embodied in William the Conqueror. This figurative marginalization, I have argued in the previous chapter, is mimed by the literal representation we find in

²⁰⁸ Gransden, *Historical*, 170.

²⁰⁹ The sections that Stubbs refers to are 229-239. Introduction to William of Malmesbury, *Willelmi Malmesbiriensis Monachi de Gestis Regum Libri Quinque; Historiae Novellae Libri Tres*, ed. W. Stubbs, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1887-1889), 1:xciii.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, xciii.

William of Poitiers' *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. For here Harold is in fact placed in a grave on the very edge of England itself to perpetually watch over its shores and prevent another invasion. In the early tradition as a whole, then, we are presented with two narrative strains that focus on Harold's death—one that writes him out of the narrative in order to make way for the Norman ascendancy and one that places him in a clear position of subjugation by dictating his burial location and mocking his ability to watch over the shores. While the final resting place of Harold might be said to be different, the tradition as a whole is explicitly invested in marginalizing the English King in order to give way to the conquerors. The *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* does so symbolically by refusing to bury his body; the *Gesta Guillelmi* and the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* do so by literally placing him at the terminus of England itself.

In contrast to these early accounts, William of Malmesbury relates that the Conqueror accepted Harold's mother's pleas for the body, and he "corpus Haroldi matri... sine pretio misit" (460) [sent the corpse of Harold to his mother without ransom] so that she could have it "apud Waltham sepeliuit" (460) [buried at Waltham]. The echo with the *Gesta Guillelmi*—namely Harold's mother's plea for the body of her son—is clear; whereas this had been unequivocally denied on the grounds of justice in the *Gesta Guillelmi*, here it is trumpeted. While undoubtedly this moment serves as an example that offers proof of the Conqueror's magnanimity, William of Malmesbury's change also signifies a different attitude towards the king and perhaps, by extension, the Anglo-Saxon past. For what had been simply an object to be pushed to the fringes of England in the early, continental tradition—Harold's body—is here brought within the centralized authority of a stable England and made to serve its ecclesiastical system; although an

uneasy relationship, William's treatment of Harold suggests the acceptance of a narrative alternative to the triumphalist early Norman accounts. The church at Waltham—and perhaps England itself, William's narrative seems to suggest—depends on a kind of continuity with its Anglo-Saxon forbearers. While William of Malmesbury's change might seem slight in the literal sense, its ideological import is significant.

William's revisionary tendencies are once again apparent in the way that he portrays the desecration of Harold's body receives after the battle. As William's *GRA* states, "femus unus militum gladio proscidit" (456) [one of his knights hacked at his thigh with a sword]. While the *Gesta Guillelmi* does mention that Harold "ipse carens omni decore, quibusdam signis, nequaquam facie, recognitus est" (140) [himself was recognized by certain marks, not by his face, for he had been despoiled of all signs of status], no explicit mention of the marking on his thigh is related; even this level of detail is missing from William of Jumièges entries in the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum* which elides any sort of description of the body. Although more elaborate, the description in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, which I have quoted at length above, does make mention of the cutting off of his thigh (lines 545-550). Ultimately, however, it is likely the Bayeux tapestry which was the source for William's narrative. Here we can see what is presumed to be the corpse of Harold struck in the thigh.²¹¹

While this portion of William's narrative does have some precedence in the early narratives, William of Malmesbury once again adds to his narrative. Indeed, he relates

²¹¹ A similar episode is to be found in the Bayeux tapestry where Harold's thigh appears to be slashed; this contrasts with the mutilation of Harold's body that we see in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. Discussing the relevance of this event in the tapestry, Bernstein suggests that it could have been understood as a "symbol of castration, as an allusion to the biblical link between a solemn oath, and the thigh, and possibly as a reference to a proverbial truism." David J. Bernstein, *The Mystery of the Bayeux Tapestry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 161. Instead of arriving at an understanding of this act as a symbol, I will here be concerned with the role that this act plays within the text itself and how William of Malmesbury's choice of intertext or innovations modulate the event to fit his aims.

that the knight who committed this act was in fact “a Willelmo ignominiae notatus, quod rem ignauam et pudendam fecisset, militia pulsus est” (456) [marked with disgrace by William because he committed a cowardly and shameful act, and was driven from the army]. Just as before, this event once again serves to portray the Conqueror’s character in a positive light; even after the battle William is still respectful to his enemies. At the same time, however, it does nonetheless function to rehabilitate Harold to an extent. Instead of solely being an object onto which violence of the Conquest can clearly be inscribed, William of Malmesbury retells the events in such a way that Harold’s body is treated with respect.

One might, of course, be tempted to suggest that William’s choice to limit the desecration present in the early tradition ultimately is intended to completely overwrite the violence explicit in the Conquest. This is not, however, accomplished. The memory of the act does remain, even if it is repudiated; it has simply been modulated. What becomes clear, however, is that we can understand this narrative—as Stein suggests that we should—as fully compliant with the “contemporary array of power.”²¹² His narrative does, after all, serve the Conqueror and no explicit strain of anti-Norman bias can be felt. And yet, the changes he effects to the portrayal of Harold do substantially temper the impulses of narratives such as the *Gesta Guillelmi*, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, or even the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. While the term “synthesis,” then, is appropriate in a basic sense, it fails to draw attention to the complexity of William’s narrative practice. For what had been the promised formation of a new polity in the early tradition—one that depended on the marginalization and mutilation of the king—is here reformulated as a productive act that depends on the rearticulation of history. Instead,

²¹² Stein, *Reality*, 72.

then, of simply overwriting the past, of establishing a new history and polity on the body of the Anglo-Saxon king, William suggests that his narrative depends on the integration of the past and the present, of the Anglo-Saxon and the Norman, in a way that privileges neither specifically, but keeps both in tension.

To this point, I have been concerned with the physical manifestation of Harold in William of Malmesbury's text—specifically how his body is treated and buried; coupled with this analysis, however, must be a consideration of just how Harold himself is characterized. It might seem a bit odd to discuss characterization when discussing historical personages; and yet, as Blacker would remind us, “evaluative and creative processes, both conscious and unconscious, are at work as the historian transforms the ‘givens’ of history into a unique representation.”²¹³ While characterization, might seem to be more applicable to fictional works, its equally apt to historical narratives.

When discussing William of Malmesbury's method of characterization—along with Orderic Vitalis, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Gaimar, Wace, and Benoît de Sainte-Maure—Blacker suggests that he very often deemphasized the individual generally; “individuation,” which “was not the goal of characterization.” Instead, “major figures tended to fall into one of two categories—good and evil.”²¹⁴ With William of Malmesbury, in particular, Blacker suggests that his portraiture depends on the idealized portraits of Suetonius, a point which has long been conceded. Gransden, for instance, confirms such a reading when she suggests that the “influence of Suetonius on William of

²¹³ Blacker, *Faces*, 53.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

Malmesbury was strong” and can generally be seen in the ways that William goes about “illustrating facets of character with trivial anecdotes.”²¹⁵

This bifurcation of characters is evident in the ways that Harold and William the Conqueror are portrayed. When preparing for war, for instance, William of Malmesbury describes the Conqueror’s actions:

Verum tunc Willelmi industria, cum prouidentia Dei consentiens, iam spe Angliam inuadebat et, ne iustam causam temeritas decoloraret, ad Apostolicum, qui ex Anselmo Lucensi episcopo Alexander dicebatur, misit, iustitiam suscepti belli quantis poterat facundiae neruis allegans. Haroldus id facere supersedit, uel quod turgidus natura esset, uel quod causae diffideret, uel quod nuntios suos a Willelmo et eius complicitibus, qui omnes portus obsidebant, impediri timeret. (448)

[Certainly then William’s purpose was consonant with God’s will; now he was invading England with hope and, lest rashness taint his just cause, he sent to the pope, who was called Alexander and was formerly Anselm, bishop of Lucca alleging the righteousness of his war with as much force of eloquence as he was able. Harold refrained from doing that, whether because he was prideful by nature, or because he lacked confidence in the cause, or because he feared that his messengers would be hindered by William and his confederates who blockaded all the ports.]

The virtues of the Conqueror are here emphasized. It is his unwillingness to appear rash, or to display *temeritas*, that drives him to seek approval from the Pope. The Conqueror

²¹⁵ Gransden, *Historical*, 170-1. The influence that Suetonius had on William of Malmesbury’s literary form was first posited by Marie Schütt who demonstrated that “it was Suetonius’ form of composition which William of Malmesbury took for his model when describing the reigns of William Rufus and Henry the First” Marie Schütt “The Literary Form of William of Malmesbury’s ‘Gesta Regum’.” *The English Historical Review*, 46, no. 182 (1931), 256. Additionally, a summary of the general format of this model, with particular reference to Suetonius’s *Vitae Caesarum* is to be found in this article at 256. Although Schütt primarily confines her comments and analysis on the structuring principles operative in William’s *Gesta* to accounts of William Rufus and Henry I, Joan Gluckauf Haahr expands it to include William the Conqueror and couples these claims with an understanding of the influence that Lucan had on William of Malmesbury’s writing. Ultimately, Haahr claims that “it is clear that when he had no English or continental sources on which to draw for narrative or ideological inspiration, he went easily and naturally to Roman models.” Joan Gluckauf Haahr, “William of Malmesbury’s Roman Models: Suetonius and Lucan,” in *The Classics in the Middle Ages*, ed. Aldo S. Bernardo and Saul Levin (Binghampton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1990), 172. In addition to the formal influence that Suetonius had on the *GRA*, as Stubbs notes William of Malmesbury does quote his work. Stubbs’s edition of the *GRA*, xxii. A full list of William of Malmesbury’s quotation of Suetonius’s various works can be found in Mynors, Thomson, and Winterbottom’s edition of the *GRA*, 2:461-2.

can be said to acting reasonably with a clear plan of action that includes garnering the support of the ecclesiastical community.

In contrast, the opposite of this very quality is present in Harold. When relating the Conqueror's military strength to Harold a messenger states that "proinde consultius ages si, instanti necessitati te subtrahens, nostro periculo colludium pugnae temptaueris" (452) [hence if you would act prudently, drawing yourself away from this present obligation, you would try a play of battle at our expense]; instead of heeding such advice, however,

noluit effrenata temeritas aurem placidam monenti commodare, existimans inglorium et anteactae uiae obprobrium cuicumque discrimini terga nudare, eademque impudentia uel, ut indulgentius dicam, imprudentia monachum Willelmi legatum nec bono uultu dignatus turbide abegit, hoc tantum imprecans, ut Deus inter eum et Willelmum iudicaret. (453)

[he [Harold], with unbridled rashness, wanted not to lend a patient ear to the warning because he thought it inglorious and shameful with respect to his past life for him to flee in a crisis. On account of this same impudence, or as I might say more indulgently, lack of foresight, he drove off the monk, refusing to treat him with respect in his frantic mood, instead invoking such that God would judge between him and William.]

The echo of William's earlier action is marked. In fact, the very same quality, *temeritas*, that was avoided by William is here applied aptly to Harold. Whereas the Conqueror had heeded such advice and thus displayed his prudence, here Harold eschews such action and instead exhibited *effrenata temeritas* because he failed to "aurem placidam monenti commodare" [lend a patient ear to good advice]; it is this, his imprudence, that ultimately leads to catastrophe.

Blacker's reading would seem to be confirmed. Harold and William do, in this particular instance, act as foils for one another. The terms of their success and failure lie clearly in their decision to avoid or embrace *temeritas*—to act prudently or imprudently.

We might even be inclined to impute ethical categories. Harold's actions, inasmuch as they lead to his failure, could be said to be bad, and William's, which lead to his success, could be said to be good. Indeed, if we stretch such a line of reasoning further, as Joan Gluckauf Haahr does, we might be inclined to treat the antithetical relationship between Harold and William as ultimately supporting her claim that in the *GRA* William of Malmesbury's "dislike of Godwin and his 'clan'" is made manifest.²¹⁶

And yet, such a reading is detrimental in a number of ways. First, it prevents us from recognizing the—albeit rare—positive characteristics of Harold. When discussing his actions at Hastings, for instance, William of Malmesbury shows that just as William is to be lauded for his martial "virtus" (454), so too is Harold who was "non contentus munere imperatorio ut hortaretur alios, militis officium sedulo exsequebatur" (454) [not content to function as a commander such that he would order others; he carried out the task of the soldier diligently], such that no one "impune accederet quin statim uno ictu equus et eques prociderent" (454-6) [approached with impunity, but horse and rider were immediately felled by a single blow]. Of course, the martial virtue of Harold is here emphasized, as well as his courage despite the technological difference between him and the Norman knights.

Adhering to such a binary would limit our ability to evaluate Harold and William of Malmesbury's portrayal of him. It also precludes our understanding of this characterization procedure as, in many ways, inherited from the earlier tradition. In the last chapter, for instance, I noted that this clear dichotomy between Harold and William was in evidence. It was this very concept of rashness as opposed to prudence that seemed

²¹⁶ Joan Gluckauf Haahr, "The Concept of Kingship in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta regum* and *Historia Novella*," *Mediaeval Studies* 33 (1976): 368.

to be at issue for William of Poitiers and a point that he was seeking to emphasize in his portraiture. Although I have focused solely on one aspect of William and Harold's narrative representation, we must be careful not to assert that this style was unique to William of Malmesbury, nor, by extension, to the twelfth century; he was, I would like to suggest, in keeping with the tradition from which he was working. Moreover, if this precedence is ignored and William of Malmesbury's style is treated as a unique innovation, then extrapolations, like those made by Haahr, become tenable. Instead, a clear contextualization with William's sources elucidates a fundamental stylistic aspect that he inherited from the eleventh-century Norman historians.

Finally, such clear binary categories also prevent us from understanding just how William of Malmesbury did innovate, particularly in this instance. Here I would return to that passage, and my translation, which I just discussed. Once again, the passage reads as follows:

noluit effrenata temeritas aurem placidam monenti commodare, existimans inglorium et anteactae uiae obprobrium cuicumque discrimini terga nudare, eademque impudentia uel, ut indulgentius dicam, imprudentia monachum Willelmi legatum nec bono uultu dignatus turbide abegit, hoc tantum imprekans, ut Deus inter eum et Willelmum iudicaret. (452)

[He [Harold], with unbridled rashness, wanted not to lend a patient ear to the warning because he thought it inglorious and shameful with respect to his past life for him to flee in a crisis. On account of this same impudence, or as I might say more indulgently, lack of foresight, he drove off the monk, refusing to treat him with respect in his frantic mood, instead invoking such that God would judge between him and William.]

It is clear in the first sentence of this passage that the person being discussed is Harold Godwinson. The English king is the subject of the material immediately preceding this. More than that, William's editorializing comment in the second sentence clearly delineates that this material is to be about Harold. Accordingly, in my translation I

include mention of Harold to ensure comprehension. Similarly, the recent editors of William of Malmesbury's text provide the following translation for that first sentence: "But there was no holding Harold. Rash as he was, he refused to lend a patient ear to good advice, thinking it discreditable and a blot upon his record to turn tail in the face of any danger" (453).

To get across the matter of the sentence here, the translators break it up into two separate sentences; while, strictly speaking, the first is unprecedented in the Latin, it does nonetheless serve to clarify the action of the moment. Similarly, the second sentence applies a clarifying clause "rash as he was" that serves to gloss *effrenata temeritas* while still maintaining Harold as the subject. These translations, however, are not necessarily warranted in the Latin. It is clear that *effrenata temeritas* is meant to serve as the subject of this sentence. It is, in fact, the "unbridled rashness" that "wanted not to lend a patient ear to the warning." In this instance, *effrenata temeritas* is not merely meant to serve as a defining character trait for Harold as was the case in the early tradition. In fact, according to the Latin of the passage itself, the quality has become a kind of personification, like idolatry, lust, or wrath in Prudentius's *Psychomachia*; it is synonymous with Harold himself. The king and his defining character trait have, in William's text, become inseparable. What had simply been implied in that early tradition—that Harold could be identified by his rashness—has been made explicit in this twelfth-century account.

If we fail to understand the relationship between William's narrative style and the early tradition he was working from, such moments of artistry fade to the background. Indeed, this troubling Latin passage can become clear when we keep in mind just such a

tradition. To categorize William's method simply as depending on the blanket ascription of major figures to one of two domains (whether good or evil) restricts our ability to understand the subtle narrative artistry employed by William of Malmesbury. While his portraiture depends on continental models, the narrative he constructs is unique in and of itself. The material body of Harold, as William treats it, becomes something onto which the English can build instead of simply necessitating marginalization. More than that, while William of Malmesbury's portraiture depends on the foiling of Harold and William in the early tradition, such a relationship is expanded and reformulated in the *Gesta*.

William of Malmesbury's relationship with the continental and English traditions of the eleventh century, as well as with the Anglo-Saxon past more generally, is perhaps most clearly articulated in his prologue to book III.²¹⁷ William states that:

De Willelmo rege scripserunt, diuersis incitati causis, et Normanni et Angli. Illi ad nimias efferati sunt laudes, bona malaque iuxta in caelum predicantes; isti pro gentilibus inimicitiiis fedis dominum suum proscidere conutiis. Ego, autem quia utiusque gentis sanguinem traho, dicendi tale temperamentum seruabo: bene gesta, quantum cognoscere potui, sine fuco palam efferam; perperam acta, quantum suffitiat scientiae, leuiter et quasi transeunter attingam, ut nec mendax culpetur historia, nec illum nota inuram censoria cuius cuncta pene, etsi non laudari, excusari certe possunt opera. (424)

[Both the Normans and the English, impelled by various causes, have written on the rule of William. The Normans were driven to praise him greatly; on the other hand, the English, because of their national hatred, defame their lord with mockery. I, however, because I unite the blood of both people, will retain a temperate course in my telling; I will bring forth without embellishment the good deeds, as many as I have been able to learn. Similarly, I will touch lightly, as if cursorily, on his misdeeds as necessary so that my history might not be decried as mendacious. I will not mark a man, whose works—even if they can't all be praise—can certainly be excused, with a censorious stamp.]

²¹⁷ Referring to this section, Gransden—in *Historical*—suggests that William's "ambivalent attitude to the Anglo-Saxons was not only due to the fact that he used both English and Norman sources. No doubt it was also partly due to his own mixed parentage...which must have divided his loyalties" (173).

Of course, such a statement functions on a number of levels. It clearly serves to increase William's own credibility. He claims, after all, that he will be able to adhere to the facts instead of either working to praise William's rule too much, or to revile it too much. Additionally, it serves to separate his work from other histories; for his is the only one that can take such a medial position because of his parentage. He suggests that he exists in a unique position, a particular post-Conquest moment wherein the English and the Normans have become one.

And yet, the echo with the earlier continental tradition surrounding the Battle of Hastings cannot be missed. In many ways, William comes to embody the anonymous man of the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, who is "partim Normannus et Anglus" [part Norman and part English]—or William Malet of the *Gesta Guillelmi*—insomuch as he can metaphorically "bury" Harold and the Anglo-Saxon past safely so that a new England can emerge. While he might not be able to separate his history from such earlier narratives, he is clearly able to modulate its content in such a way that the Anglo-Saxon past can still be of import to the Norman present. No longer is the last English king pushed to the fringes, but rather brought within the demesne of the twelfth-century Norman present. Additionally, the destruction of the English is no longer something to be trumpeted, but to be reviled and punished. Of course, such a position, which is in evidence from the types of changes that William undertakes, does not prevent William from finding fault with Harold Godwinson. He does augment William of Poitiers's concerns over Harold's rashness. Nonetheless, I would suggest that William's hybrid position ought not to be understood simply with reference to his national origins, but with the way that he approaches the Anglo-Saxon past itself. He works from within a tradition

to institute changes that reflect a shifting attitude towards the Anglo-Saxon past that is drastically different from that found in any of the eleventh-century narratives I have discussed before.

Henry of Huntingdon

Henry of Huntingdon's text is similar to his contemporary William of Malmesbury's *GRA* inasmuch as it is a syncretic composition; Henry's text relied on Bede (a conflated CM version),²¹⁸ Paul the Deacon's *Historia Romana*, Marianus Scottus's *Chronica maiora*, the *HB*—namely, the version that is not attributed to Gildas, but to the Vatican recension—Norman Annals, the *Gesta Francorum*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *HRB*, and some lost Anglo-Saxon verses.²¹⁹ What is notably absent from this list, however, is a strong representation of continental material. While Henry knew of such material, as his use of the Norman Annals suggests, his text ultimately depends more heavily on the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Not only does the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* form something like forty percent of Henry's *HA*, but Henry even sought to capture the

²¹⁸ The c-text and m-text represent different versions of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The c-text is primarily insular, while it was the m-text that was primarily available on the continent. For a discussion of the relationship between these two traditions see *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, xxxviii-lxxiii.

²¹⁹ As Diane Greenway notes in her edition of the *Historia*, Henry is a kind of "weaver" like that described by Bernard Guenée. Indeed, as she suggests, "Henry was entirely dependent on the work of other writers, which he reproduced in quotation, summary and translation"; more importantly, "roughly speaking, about 25% of the History came from Bede, around 40% derived from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and about another 10% came from other written sources." Introduction to Henry's *Historia*, lxxxv. This method of composition is discussed by Bernard Guenée in "L'historien et la compilation au xii^e siècle," *Journal des savants* (1985): 119-135 and "L'historien par les mots," in *Politique et histoire au moyen-âge* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne Paris, 1981), 221-237.

heroic ethos found in chronicle poems such as the *Battle of Brunnanburh*, which he translated and incorporated into his own work.²²⁰

Given Henry's affinity for the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, it is no surprise that his account of Harold and the Battle of Hastings would differ from that which we find in William of Malmesbury's *GRA*. Indeed, the *HA* is quite briefer. Henry of Huntingdon relates Harold's death scene as follows: "Interea totus ymber sagittariorum cecidit circa regem Haraldum, et ipse in oculo ictus corruit. Irrumpens autem multitudo equitum, regum uulneratum interfecit, et Girdh consulem et Leuine consulem, fratres eius, cum eo" (394) [Meanwhile the entire shower of arrows fell around king Harold, and he, having been struck in the eye, collapsed. Then a group of knights, rushing forth, killed the wounded king, as well as Earl Gyrrh and Earl Leofwine—his brothers—along with him]. Nowhere in this representation are there comments about the explicit mutilation of Harold's thigh or the rest of his body; similarly, mention of his burial location is omitted. While the motif of blinding was likely influenced by the Bayeux tapestry and is found in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta*, the general, abbreviated style of the narrative itself no doubt owes much to the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; the Peterborough or E version, a version similar to which was likely used quite often by Henry,²²¹ reads as follows: "7 Harold com norðan 7 him wið feaht ear þan þe his here come eall, 7 þær he feoll 7 his twægen

²²⁰ Although his translations have often been derided, Rigg has suggested that in fact Henry of Huntingdon's poetry represents "an almost unique hybrid of Latin and vernacular poetic techniques"; with particular reference to the Battle of Brunnanburh, Rigg suggests that "Henry's Latinization of the English poem represents a final (and doomed) struggle of native verse techniques in the face of Norman and Latin domination." Rigg, "Henry of Huntingdon's," 68-69.

²²¹ As Greenway suggests, "Henry's forms of personal and place-names in passages drawn from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* show a remarkable similarity to those in E and there are many points where his readings agree with E against all other versions of *ASC*." Accordingly, Greenway suggests that "there can be no doubt that Henry used and translated a version which was very closely allied to that at Peterborough, the 'E' recension, Bodleian MS Laud Misc. 636."²²¹ While this version was not the only available to Henry, it is influential. Introduction to Henry's *Historia*, xci.

gebroðra Gyrð 7 Leofwine” [Harold came from the north, and fought with him before all his army came; and there he fell, and his two brothers, Gyrrh and Leofwine. And William conquered this land].²²²

We might be able to discuss the reason that Henry chooses to associate his narrative of Harold’s death with the Bayeux tapestry or even the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; in choosing the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and relying so closely on it, a case could be made that the *HA* is, generally speaking, more ideologically in line with the insular narrative tradition than a text like William of Malmesbury’s, which relies so heavily on continental material. And yet, it is ultimately the way that Henry portrays the events leading up to the Battle of Hastings that are perhaps even more important; indeed, at the same moment where in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* the amassed English lines meet the charge of the Normans and are described as a forest (415-422), Henry of Huntingdon’s *HA* uses the idea of a “castle” metaphorically to emphasize William the Conqueror’s use of the land and in so doing implicitly suggests that this, and not necessarily a character flaw like rashness, is the cause of Harold Godwinson’s failure at Hastings. When describing the Norman landing, Henry tells us that Harold, returning “eadem die” (388) [on the same day] from the Battle at Stamford Bridge, is approached by a messenger who tells him that “Willelmus littora australia occupavit, et castellum construxit apud Hastings” (388) [William has invaded the southern shores, and has built a castle at Hastings].

The production of a fortification, or even a castle, at Hastings is not unique to Henry of Huntingdon’s work. William of Poitiers, for instance, relates that William and the Normans first “prima munitione Peneuesellum, altera Hastings occupauere” (114) [occupied Pevensey with the first fortification, and Hastings with the second]. The

²²² Irvine, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, s.a. 1066.

fortifications here, because of the use of the ablative, are emphasized as simply the tools by which the Normans are able to effect their control of the English countryside.

William of Jumièges similarly emphasizes the construction of fortifications at both Pevensey and Hastings; as he relates, once William had landed he “statim firmissimo uallo castrum condidit” (166) [immediately built a military camp with a very strong wall] and also at Hastings he “cito opere aliud firmauit” (166) [quickly fortified another with work]. In the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*, the construction of fortifications is once again emphasized. Here the author relates the following: “Littora custodis, metuens amittere naues, / Menibus et munis, castraque ponis ibi. Diruta que fuerant dudum castella reformas; / Ponis custodes ut tueantur ea” (141-144) [you guard the shores, fearing to lose your ships, and you strengthen them with fortifications, and there you place castles]. The *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* reconciles, in many ways, the terminology present in the previous two Norman sources. Not only does it emphasize the creation of *moenia* [fortifications] or military camps [*castra*] but pairs this with a word that typically is aligned with the Norman castles—namely *castella*. Although the editor of the *HA* is correct to point out that no mention of earthworks is made in the E version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*,²²³ the D version does make mention of just such formations; indeed, the Normans “worhton castel æt Hastingaport” (80) [built a castle as Hastings].²²⁴

Throughout these sources, then, we note the presence and construction of fortifications, at Pevensey as well as at Hastings. While the terminology itself might shift slightly, from the more general—implicit in the term *munitio*—to the more distinctive

²²³ Greenway’s edition of the *Historia*, 388n161.

²²⁴ As the *Dictionary of Old English* notes, the word “castel” was frequently used to render the Latin *castellum*. *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. “castel,” accessed January 10, 2011, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/floyd.lib.umn.edu/doe/>.

castrum, *castellum* or even *castel* in the OE sources, it can be said that the sources do in fact agree. Even in John of Worcester's twelfth-century *Chronicon ex chronicis* just such language recurs; indeed the Normans "sibi castellum firmauerant" (604) [had built a castle for themselves]. It is no surprise, then, to witness this term and the construction of a castle mentioned in Henry of Huntingdon's text.

In contrast to these early sources, however, Henry does not dispassionately outline the construction of fortifications without a consideration for its implications. Instead, it becomes tied to his description of Harold and the Battle of Hastings more generally. When describing Harold's response to William, Henry tells us that when Harold "totam gentem suam in una acie stritissime locasset, et quasi castellum inde construxisset, impenetrabiles erant Normannis" (392) [had placed all his people very closely in a battle line, as if he had constructed a castle from them; they were impregnable to the Normans]. The echo here, I would suggest, is deliberate and carefully crafted. Indeed the very terms of William's arrival are here repeated and challenged. Just as William "castellum construxit" so too does Harold attempt to "castellum...construxisset." The difference, however, is in the stability of such a construction. What had been truly constructed by William, thus suggesting his ownership of the land, can only be "quasi construxisset" by Harold using the very bodies of his men. Moreover, each *castellum* is constructed differently; William's is made from the very land itself, whereas Harold's is constructed from the bodies of his men. And herein lies the cause for his failure. For when the Conqueror realizes the impregnable nature of the English lines he had his men simulate flight; when the English gave chase, the principal line of the Normans was able to break the central band of those English who had been

pursuing the Normans (392). Such a feigned flight is not without precedence in other sources.²²⁵ Here, however, this flight and the subsequent failure of the English serve to emphasize the enduring character trait by which Henry had identified the Normans. When first discussing the events of 1066 he suggests that “*perfectit dominator Dominus de gente Anglorum quod diu cogitauerat. Genti namque Normannorum aspere et callide tradidit eos ad exterminandum*” (384) [the Lord, the ruler, brought to completion that which he had intended. For he delivered them up for extermination to the harsh and crafty (*callide*) Norman people]. It is a credit to such a character trait that they are sly enough to break the almost impregnable shield wall of the English and bring about their defeat.

And yet, I would also suggest that such a term, *callide*, is equally apt in describing just how the Normans use the land. The Normans, Henry here seems to suggest, take possession of the land from the outset; they reshape it and formulate their own defensive structures immediately upon arriving. Although Harold might attempt to do the same, this section and the imagery that Henry uses suggest that mastery of the very landscape has already passed from the English. Harold no longer can take hold of the land and reshape it to his will; his power resides only in his men. It is thus because their castle could only be made of men and not the practiced fortifications of the Normans that the English were doomed to failure.

Of all uses of this term, *castellum*—and by my rough estimate there are some fifty-three occurrences of this word and its various forms—in the *HA*, this metaphor is rare; in fact, there is only one other occurrence that seems to mirror just how Henry has

²²⁵ William of Poitiers’s *Gesta Guillelmi*, for instance, mentions the feigned flight (132), as does the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* (l. 424); such a flight is also found in William of Malmesbury’s *Gesta* (454).

employed this image. When describing contemporary events, Henry relates that Stephen was in fact attacked at the Battle of Lincoln and that his enemies “*circuierunt igitur unique aciem regalem et totam in circuitu expugnabant, sicut castellum solet assiliri*” (736) [surrounded the royal line completely and were assaulting it on every side, just as a castle is wont to be sieged]. Once again, those under attack are described “*sicut castellum*” [as a castle]. Here, however, the resonances with previous actions are not present. In the instance I discussed above, one of the primary notions at issue was that Harold himself *construxisset* [constructed] a castle-like edifice out of the bodies of the English. Here, however, such activity is completely absent. Stephen himself does not seek to emulate the castles; instead this image simply serves as a description of the heavily fortified position which he takes in response to the charge of his enemies. While the echo of Harold’s earlier struggle might be present, the explicit tension between the English and the Normans is missing.

We might also wonder why Stephen’s position might echo Harold’s. Perhaps it is meant to emphasize Stephen’s doomed struggle; he would be captured at the close of the battle. Or perhaps, as I think more likely, such a description is merely meant to emphasize a particular image that Henry had found to be effective in his earlier writings. Regardless, it seems that the description of Harold’s actions—specifically his activity in the construction of his battle lines in a castle-like shape, as well as the echoes between this construction and William’s construction of the castle at Hastings—suggests that this earlier occurrence is unique in its symbolic effect; it carefully ties Harold and William together but also serves to emphasize Harold’s inability to match William’s technologic superiority.

Of course, I am not suggesting that the castles described in these sources did not physically exist. What I am suggesting, however, is that in his use of figurative language and its parallel with the physical description provided only a few lines before, Henry is creating a picture of events that depends on the rhetorical articulation of the facts. In short, while his account might be truthful, the literary flourishes he employs are distinct and serve an important literary function in and of themselves. More than that, such flourishes are intimately connected with the narrative itself and ought to be understood as such. Henry could have simply stated that the English drew themselves up *una acie* [in a battle line]; but, through a subtle turn of phrase, he instead constructs a verbal echo that emphasizes the Normans' command of the English landscape and subsequent domination of the English themselves.

The Waltham Chronicle

Although the *Waltham Chronicle*, or the *De inventione sancte crucis*,²²⁶ is extant only in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century copies,²²⁷ it was likely written by an anonymous canon between 1177, but before 1189;²²⁸ as such it “gives the best and earliest account of the Waltham version of the death and burial of the founder of his house.”²²⁹ As the editors note, although William of Malmesbury was writing earlier than the author of the *Waltham Chronicle*, it was likely this “Waltham version” of events that

²²⁶ On the nature of the narrative and its relationship with *inventio* narratives of the twelfth century more generally, see Monika Otter's *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), particularly at 38.

²²⁷ The two manuscripts are in the British Library: Cotton Julius D. VI and Harley 3776.

²²⁸ As the editors note, the text was produced “by a former canon of the secular college at Waltham after the suppression of the house in 1177 and its replacement by an abbey of Augustinian Canons” xiii. Introduction to Leslie Watkiss and Marjorie Chibnall, eds. and trans., *De Inventione Sancte Crucis: The Waltham Chronicle: An Account of the Discovery of Our Holy Cross at Montacute and Its Conveyance to Waltham*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), xiii. References to the text itself will be from this edition; the translations are my own.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, xliii.

was known to William of Malmesbury; indeed, as they suggest, he “preferred a mixed story nearer to the Waltham version.”²³⁰ For the version of events retold in this chronicle the author relied on various archival evidence, but otherwise had recourse only to “oral sources of various kinds and his own recollections.”²³¹

This source material is different in tenor from that relied on by William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntingdon; accordingly, there are some important innovations in in the memory of the Battle of Hastings, Harold, and his death to be found in this chronicle. More specifically, when discussing the early, eleventh-century tradition, I argued that one of the primary characteristics of Harold, and part of the reason for his failure at Hastings, was that he gave in to *temeritas*; moreover, as part of a systemic narrative technique, this characteristic was contrasted with William the Conqueror’s prudence. Indeed, based on the words of his speech before Hastings, the narrator of the *Gesta Guillelmi* relates that the Conqueror ought to be understood as “prudens, iustus, pius ac fortis” (122) [prudent, just, faithful, and brave]. Not only does this characteristic function as one of the four pillars of William’s character, but it is given particular importance because it is couched in the voice of the narrator and not in some form of reported speech. More than that, because of the distinctive antithetical relationships between Harold and William, the Anglo-Saxon king also ought to be understood as fundamentally *imprudens*.

The *Waltham Chronicle*, however, challenges just such a characterization of Harold. Instead of being termed *imprudens*, Harold “se talem gerebat quod non solum Angli, uerum etiam Normanni et Gallici ipsius inuidebant pulcritudini et prudentie,

²³⁰ Ibid., xlv.

²³¹ Ibid., xxxiii.

militie et sagacitati” (26) [bore himself in such a way that not only the English, but even the Normans and the French envied his beauty and prudence, his courage and his wisdom]. Not only is Harold in this text particularly handsome—a marker of nobility that I also noted in William of Poitiers’s *Gesta Guillelmi*—but here his “prudence” is to be envied not only by the English but also by both the Normans and the French. In this passage, then, the narrator provides a four-fold description of Harold, reminiscent in many ways of the earlier description that William of Poitiers provides for William the Conqueror. Ultimately such a description serves to separate Harold from the eleventh-century tradition that had preempted him. For what had been a fundamental marker of his ineptitude is at least here inverted; moreover, that the Normans are made to envy such a characteristic in Harold further emphasizes the disjuncture between this narrative and the earlier continental sources.

Of course, this is not to say that such prudence is always in evidence. In fact, when leaving from the battle at Stamford bridge, and hearing of William’s landing in England, Harold failed to follow the advice of his English compatriots; “nam ab omnibus consultum est ei Tostinum, Gerth, et Bundinum, et reliquos qui secesserant expectare, set nimis preceps et de virtute sua presumens, credebat se inualidos et inpreunitos Normannos expugnare” (44-46) [for the counsel from everyone was for him to wait for Tostig, Gyrrh, Bondi, and the rest of those who had withdrawn, but he was very rash and took the virtue of his cause for granted; he intended to assault a weak and unprepared Norman army]. Here, of course, it is the fact that he is *nimis preceps* [very rash], that impels him to act against the Normans and that would eventually lead him into battle against William with only a minimal force.

Additionally, when moving against the Normans a similar formulation is present. The narrator suggest that “rex properat ad expugnandas gentes exteras, heu nimis animosus, minus quidem quam expediret circumspectus, propriis quidem magis quam suorum confidens viribus” (48) [the king hastened to drive out the foreign people, but, alas, he was too bold and not circumspect enough to be advantageous, and he was more confident in his own strength than that of his men]. Once again the term *nimis* recurs; here however, it is coupled with the term *animosus*. While Watkiss and Chibnall translate this as “too boldly and too rashly,” the doublet is not warranted by the single adjective. Instead, the term *animosus* itself carries the implication of bravery.²³² Here, however, it is modulated by the final clause that links it explicitly with pride: Harold trusted too much in his own strength [propriis...viribus]. Pride begins to emerge as Harold’s defining characteristic. Such a trait meets immediately with the reproach of the narrator who includes the following statement, which quotes a line found in Prudentius’s *Psychomachia*: “Set ‘frangit Deus omne superbum,’ nec dicturnum extat hominis edifitium, cui non est ipse Deus fundamentum” (48) [but ‘God breaks all who are proud,’ and the edifice of man does not last long without God himself as its foundation].²³³

What I would like to suggest, ultimately, is that there are two operative drives that influence the way that Harold is portrayed here. First, the *Waltham Chronicle* works to create a particular narrative distance from the continental tradition by refuting claims

²³² *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, for instances, defines “animosus” as “courageous,” “resolute,” or even “harsh.” *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources*, ed. R. E. Latham, s.v. “animosus.” Such a reading is confirmed in Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short’s *A Latin Dictionary*, 1879 ed., s.v. “animosus.”

²³³ The *Waltham Chronicle*’s citation of Prudentius is noted in Watkiss and Chibnall’s edition of the *Waltham Chronicle*, 48n1. The corresponding line in Prudentius is as follows: “Desine grande loqui; frangit Deus omne superbum” [cease your grand speech; God breaks all the proud]. Prudentius, *Psychomachia*, Loeb Classical Library, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949-1953), 298. The translation is my own.

against Harold's prudence. What had been Harold's downfall, his *imprudens*, is inverted by the *Waltham Chronicle*; he is in fact admired initially for the very opposite trait. As a result, the text also reduces the antithetical relationship between Harold and William by characterizing Harold in a similar fashion—and with similar terms—to the portrayal of the Conqueror. Harold's rashness, however, is not jettisoned completely; for in its place we still have rashness by implication. Because of the generic pressures of an *inventio* narrative, however—concerned as they are with the finding of the relics and the origins of a particular monastery—such a trait becomes explicitly linked with a distinctive Christian register.²³⁴ It is Harold's pride that becomes his downfall, and not simply his imprudence that would bring his fall *per se*. While the lexical disparity from *imprudens* to *animosus* registers this switch, so too does the pairing of such a portrayal with a condemnation of the proud.

While this lexical variation might be somewhat slight, my claim that this marks a distinctive change in the discourse, from secular to religious, is also supported by systematic portrayal of Harold in the *Waltham Chronicle*. More specifically, the narrative overwrites the claims and kin-relations that had been prevalent in the earlier versions of Harold and his death in order to supplant them with ecclesiastical authority. Once Harold has died, Osgod and Æthelric, the two of the elder brethren from the church who had been assigned to travel with Harold, approach William and ask William “per gratiam tibi diuinitus” (52) [through the grace conferred on you [William] by God] “quod liceat nobis in beneplacito uestro corpora tollere et nobiscum libere deportare domini regis fundatoris et institutoris ecclesie nostre” (52) [that it might be allowed for us, by

²³⁴ For a discussion of *Invention* narratives in the twelfth-century more generally, see in particular Otter, *Inventiones*.

your good favor, to take away the bodies of the men and to bring home freely with us the body of our lord, the king, the founder of our church]. In order to sway William from founding “ecclesiam et ordinem monasticum centum monachorum” (52) [a church and a monastic community of one hundred monks] on the site of the battle and entombing Harold’s body there, the brethren suggest that he “has .x. marcas auri ex beneficio defuncti in usus tuorum digneris suscipere, et corpus ad locum quem instituit ipse remittere” (52) [deign to take these ten marks of gold from the endowment of the now dead king for the benefit of his men, and to send back the body to that place which he founded]. William, as would be expected of a generous king, granted them their request but was “spernans et pro nichilo oblatum reputans aurum” (54) [spurning the offered gold and considering it as nothing].

This exchange for gold has tangible parallels in the other narratives of Harold’s death. We saw, for instance, in the *Gesta Guillelmi* that it was, in fact, Harold’s mother who had sought to reclaim her son’s body but was ultimately refused, even though she offered “pro corpore dilectae prolis auri par pondus” (141) [a weight of gold equal to the body of her dear son]; similarly, in the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* she offers that he could “corpus puro preponderet auro” (1581) [weigh the body against pure gold] and is yet rejected. Finally in William of Malmesbury she offered “multum” (461) [much]. While he doesn’t accept such a ransom, he does, as I showed above, send his body to her so that it could be buried at Waltham.

The semi-fictional accounts of a mourning parent humbly petitioning for the body of a warrior son, which echoes the *Illiad*, have been reformulated. They have been transformed from narratives about secular relationships in order to stress the primacy of

the church and its foundation. Harold's mother has been replaced by church officials in the *Waltham Chronicle* and the offer of gold substantially reduced to more realistic proportions. As a result, while this narrative echoes the earlier tradition, its concern is no longer over a mother's grief for her children, but over the two "brethern's" claims for the body of the founder of their church at Waltham. Moreover, while this narrative moment still serves to highlight the magnanimity of William, it here also makes another truth claim; namely it emphasizes that William clearly and distinctly privileged the church at Waltham and directly valued its continued endurance by willingly allowing Harold's body to be moved there in order to help the monks to establish its position more fully and to ensure that its "perpetuitas illibata" (52) [continuance be assured]. While this change is relatively minor, when taken in context with the other changes I have drawn attention to it highlights the complex process of rewriting the legend that ultimately results in a stronger claim for authority at the church in Waltham.

Finally, we can see this rewriting of the event within an ecclesiastical framework most clearly in the poetic lines that close the events of Hastings. Here the author of the *Waltham Chronicle* relates that

Fimini iusti lux est tibi luce Calixti
 Pronior, hinc superas, hinc superatus eras.
 Ergo tibi requiem deposcat uterque perhennem,
 Sicque precetur eum quod colit omne Deum. (50)

[Firmin the Just's day was more inclined to favor you than was Calixtus's day—on one you conquered, on the other you were conquered. And so may each request earnestly for your eternal rest and so all who cherish God pray to him.]

The shift in time here is marked. Instead of a calendrical date, the events of Hastings are catalogued specifically in religious chronology; it is on Firmin the Just's day and Calixtus's day that the events take place, not on September 25, nor October 14. In much

the same way that the retelling of Harold's death operated, these changes serve to move the events of Hastings firmly into religious discourse and out of a secular milieu. In these instances, we note the deliberate rewriting of the tradition as per the constraints of the genre—a foundation narrative for the church at Waltham. The changes, unprecedented largely in the historical record to this point, nonetheless systematically serve to emphasize the authority of Waltham, its possession of Harold's body, and its preeminence inasmuch as it was recognized by William. This portrait of Harold has become a malleable construction that can be appropriated and altered according to the dictates of an individual narrative.

Similarly, these changes themselves precipitated other changes to the narrative. In order to suggest the preeminence of Waltham, I argued that the narrative operates to paint William in a positive light by emphasizing his magnanimity. In order to maintain consistency with such portraiture, other changes to the narrative must be carried out; more specifically, the destruction of Harold's body is downplayed and overwritten in terms rather similar to that which we noticed in William of Malmesbury. In the *GRA* I suggested that William sought to elide the symbolic violence implicit in the mutilation of Harold's corpse by reducing it to a single act that was then censured by the Conqueror. In the *Waltham Chronicle*, even this single act is elided. Certainly the narrative recognizes the wounds inflicted on Harold; those who sought out the king “currunt ad cadauera, et uertentes ea huc et illuc, domini regis corpus agnoscere non ualentes” (54) [ran to the bodies and, turning them this way and that, were unable to recognize the body of the king]. Accordingly, their only recourse is to seek out Edith who “secretiora in eo signa nouerat ceteris amplius, ad ulteriora intima secretorum admissa, quatinus ipsius

noticia certificarentur secretis inditiis qui exterioribus non poterant” (54) [knew the secret signs on him more than others, having been admitted to the most secret of places]. In short, the body of the king had been so mutilated that it could not longer be recognized.

While this trope of mutilation has been present before, here the author of the *Waltham Chronicle* deliberately elides any explicit mention of the marks that might have prevented recognition. In fact, he is at pains to explain away just why the body of Harold would have been unrecognizable. It is either “quia corpus homini exangue non consuevit mortuum formam prioris status frequenter exprimere” (54) [because the body of a man having died is bloodless, and frequently does not imitate the form of the prior state] or “quia statim letali uulnere confosso, quicquid in eo regalis erat insignii duci deportatum est, signum scilicet prostrationis regie” (55) [because immediately when the lethal wound was struck, whatever royal insignia were on him was brought to the duke as sign of the overthrowing of the king]. Each of these explanations follows immediately after the claims as to why the body could not be recognized. The first appears just after, in fact within the same sentence, the brother *non valentes agnoscere*; similarly when only the secret marks are available for recognition, the author avoids mention of the bodily condition of the king in order to emphasize the lack of his raiment and to attribute it to a cultural practice which has its authority *antique* and which is still fundamental *moderne*.

By eliding mention of Harold’s body and its condition and by deliberately suggesting reasons that such a condition would have been anything but unusual, the author attempts to overwrite the violence of the act and to preserve the honor of the conquerors themselves. The first explanation provides a natural reason that a corpse would be difficult to identify. Moreover, the second suggests clearly that not only was

this a common practice to strip the corpses (thus rendering them unidentifiable), but it was a custom that was founded in antiquity and thus the Normans are acting with the authority of the ancient Romans. And yet, in the continued proliferation of such explanations, the obverse tradition cannot help but become apparent. In short, the author is here deliberately writing against a tradition that witnessed the bloodied dismemberment of Harold's corpse. On the one hand, he seeks to visibly protect the founder of the church itself by denying the humiliation that symbolic mutilation implied in the early Norman texts. On the other hand, though, he must also emphasize the nobility of William. For it is on the claim that William gave Harold's body to the monks that Waltham's claim to Harold's body rests. Thus flaws in character, like excessive brutality, would undercut their credibility and likely admit the possibility of repercussions from the Norman administration. Accordingly, the mutilation of Harold's corpse must be explained away; and yet, the very explanations themselves betray the truth of the act, especially in light of the various traditions that have preceded the Waltham version of events.

Finally, of course, the author of the narrative must work to establish the fact that it was in fact Harold's body that rests at Waltham; if Harold's body was so mutilated that it could not be recognized by any but Edith, contrary accounts were sure to crop up—and in fact did—about just where Harold's body rested. Accordingly, the narrator relies on his own personal authority and the testimony *antiquorum*. Indeed, the narrator “memini” (56) [remembers] when the body was to be translated, and “uulgo celebre est et attestationes antiquorum audiuimus” (56) [it is well known by the masses and we have heard the testimony of the ancients] that “plagas ipsis ossibus impressas oculis corporeis

et uidisse et manibus contrectasse” (56) [men saw with their corporeal eyes, and touched with their hands the wounds which were impressed on the very bones themselves...and touched with their hands, the marks of the wounds visible on the very bones]. Here, in fact, those things that had been so ardently suppressed by the narrator, the wounds on Harold, become the means through which the authenticity of the body can in fact be asserted; for it is the *plagas* themselves that offer the confirmation or the *attestationes antiquorum*. What had hidden Harold’s identity is here made to trumpet its authenticity. It is this claim that the narrator refutes: that “quicquid fabulentur homines quod in rupe manserit Dorobernie et nuper defunctus sepultus sit Cestrie” [whatever stories men may invent wherein Harold dwelt in a cave at Canterbury and that later, he, having died, was buried at Chester]; for, in fact, bookending this very statement are the twin claims that the *corpus* “Waltham deductum sepelierunt” [having been drawn forth, they buried at Waltham] and at the close of the sentence that “pro certo quiescit Walthamie” (54-56) [certainly he rests at Waltham].

The changes made to the portrayal of Harold and his death, then, are the result of complex pressures inherent in the genre of the *inventio*, but also because of the exigencies of the claims made by the author. Far from stable and far from what might be called explicitly truthful, the author works to accomplish a number of alterations. First he distances this work from the early tradition by reinscribing Harold’s character. He then asserts the primacy of the church in relation to the death and burial of Harold; in so doing he relies on the common topos of a monetary exchange for his body that is denied by William but elides mention of Harold’s mother in order to portray Osgod and Æthelric’s role as representatives of the church in the events. Moreover, he moves the register of the

battle from the secular time into ecclesiastical by emphasizing the feast days during which the events of the battle took place. Perhaps most interestingly, he deliberately overwrites or “explains away” the wounds that Harold had taken initially in order to emphasize the endurance of Harold’s corpse (and thus avoid desecration of the church’s founder), but also to maintain the nobility of William the Conqueror in order for their claims to Harold’s body to be met with the most credibility. Finally those wounds become the very means through which Harold’s body can in fact be recognized. His body is no longer recognizable by his likeness or by his position or station as king, but can only be recognized by the wounds he did in fact receive. In many ways, he has become a martyr whose authority and legitimacy depend on the violence perpetrated against his very body.

The Thirteenth Century and the Vita Haroldi

The *Vita Haroldi* appears only in a single manuscript, the BL MS. Harley 3776. While the manuscript itself is dated to the early fourteenth century, the composition date for the text is assumed to be within the early thirteenth century. Walter de Gray Birch suggested a date of ca. “150 years after the battle of Hastings.”²³⁵ As such, this text represents a narrative tradition at the furthest remove from the early accounts I have discussed previously. Considering this temporal distance, it is in many ways no surprise that the fundamentals of the legend have been greatly modified. Twelfth-century narratives did often manifest different narrative traditions from those in the eleventh-century

²³⁵ Walter de Gray Birch, *Vita Haroldi: The Romance of the Life of Harold, King of England* (London: Elliot Stock, 1885), ix. Michael Swanton, on the other hand, asserts that the author began composing ca. 1205. Introduction to Michael Swanton, *Three Lives of the Last Englishmen, Garland Library of Medieval Literature* 10 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1984), xxvi. Additionally, while Michael Swanton’s is the more recent edition, I follow Stein’s *Reality* in adopting the more accurate Birch text. Subsequent citations will be noted parenthetically by page number and taken from this edition; the translations are my own. For more on the reason for this choice of edition, see Stein, *Reality*, 230n32.

narratives because of various rhetorical, social, political, and generic constraints which ultimately resulted in new narratives about Harold Godwinson in the twelfth century; the *Vita Haroldi* then further modifies these new narratives, ultimately arriving at a text whose relationship with the Anglo-Saxon past is even more distant.

Indeed, this text is radically different from anything that had come before. In the early tradition, Harold was believed to have been killed in the Battle of Hastings—although the manner of his death might be narrated differently. In the hybrid hagiographic/romance *Vita Haroldi*,²³⁶ however, such is not the case. For while he was badly wounded, he was not killed. When Edith moves amongst the battlefield to inspect the dead and find the body of Harold, she is unable to recognize him and instead returns with a proxy body. Unbeknownst to her or the Normans, a Saracen woman finds Harold's actual body among the fallen at Hastings and cares for him until he returns to health. Then he returns to the continent in the hopes of drumming up support for a mission to overthrow the Normans themselves; such a mission, however, fails as no support is to be found. Realizing the futility of such a secular mission, Harold turns to God and begins a substantial pilgrimage. After a long period of this, he returns again to England, adopting the name Christian and a veil to cover his wounds; he comes to rest for a period at the Welsh borders, enduring their assaults in penance for his earlier war on the Welsh. Near the end of his life he returns to Chester, where he lives in anonymity until his death. The narrative itself wraps up with a kind of dual ending. The narrator proper closes his portion of the text with the last moments of Harold's life wherein his identity is revealed. The hermit who replaced Harold in Chester then ends the text as a whole with a kind of summary on Harold's life.

²³⁶ On the generic tenor of this text, see Stein, *Reality*, esp. 80-87.

While such a summary accounts for the major variations between this narrative and the previous tradition, further discussion of their implications in light of this text's understanding of the Anglo-Saxon past is necessary. As I have argued, each of the accounts of Harold's death and burial heretofore has been primarily concerned with placing Harold within a space that can be clearly articulated and bounded; in the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*, Harold was placed on the shore "portus / illi" (582-583) [of that very port] at Hastings to watch over the seas under a plaque that clearly demonstrated the power of the Conqueror; in the *Gesta Guillelmi* a very similar fate is meted out to Harold. Such treatment then saw revision in twelfth-century narratives that sought to move Harold from the edges of England. In William of Malmesbury's *GRA*, for instance, Harold's body came to rest in the church at Waltham and suggested a more central position for the body of the fallen English king; the *Waltham Chronicle* similarly relocated Harold within the eponymous church.

Instead of simply using the margins of England as an ideological tool to suppress Harold and the English or placing his body within the ecclesiastical structure of a new England, the *Vita Haroldi* instead reformulates the fringes of England with a kind of spiritual force and locates Harold in this new space. In this text, for instance, Harold spends much time after his survival at the Battle of Hastings wandering across England. Ultimately he comes to rest at Dover, in a cave that "Non vero multum a loco ubi regnum terrenum pene moriendo pridem ipse amiserat" (70) [was not far distant from where he had previously lost his earthly kingdom by nearly dying].²³⁷ By occupying this space,

²³⁷ In addition to this early narrative of Harold's survival, similar tales also persist in Scandinavian literature. In fact, three separate texts recount just such a fate: *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, and *Játvarðar saga*. For an initial look, with particular emphasis on *Hemings þátrr Áslákssonar* and survival narratives more generally, see Margaret Ashdown, "An Icelandic Account of the

Harold is able to seize “regnoque celorum vim” (70) [power from the Kingdom of Heaven] through the memory of the events of the Battle of Hastings. Moreover, after spending time in Dover, he returns to the “confinio” (71) [border] of Wales where the Welsh “indesinenter impugnant” (71) “attacked him ceaselessly” as penance for his military actions against them earlier in life. In short, the margins, whether on the border of Hastings or of Wales, become key to the narrative. They are sites in which spiritual redemption is possible, and where Harold is reminded of his past failure such that he might ascend to the kingdom of God. Not only has Harold thus lived through the battle at Hastings, but the margins England—so important to the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* and the *Gesta Guillelmi*—are completely transformed by the narrative. They become not a site of suppression by which the Anglo-Saxon king can be denigrated, but central to a Christian fulfillment.

Moreover, one of the predominant impulses of narratives about the Conquest has been to overwrite the violence of the Conquest. In the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* this was accomplished with the rejoining of Harold’s fragmented body; in William of Malmesbury the gruesome mutilation is tempered such that only the symbolic cutting of Harold’s thigh remains. Finally, in the *Waltham Chronicle* the wounds on Harold’s body are transformed into a kind of marker of truth. The *Vita Haroldi*, however, posits a new narrative technique that reformulates the import of the wounds themselves; it transforms

Survival of Harold Godwinson,” in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History and Culture presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1959): 122-136. More recently, Gillian Fellows-Jensen explores this material and suggests that these three sources “have sufficient similarities for it to seem likely that they shared a common source”; this source most likely was similar to that found in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, which “is the more reliable representative of the original version of the myth in the Icelandic sources.” Gillian Fellows-Jensen, “Harold II’s Survival in the Scandinavian Sources,” in *King Harold II and the Bayeux Tapestry*, ed. Gale R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005): 60-61. Finally, on Harold and his ties with Chester specifically, see A. Thacker, “The Cult of King Harold at Chester,” in *The Middle Ages in the North-West*, ed. Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (Oxford: Leopard’s Head Press, 1995), 155-176.

them into the tools through which Harold is able to live. For instance, the author relates the story of Edith, who sets out to obtain Harold's body because she "plenius noverat" (84) [knew him very well] because "utpote quam thalami ipsius secretis liberius interfuisse constaret" (84) [it was known that she had been present in the secret places of his chamber without limit]. While the *Vita Haroldi* is not alone in relating this narrative—it appears in the *Waltham Chronicle* as well—instead of finding his body, she "pro estimacione publica truncatum cadaver...rapuit et secum attulit alienum" (84) [takes up and bears with her another man's mangled corpse to satisfy the public estimation]. She could not distinguish the shape of the body, "desecti cruentati jam denigrati jam fetentis" (84) [having been carved up, covered with blood, blackened and become rotten]. What William of Malmesbury's account did not erase—the symbolic mark on Harold's thigh and the memory of ritual violence—is here completely elided. In much the same way that mutilation was transformed into a means of authentication in the *Waltham Chronicle*, here the *Vita Haroldi* transforms it into the very means through which Harold is able to live.

Even more than that, the author of the *Vita Haroldi* rejects the ways in which Harold's body has been represented in the past. First and foremost, he refutes the authority of William of Malmesbury's account, and does so directly. According to the narrator, the following tenets of William of Malmesbury's account are simply untrue: "eum ictu sagitte capite vulneratu oppetisse" (81) [that he perished from an arrow wound to the head], "militem qui regi mortuo femur inciderat ducis censura victoris ab exercitu pulsum" (81) [that the soldier who cut into the thigh of the then dead king was driven out of the army by a censure from the victorious duke], and "a matre sunus regium oblata

pecunia a triumphatore Willelmo postulatum sed receptum absque pecunia apud Waltham tumulatum” (81) [that money was offered by the mother of her son the king to the triumphant William but was taken back without money and buried at Waltham]. The narrative elements in the eleventh- and twelfth-century tradition that seemed to retain the memory of the excessive violence associated with the Conquest, and even the ways in which Harold’s body was used to buttress the ecclesiastical system at Waltham, are here dismissed. The author of the *Vita Haroldi* is simply not interested in altering the tradition surrounding Harold from within that very tradition, but in completely rewriting it. In other words, the tradition from which this author is working is no longer dependent on the eleventh-century triumphalist accounts; William of Malmesbury’s text has taken up the authoritative position and thus any alterations are at a remove from the original accounts.

In this, the author of the *Vita Haroldi* articulates a new tradition of Harold, one in which he can triumph over his enemies by reaching the kingdom of God. While other sources could at best be apologetic for his actions, the author of the *Vita Haroldi* has transformed him into a spiritual figure by denying the markers of subjugation to the Norman invaders. He does not, however, provide any sense of closure for the narrative, and herein lies one of the most interesting things about this text. Instead of relating the location of Harold’s body at the close of the narrative, we are simply presented with the following: Harold “hec emisit spiritum: et jam omnium hostium suorum victor migravit ad dominum” (99) [gave up the ghost, and now, conqueror over all his enemies, he has

departed to the Lord]. No mention of a final resting site, no ultimate appropriation of Harold's body, is undertaken.²³⁸

The author, instead, invites the audience to further appropriate and reimagine the material he has presented. As he states, “*liber claudendus est ut que de Haroldo innotescere necesse est: illorum qui hec plenius agnoverunt stilus evolvat*” (92) [my book must be closed so that whatever is necessary to be known concerning Harold might be disclosed by the pen of those who know more about these things]. While there is no doubt that the author intends to implicate the hermit that took over Harold's dwelling after his death—who in fact closes the narrative with an account of Harold's last moments—the plural pronoun (*illorum*) broadens the narrative beyond such a singular association. Instead, the audience, it is suggested, ought to take up the narrative, to take what they know and create their own story.

In this act, the author has separated Harold from any attempts to use his body as a symbol for the fall of the English by providing a narrative alternative to be used as a sort of “raw material” by anyone who might choose to do so. In this new tradition the margins themselves have become a powerful force. What had been only hinted at in the early tradition, namely the power that the forests or the margins of England contained, is in this narrative given a kind of spiritual force that is made available to Harold and the English; no longer can they simply be used as sites where the English and their king can be derided. Moreover, the violence of the Conquest has been transformed into a productive force. What had been described with relish in the early tradition or tempered in the twelfth century becomes the very means through which the Anglo-Saxon king is

²³⁸ Although Harold is last seen in a “*mansio*” (77) [abode] in Chester, no mention of his burial is mentioned. As Thacker notes, “no attempt is made to locate the final resting-place of the king's remains, far less to suggest that they became the focus of miracles.” Thacker, “Cult,” 158.

able to survive. In these acts, the author of the *Vita Haroldi* has reformulated Harold Godwinson; he has become not a figure to be denigrated and subjugated, but a figure to be admired and imitated.

Conclusion

Immediately after the events of 1066 a narrative tradition about the Anglo-Saxon Harold Godwinson's life and death emerged in accounts like the *Gesta Guillelmi*, the *Gesta Normannorum Ducum*, and the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio*. As I have argued, the depiction of his character trait—defined in direct opposition to William the Conqueror—the desecration of his body, and his burial in these sources is part of an Anglo-Norman ideology that suggests his marginal position in the ascendant Norman polity. Of course, such symbolic constructs can be extended to the English themselves who, I have shown, often meet with a fate similar to their king. Given the general tenor of these documents, it is tempting to read moments like those I have described as clearly invested in a kind of doctrine of triumph; to suggest that these early texts are avowedly triumphalist is correct.

However, in these moments the ideological enterprise enacted in these texts ought not to be understood as inherently monolithic. While the text might seem to perform a unified suppression of the English and trumpet the triumphs of the Normans, a careful reading suggests that every text is riddled with conflicting ideological messages. While we might see the burial of Harold's body in the *Carmen de Hastingsae Proelio* as invested in marginalizing his role and in fact creating him as a monument to the suppression of the English under the mockery of the Normans, a careful reading of the way that similar spaces are used in the text suggests that such a moment is meant to overwrite a

fundamental anxiety about the persistence of the Anglo-Saxon past—an anxiety that can never truly be expunged. Similarly, in William of Poitiers the consistent destruction of the English at the Battle of Hastings suggests a particular need to stamp out all the threat that the English pose in an elaborate, and in many ways fictional, universe that can be made to serve a fundamental role in the historical reality of post-Conquest England. These texts can only perform the dominance of the English, but, given the limits of representation, cannot enact it. This triumphalist tradition cannot overwrite the violent reality of the Conquest and the actions meted out to the Anglo-Saxons themselves.

This eleventh-century ideological tradition initiates certain key narrative tropes and techniques that would be inherited and transformed by twelfth-century narratives. In these narratives, William and Harold enter into an antithetical relationship that is, at least in part, founded on the Harold's imprudence and William's prudence. Harold's burial is distinctly moved to the fringes both of the literal England, and metaphorically of the Norman present; this burial, more importantly, is symptomatic of the inherent concern over the very land of England and the Normans' control thereof. Finally, Harold's body is subject to the ritual dismemberment of the Normans, whether that be poetically defined as we see in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* or in more subtle descriptions where he can no longer be recognized.

In William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century *GRA*, such narrative touchstones are manifested once again, suggesting William's debt to this early tradition. That Harold's corpse was mutilated is still of import to William's text; that his character is to be defined in contrast to William persists. And yet, certain key innovations made by William suggest a shifting relationship with narratives like those found in the early tradition and

suggest the importance of the Anglo-Saxon past. While Harold's corpse is still mutilated, such an act is met with censure; similarly, while the same character traits are made to inhere in Harold, they are taken to an extreme through personification. Finally, William of Malmesbury rewrites Harold's burial in order to situate him firmly within post-Conquest England, by placing him at Waltham.

This similar narrative tendency, wherein authors in the twelfth century were indebted to their eleventh-century counterparts yet still sought to distance themselves from such narratives, is clear in Henry of Huntingdon's *HA*. Instead of deliberately writing against the early narrative tradition explicitly, Henry's changes are more subtle. In the Norman sources from the eleventh century I noted that metaphoric descriptions often centered on the landscape and sought to emphasize the triumph of the invaders; Henry has recourse to similar figurative language. Indeed, the one moment where a particularly vivid simile occurs in Henry's *HA* is precisely the moment of metaphoricity we note in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*. In Henry's hands, however, this use of language is not explicitly used to trumpet the success of the Normans, but to suggest that Harold's failure rests in his inability to control the landscape. While not necessarily rewriting the tradition that had come before him, Henry's narrative does offer a kind of alternative to the Norman historians, one that reimagines the ways in which the landscape of England can be defined.

In the *Waltham Chronicle*, it is clear that the narrative of Harold's death is subject to the exigencies of the *inventio* genre; the events of 1066 become mapped onto ecclesiastical time and formulated along just such a consistent axis. And yet, the narrative still works to distance itself from the continental tradition. It formulates

Harold's character in terms that recall the early tradition; and yet, instead of being found to be imprudent, he is marked as prideful. Additionally, what had been the mark of Norman supremacy—the wounds he receives at Hastings—become the marks through which the legitimacy of Waltham and its claim to possess the body of the king can be recognized.

None of these narratives creates a wholesale disjuncture from the eleventh-century tradition. In all instances they work from within that tradition and modify events to fit their narratives. I do not mean to suggest that any of these narratives is explicitly antithetical to that early tradition, nor do I intend to create a totalizing account that sees these twelfth-century narratives as inherently subversive with respect to the present, Norman state of England; such is not the case. William of Malmesbury's account, for instance, still clearly marks out Harold's failure and takes William of Poitiers's claims one step further by making Harold a personification of *temeritas*. Even Henry of Huntingdon's account ought not to be seen as overtly reactionary; to find intention in his use of metaphor would be difficult to prove considering the general tenor of his account. And yet, what can be said is that in this particular moment—the twelfth century—the Anglo-Saxon past was being reformulated and changed to fit the narrative, generic, and perhaps even political demands of a given narrative. To be sensitive to such slight variations allows us to be aware of the intricate nature of historiographic narratives, and forces us to be sensitive to the narrative traditions that underlie them. More than that, a diachronic analysis, as I have undertaken here, of a prominent and contested figure from the Anglo-Saxon past, allows us to see just how that past was treated in the twelfth and into the thirteenth century. There is a marked reduction in the triumphalist tone that

predominated in the eleventh century. The elaborate, poetic violence is also reduced in favor of a more measured stance. Finally, the actions of the Anglo-Saxon king meet not with sole and complete censure, but are oftentimes modulated. Narratives in the twelfth century, then, reinvision Harold Godwinson and his treatment at the hands of the Normans; such revisions suggest a distinctive and pervasive reassessment of a literary tradition and the slow accretion of a new narrative. Although such a transformation wouldn't be complete until the thirteenth century and the *Vita Haroldi*, narratives in the twelfth century, replete with their discrepancy from the eleventh century, laid the ground work for later retellings of Harold Godwinson that might see him as a figure of rebellion and of a lost Anglo-Saxon heritage.

Conclusion

After briefly mentioning William the Conqueror's deeds, Guy of Amiens describes the impetus for his project in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio* as follows: "deceat memorare suum per secula factum" (25) (it is fitting to relate his [the Conqueror's] achievement throughout the ages). Although the *factum*, what Guy of Amiens's terms the Conqueror's achievement, is key to our understanding of the Battle of Hastings, Hayden White's work—among many others—has done much to draw our attention to the ways in which history has, to quote Guy of Amiens, been *memoravit* (recounted).²³⁹ For instance, when discussing how the historical trauma of the crusaders' cannibalism during the First Crusade is recounted in Geoffrey of Monmouth's twelfth-century *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geraldine Heng suggests that this act "has not been buried so much as it has been metastasized and re-formed in order that it might be made harmless by being remembered differently."²⁴⁰ While none of the texts I have dealt with heretofore are romances in the strictest sense, I would suggest that twelfth-century historiography depends on an impulse to master the past that is very similar to that which Heng has described. The political and social realities of twelfth-century England, depending as

²³⁹ For White, history and fiction are intimately connected. As he states, "historical narratives are not only models of past events and processes, but also metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between such events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings." Hayden White, "The Historical Text as Literary Artifact," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 88.

²⁴⁰ Geraldine Heng, *Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 45. It is this reshaping of historical matters that, for Heng, becomes the hallmark of romance.

they do initially on the ascendancy of the Normans and then on the integration of Norman and native English ethnic identities, demanded a careful and complex understanding of the Anglo-Saxon past.

In recounting the *adventus Saxonum*, for instance, twelfth-century historians struggle to make sense of the destruction of an entire native population. In so doing, William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Geoffrey of Monmouth follow their forbearers—Gildas, Bede, and Nennius—to insulate their present from the violent reality of conquest by expressing it as a natural and justified occurrence that depends on the collective and/or singular responsibility of the Britons and their leader. While perhaps not problematic in the same terms as the *adventus*, the idea of a unified and singular England espoused in early accounts of the *Battle of Brunanburh*—one which predates the Conquest—runs counter to the Anglo-Norman ideology of twelfth-century England. As such, in his translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh*, Henry of Huntingdon modulates the representation of this event so that it becomes not simply a revelatory moment in which an English polity emerges, but an evolutionary step in the creation of a Norman polity that would see its fruition in his twelfth-century moment. Finally, in their accounts of the Battle of Hastings, twelfth-century historians like William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and the author of the *Waltham Chronicle* struggle to temper the triumphalist tone of their eleventh-century counterparts by modulating the violent impulses of that narrative tradition, by incorporating the material remnants of the conquest into their Anglo-Norman England, and by charting control of the very land itself. Of course, in their attempts to transform the events of that day into something that can be productive for their contemporary reality, none of these interpretative productions are seamless nor

total. Although Norman historians, for instance, might seek to revel in the conquest of the English during the Battle of Hastings, their own narratives are fractured in a way that, at the very least, suggests a kind of anxiety—an unease—about their ideological enterprise itself.

In order to recount these ideologically charged moments—moments important in the construction of a collective identity—twelfth-century historians oftentimes have recourse to similar narrative tendencies. Both Henry of Huntingdon and William of Malmesbury, for instance, rely on a cyclical structural patterning that conditions their understanding of the past. While Henry's postulates a never-ending reduplication of conquest and collective national collapse, each still configures the vicissitudes of history as inherently predetermined. Perhaps even more importantly, historians of the twelfth-century manifest their concerns about power dynamics with a symbolic understanding of the land and bodily mutilation. William of Malmesbury in his *GRA*, for instance, challenges eleventh-century narrative attempts to marginalize the English by incorporating Harold's very body into the English landscape through his burial at Waltham and by tempering the treatment meted out to his body post-mortem; in Henry of Huntingdon's *HA* the land emerges as a transcendent category that resists the vicissitudes of regime change and that can be made to register the passage of dominion. Such tendencies reach their apex in narratives like the *Waltham Chronicle* and the *Vita Haroldi*, wherein Harold's wounds in particular are simultaneously disavowed and used to authorize his body. The realities of conquest and resistance, then, have been transformed, at least in part, from the material to the symbolic; the landscape of England

and the bodies of its kings and people have become the site wherein the legible signs of conquest, invasion, and resistance have been written.

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Appendix:
Texts and Translations

1.) The Old English *Battle of Brunanburh*

Æpelstan cyning,	eorla dryhten,
beorna beahgifa,	and his broþor eac,
Eadmund æþeling,	ealdorlangne tir
geslogon æt sæcce	sweorda ecgum
ymbe Brunanburh;	Bordweal clufan,
heowan heaþolinde	hamora lafan,
afaran Eadweardes;	swa him geæþele wæs
from cneomægum,	þæt hi æt campe oft
wiþ laþra gehwæne	land ealgodon,
hord and hamas.	Hettend crungun,
Sceotta leoda	and scipflotan
fæge feollan.	Feld dunnade
secga swate,	siðþan sunne up
on morgentid,	mære tungol,
glad ofer grundas,	Godes condel beorht,
eces Drihtnes,	oð sio æþele gesceaft
sah to setle.	þær læg secg mænig
garum ageted,	guma norþerna
ofer scild scoten,	swilce Scittisc eac,
werig, wiges sæd.	Wesseaxe forð
ondlongne dæg	eorodcistum
on last legdun	laþum þeodum,
heowan herefleman	hindan þearle
mecum mylenscarpan.	Myrce ne wyrndon
heardes hondplegan	hæleþa nanum
þæra þe mid Anlafe	ofer earagebland
on lides bosme	land gesohtun,
fæge to gefeohte.	Fife lægun
on þam campstede	cyningas giunge,
sweordeum aswefede,	swilce seofene eac
eorlas Anlafes,	unrim heriges,
flotan and Sceotta.	þær geflemed wearð
Norðmanna bregu,	nede gebeded,
to lides stefne	litle weorode;
cread cnear on flot,	cyning ut gewat
on fealene flod,	feorh generede.
Swilce þær eac se froda	mid fleame com
on his cyþþe norð,	Costontinus,
har hildering;	hreman ne þorfte

mæca gemanan: he wæs his mæga sceard,
 freonda gefylled on folcstede,
 beslagen æt sæcce, and his sunu forlet
 on wælstowe wundun forgrunden,
 giungne æt guðe. Gelpan ne þorfte
 beorn blandenfeax bilgeslehtes,
 eald inwidda, ne Anlaf þy ma;
 mid heora herelafum hlehhhan ne þorfhtun
 þæt heo beaduweorca beteran wurdun
 on campstede, cumbolgehnastes,
 garmittinge, gumena gemotes,
 wæpengewrixles, þæs hi on wælfelda
 wiþ Eadweardes afaran plegodan.
 Gewitan him þa Norþmen nægledcnearrum,
 dreorig daraða laf, on Dingesmere,
 ofer deop wæter Difelin secan,
 eft Ira land, æwiscmode.
 Swilce þa gebroþer begen ætsamne,
 cyning and æþeling, cyþþe sohton,
 Wesseaxena land, wiges hremge.
 Letan him behindan hræ bryttian
 saluwigpadan, þone sweartan hræfn,
 hyrnednebban, and þane hasupadan,
 earn æftan hwit, æses brucan
 grædigne guðhafoc and þæt græge deor,
 wulf on wealde. Ne wearð wæl mare
 on þis eiglande æfre gieta
 folces gefylled beforan þissum
 sweordes ecgum, þæs þe us secgað bec,
 ealde uðwitan, siþþan eastan hider
 Engle and Seaxe up becoman,
 ofer brad brimu Brytene sohtan,
 wlance wigsmiþas, Wealas ofercoman,
 eorlas arhwate, eard begeatan.

[In this year King Æþelstan, lord of warriors,
 ring-giver of men, and also his brother,
 atheling Edmund, obtained eternal glory
 by fighting in battle with the edges of swords
 around Brunanburh. They split the shield-wall,
 cut down the lime-shields with the remnants of hammers.
 Edward's offspring, as was natural for them
 because of their ancestors, that they should often defend
 their land, at battle against every enemy,
 treasure and homes. The enemies perished,
 the people of the Scots and the sailors

fell doomed. The field was darkened
 with the blood of warriors, after the sun rose
 in the morning time; the glorious heavenly body
 glided over the land, the bright candle of God,
 of the eternal Lord, until that noble creature
 sank in setting. There lay many a warrior
 destroyed by spears, men of the north
 shot above the shield; likewise the Scottish too,
 weary, sated with war. The West-Saxons went forward
 the whole length of the day with the troops,
 pressed on in the track of the hostile people,
 cut down fugitive soldiers severely from behind
 with file-sharpened swords. The Mercians did not refuse
 hard battle to any of the heroes
 who with Anlaf over the turmoil of the as
 in the ship's bosom sought land,
 doomed in battle. Five lay
 on the battlefield, young kings,
 put to sleep by swords; similarly another seven
 jarls of Anlaf, a countless number of the army,
 sailors and Scots. There, put to flight,
 was the prince of the Norsemen, compelled by force
 into the prow of the ship with a small troop;
 the ship was driven onto water, the king sailed out
 onto the fallow sea: he saved his life.
 Likewise there too the old Costontinus
 with flight came into his northern native land;
 this grey-haired warrior had no cause to exult
 in the meeting of swords; he was deprived of kinsmen,
 of friends, killed on the battlefield,
 deprived by the strife; and he left his son
 on the slaughter-field ground down by wounds,
 young in battle. The grey-haired warrior
 had no reason to boast there of the sword-clash,
 the old wicked man, no more than did Anlaf;
 with the remnant of an army they had no cause to rejoice
 that they would be the better in deeds of war
 on the battlefield in the clash of banners,
 in the meeting of spears, in the confrontation of men,
 in the hostile encounter, when they played on the slaughter-field
 with Edward's descendants.

Then the Norsemen departed in nailed ships,
 mournful survivors of spears, into Dingesmere
 over deep water to seek Dublin,
 and Ireland again, ashamed.
 Likewise, both the brothers together,

the king and the prince, sought their native land,
 the country of the West Saxons, exultant in battle.
 They left behind them to enjoy the corpses
 the dark-coated one, the black raven,
 the horny-beaked one, and the dun-coated one,
 the eagle, white from behind, to enjoy the carrion,
 the greedy bird of war, and the grey animal,
 the wolf in the wood. Never was there a greater slaughter
 of people killed on this island
 by the sword's edge, even up until now
 or before this, of which books
 tell us, since from the east
 the Angles and Saxons arrived up
 over the broad seas to seek Britain,
 proud warmongers, they overcame the Welsh,
 noble warriors eager for glory, they conquered the country.]²⁴¹

2.) Henry of Huntingdon's Latin translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh*

Rex Adelstan, decus ducum,
 nobilibus torquium dator, et frater ejus Edmundus,
 longa stirpis serie splendentes,
 percusserunt in bello acie gladii apud Brunebirih.
 Scutorum muros fiderunt, nobiles ceciderunt,
 domestice reliquie defuncti Edwardi.
 Sic namque eis ingenitum fuerat a genibus cognationum,
 ut bellis frequentibus ab infestis nationibus
 defenderent patrie thesauros et domos, pecunias et xenia.
 Gens uero Hibernensium, et puppium habitatores
 fatales corruerunt, colles resonuerunt.
 Sudauerunt armati ex quo sol mane
 prodiit, micans hilariter, letificans profunda,
 Dei luminare, fax Creatoris,
 usquequo idem nobilis ductor occasu se occuluit.
 Ibi uiri jacuerunt multi a Dacia oriundi,
 telis perforati, sub scutis lanceati,
 simul et Scotti bello fatigati.
 Gens uero Westsexe tota simul die,
 prius electi, post indefessi,
 inuise gentis globos strauerunt;
 uiri elegantes hastas cedebant,
 uiri Mercenses acuta jacula
 mittebant duro manus ludo.

²⁴¹ The Old English text is taken from Campbell's edition of *Brunanburh*, 93-95; the translation is from Elaine Treharne, ed., *Old and Middle English c. 890-c. 1400: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 31-33.

Sanitas ibi nulla his, qui cum Anlao
 trans maris campos in ligni gremio
 terram pecierunt, Marte morituri.
 Quinque occubuerunt in loco belli
 reges, iuuenes, gladiis percussi,
 ducesque septem regis Anlai.
 absque numero ceciderunt Scotti. Deperiitque
 Normannorum tumor. Nec enim paucos
 ad litem belli duxerant secum.
 Cum paucis uero in maris fluctus
 rex nauis prouectus intrinsecus gemit.
 Simul et Froda, ductor Normannus,
 cumque suis notis dux Constantinus,
 de Martis congressu jactare nequierunt,
 ubi cognationis sue fragmen apparuit,
 ubi amici sui corruerant
 in statione populi bello prostrati,
 et filium suum in loco prelii
 uulneribus demolitum carum reliquit.
 Nec Gude Dacus declamare potuit,
 licet uerbis blandus, et mente uetustus.
 Nec Anlaf ipse cum reliquiis suis
 mentiri potuit, quod ad hoc negotium
 sui prestiterint in campo belli
 ictuum immanitate telorum transforatione
 in concilio proborum. Matres uero et norus
 planxerunt suos belli alea
 cum Edwardi filiis luisse,
 cum Normanni nauibus clauatis
 et Anlaf tabefactus ultra profundum flumen
 terras suas mesto animo
 repetissent. Postea frater uterque
 rediit Westsexe belli reliquias post se deserentes,
 carnes uirorum in escam paratas.
 Ergo coruus niger ore cornutus
 et buffo liuens, aquila cum miluo,
 canis lupusque mixtus colore,
 his sunt deliciis diu recreati.
 Non fuit bellum hac in tellure
 majus patratum, nec cedes tanta
 precessit istam, postquam huc uenerunt
 trans mare latum Saxones et Angli,
 Brittones pulsuri, clari Martis fabri
 Walenses uicerunt, reges fugauerunt, regna susceperunt.

[King Æthelstan, flower of commanders, ring-giver to nobles, and Edmund his brother, the splendid products of a long unbroken lineage, struck with the sword's edge in battle at Brunanburh. Those who were left of the family of the departed Edward split the shield-walls, slaughtered the nobles. For thus it had been implanted into them by their kinsfolk that in frequent battles they should defend from hostile nations the treasures, homes, wealth, and precious things of their native land. The Irish race and the fateful ship-dwellers descended; the hills resounded. The warriors struggled from the time the sun rose in the morning, gleaming joyfully, rejoicing the depths, the lamp of God, the torch of the Creator, until that noble guide sank at its setting. There lay men born in Denmark, pierced through by spears, lanced under their shields, as well as Irish, worn out by battle. But all that day the people of Wessex, first chosen, then unwearied, laid low the masses of the enemy race. Fine warriors destroyed the spears, Mercian warriors threw sharp darts in the harsh sport of warfare. There was no safety for those doomed to die in battle, who with Olaf in the timber bosom had sought this land across the fields of the sea. Five young kings fell on the battlefield, struck down by swords, and seven of King Olaf's earls. Irishmen died without number. The pride of the Norsemen perished. They had brought a great many with them to the contest of war, but the king groaned inwardly as he sailed back in his ship in the waves of the sea, with only a few men. Along with him Froda, leader of the Norsemen, and Constantine the commander, with his celebrated followers, could not boast of this military encounter, for their kin were reduced to a remnant, their friends had fallen, laid low in the combat on the battlefield. [Constantine] left hi dear son on the field, destroyed by wounds. Nor was Gude the Dane able to boast, although smooth in words and seasoned in mind. Nor could Olaf himself, with his remnants, tell falsehoods about their pre-eminence in the engagement, about the fierceness of their blows, about the piercing of their spears in the encounter of brave men. Mothers and young women grieved that their menfolk had played the chancy game of war with Edward's sons, when the Norsemen in nailed ships and the broken Olaf returned with heavy hearts across the deep waters to their own lands. Then the two brothers left for Wessex, leaving behind him the relics of war, the flesh of men made ready as food. So the black crow with the crooked beak, and the livid toad, the eagle and the kite, the dog and tawny wolf, were long refreshed by the tit-bits. There has been no greater battle fought in this land, nor was there such great slaughter before, not since the Saxons and Angles came hither across the broad sea to defeat the Britons, the famous smiths of Mars, who conquered the Welsh, drove out the kings, and took over the kingdoms.]²⁴²

²⁴² The text and translation is taken from Greenway's edition of the *HA*, 310-315; the lineation is taken from Rigg, "Henry of Huntingdon's," 69-70.