[*Page numbers of the printed text appear at the right in bold.*
Note: yogh has been replaced with y in the Middle English quotations.]

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Rebirth of a Nation? Historical Mythmaking in Layamon's *Brut*

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   In spite of Layamon's claim to have based his *Brut* in part on books by Bede, Albinus and Augustine, it is well known that his narrative is drawn--as its title suggests--almost entirely from his fourth putative source, the *Roman de Brut* of his clerical predecessor Wace.[1] Thus he follows Wace in chronicling the dynastic history of the kings of Britain from the founder Brutus to Cadwallader, the last British king to rule the island. Like Wace, Layamon devotes about a quarter of his poem to the career of Arthur, the leader who nearly succeeded in preventing the Anglo-Saxon conquest. Layamon, however, was not content merely to translate his Norman-French original, itself rather freely adapted from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae.*[2]

   That Wace's *Roman* is 14,866 octosyllabic verses long, while *Brut* encompasses over 16,000 lines, tells only part of the story, for Layamon's alliterative verses are often equivalent to a whole couplet in Wace. Moreover, Layamon's style, which mimics the rhythms of Old English alliterative prose and echoes the language of Anglo-Saxon heroic verse, is itself an indication that the Middle English poet is using Wace's narrative for his own purpose.[3] What that purpose might be has long been a subject of critical discussion. It is my (not entirely original) contention that Layamon's poem turns the legendary dynastic history of Britain into the national epic of England.[4]

   The Middle English *Brut* survives in two manuscript copies, British Library Cotton Caligula A.ix (C), and BL Cotton Otho C.xiii (O). The C version, discussed in this essay, has been dated as early as 1200-25 and as late as 1275-1300. The shorter and much revised O version, which mod-

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ernizes the archaic language of C, has been dated from the late thirteenth to the early fourteenth century.[5] If the dating of the two manuscripts is controversial, the dating of the poem's author and its composition is truly vexed.[6] I will assume, however, that the composition of *Brut* dates from early in the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and that C was copied from a manuscript close to the author's holograph, if not the holograph itself.[7]

   Looking at some of the places where Layamon severely modifies Wace's narrative will enable us to see more clearly the English poet's thematic concerns. A neat illustration of Layamon's procedure appears in a comparison of how the two poets deal with the death of Arthur after the final battle with Modred. Wace tells us:

> Arthur, si la geste ne mente,
> Fud al corse nafrez mertelment;
> En Avalon se fist porter
> Pur ses plaies mediciner.
> Encore i est, Bretun l'attendent,
> Si cum il dient e entendent;
> De la vendra, encore puet vivre.
> Maistre Wace, ki fist cest livre,
> Ne volt plus dire de sa fin.
> Qu'en dist le prophetes Merlin;
> Merlin dist d'Arthur, si ot dreyt,
> Que sa mort dutuse sereit.
> Li prophetes dist verité;
> Tut tens en ad l'um puis duté,
> En dutera, ço crei, tut dis;
> Se il est morz u il est vis.

>Porter se fist en Avalun,
>Pur veir, puis l'Incarnatiun
>Cinc cenz e quarante douz anz.
>Damage fud qu'il not enfanz.

>(Arthur, if the chronicle is true, received a mortal wound to his body. He had himself carried to Avalon, for the treatment of his wounds. He is still there, awaited by the Britons, as they say and believe, and will return and may live again. Master Wace, who made this book, will say no more of his end than the prophet Merlin did. Merlin said of Arthur, rightly, that his death would be doubtful. The prophet spoke truly: ever since, people have always doubted it, and always will, I think, doubt whether he is dead or alive. It is true that he had himself borne away to Avalon, five hundred and forty-two years after the Incarnation. It was a great loss that he had no children.)8

Wace, who adopts at least the pose of the dutiful chronicler, traces a carefully hedged and circuitous path through the minefield of legends about the once and future king; even so, the last line of the passage is his dry comment, perhaps, on the likelihood of Arthur's return: damn shame he had no children!

   Layamon's treatment of this passage is quite interesting. Arthur first makes a death speech in which he entrusts the realm to Constantin son of Cador, and then he announces that he will go to Avalon to be healed by Argante, after which he will return, presumably not very long afterward, and "dwell with the Britons in great contentment" (14282).9 Then appear the two women, who carry him into their boat and sail away--one hopes (but Layamon does not specify) to Avalon. The poet-narrator's comment follows:

>Þa wes hit wurðen þat Merlin seide whilen:
>þat weore unimete care of Arðures forðfare.
>Bruttes ileueð yete þat he bon on liue,
>And wunien in Aualun mid faireste alre aluen.
>And lokieð euere Bruttes yete whan Arður cumen liðe.
>Nas nauer þe mon iboren of nauer non burde icoren
>Þe cunne of þan soðe of Arthure sugen mare.
>Bute while wes an witiye Mærlin ihate;
>He bodede mid wurde --his quiðes weren soðe--
>Þat an Arður sculde yete cum Angeln to fulste.

>(Then was come to pass what Merlin prophesied of yore: that there would be grief beyond measure for Arthur's passing. The Britons yet believe that he is alive, and dwells in Avalon with the fairest of all fairy women; and the Britons still await the time when Arthur will come again. No man ever born of noble lady can tell more of the truth about Arthur. But there was once a seer called Merlin who prophesied--his sayings were true--that an Arthur should come again to aid the people of England.) (14288-97)

   Even moreso than Wace, he makes the Britons' vain hope for Arthur's return a sad assuagement of their grief, and he locates the origin of those hopes in Arthur's own valiant "I shall return." Furthermore, he divides Merlin's prophecy into two parts. The first--not one that would seem to require much of a 'seer'--simply predicts that the "Bruttes" will mourn for their great leader. The second changes the "prophecy" into one that depends less upon magic than upon a concept of historical probability: not Arthur, but "an Arthur" will come "cum" not "cumen liðe," and not to help the "Bruttes" but rather *Angeln to fulste*, "to aid the English." This last phrase might very well confuse the reader who expects to

be reading a chronicle of the British. In such a chronicle, the English are supposed to be the same people as the treacherous Saxons that Arthur has pushed back and hemmed in, restoring military glory and a British dynasty to Britain.

   The change to "Angeln" from the earlier reference to the "Bruttes" is not a clumsy slip from the quill of a rustic

English clergyman unaccustomed to the ethnic nuances of a more sophisticated Norman-French romancer, nor is it due to a careless copyist.[10] Indeed his most recent translator has observed that it is Wace who seems to have difficulty with the concept of a Britain geographically more extensive than the territory of England.[11] By making the first part of Merlin's prophecy a simple prediction of British grief and hope at the time of Arthur's passing, and the second part a reinterpretation in the present of the narrator, Layamon in effect transfers the hopes of the ancient Britons to the contemporary English, who--at least as the narrator represents them--yearn for an Arthur to restore the kingship now in "alien" hands.[12]

   Indeed, Layamon does seem more attentive than Wace to ethnographic niceties. In the first era of Saxon settlement in Britain, after Hengest and Horsa have helped Vortigern repel a Pictish invasion and Hengest has been allowed to settle in Lindsay, the Saxon chieftain's daughter Ronwen arrives among a large contingent of his kinfolk and followers. Vortigern is invited to visit his new baron's estate, and Ronwen (his future bride), appears among the symposiasts:

> Pleine cupe de vin porta.
> Devant le rei s'agenuilla,
> Mult humblement li enclina
> E a sa lei le salua:
> "Laverd King, Wassail!" tant li dist; (6949-53)

> (She carried a full cup of wine, knelt down before the king, bowed very humbly to him, and according to her custom greeted him. "Lord King, Wassail!" she said.

   Vortigern, who cannot understand the Saxon language, asks someone to explain the young woman's behavior and speech. Keredic, a good interpreter and the first of the Briton "ki soul le language as Saissuns,", &qout;to know the Saxon tongue" (6960), is able to explain that Ronwen has saluted Vortigern as King. He continues:

> Custume est, sire, en lur païs,
> Quant ami beivent entre amis,

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> Que cil dit Wesseil qui deit beivre
> E Drinceheil kil deit receivre;
> Dunc beit cil tut u la meitied.
> E pur joie e pur amistied
> Al hanap receivre e baillier
> Est custume d'entrebaisier."
> Li reis, si cum cil li aprist,
> Dist "Drincheheil!" e si sorrist.
> Ronwen but e puis bailla,
> E en baillant, le rei baisa.
> Par cele gent premierement
> Prist l'un us e cumencement
> De dire en cel pais "Wesseil"
> E de respundre "Drincheheil,"
> E de beivre plein u demi
> E d'entrebaiser lui e li. (6963-80)

> ("The custom, sire, in her country, when friends drink together, is that the one who is to drink says 'Wassail,' and the one who is to receive it next says 'Drinchail.' Then he drinks it all, or half of it. And out of joy and friendship at offering and accepting the cup, it is the custom to exchange kisses." The king, as soon as he learnt this, said "Drinc hail!" and smiled at her. Ronwen drank and then gave it back to him, and as she gave, kissed the king. It was through these people that the custom first began to say "Wassail" in this land and to reply "Drinc hail," and to drink the whole, or the half, and to exchange kisses.)

   Layamon elaborates upon this scene with delightful tact and detail. In Wace, Ronwen's appearance is sudden and apparently unmotivated by anything more than a desire to join the party. In Layamon, perhaps because the English poet was more conscious of dynastic politics, Hengest orchestrates Rouwenne's approach to his future son-in-law. The princess, "fairest alre þinge,", who bears a golden bowl full of wine, is brought before Vortigern. Kneeling before him, Rouwenne adresses the king:

> And þus ærest sæide in Ænglene londe:
> "Lauerd king wæs hæil. For þine kime ich æm uæin." (7140-41)

> ([She] spoke these words for the first time in England: "*Lauerd king, wæs hæil. For þine kime ich æm uæin*."

Vortigern, however, cannot understand English, and he must turn to his latimer Ceredic for an explanation:

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> "Lust me nu, lauerd king, and ich the wille cuðen
>
> what seið Rouwenne, faireste wimmonnen.
> Hit beoð tiðende inne Sæxelonde,
> whærswa æi duyuðe gladieð of drenche,
> þat freond sæiðe to freonde mid fæire loten hende:
> 'Leofue freond, wæs haeil.' The oðer sæið: 'drinc hail.'
> Þe ilke þat halt þene nap he hine drinkeð up;
> oðer ful me þider fareð and bitecheð his iueren;
> þenne þat uul beoð icomen, þenne cusseð heo þroien.
> This beoð sele lawen inne Saxelonde,
> and inne alemaine heo beoð ihalden aðele." (7148-57)

> "Listen to me, my lord the king, and I will explain to you what Rouwenne, the fairest of women, is saying. It is the custom in Saxony (Sæxelonde), whenever any group of men are enjoying themselves drinking, that one friend addresses another in fair and gracious manner, 'Wes hail, dear friend.' The other responds with 'Drinc hail.' The one who holds the cup drains it; another full cup is brought and he gives it to his companion; when that cup is brought they embrace each other three times. This is polite conduct in Saxony, and in Germany (Alemaine) is thought a noble custom.

Upon hearing this explanation, Vortigern, who "cuðe . . . nan Ænglisc," exhorts Rouwenne in "Bruttisc" to drink the wine; she readily complies.

> þat maide dronc up þat win and lette don oðer þerin,
> and bitæhten þan kinge and þrien hine custe.
> And þurh þa ilke leoden þa layen comen to þissen londe:
> Wæs hail and drinc hail --moni mon þerof is fain! (7161-64)

> (The maiden drank the wine and had more poured out and, giving it to the king, kissed him three times. And through these foreigners there came to this land the usages *wæs hæil* and *drinc hæil,* which gladden the heart of many a man.)

   Layamon's Rouwenne is more clearly cast in the role of the *friðu-webbe*, the "peace-weaver" noblewoman of Germanic epic.[13] Like Hrothgar's queen Wealhtheow, Rouwenne approaches Vortiger in a ceremonial move, the ritual significance of which is heightened by the corps of retainers who conduct her before

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him, as well as by the narrator's claim that we are observing the moment of origin of the custom of *wassail/drinchail*. Unlike Wealhtheow, of course, she is the marriageable daughter, not the wife, of the host. Moreover, when Rouwenne repeats the ritual after Vortigern has lost his throne to his anti-Saxon son Vortimer, it is in order treacherously to

poison her stepson (7462-83).

   More importantly, Layamon is also careful to distinguish here between the English nation and their evil shadows, the Saxons, at the same time admitting the continuity between the Saxon invaders of British history and the English *leode* to which the poet belongs in the present. *Þeos londe*, the insular land in which the poet composes and in which his audience dwells, is *Ænglene londe*, "the land of the Angles/English." The treacherous and heathen Saxons, appropriately allied with the evil and unlucky Vortigern, bring their customs (not all of them evil) from the continental *Sæxelonde*. At the same time, while the Saxons also bring war and pestilence upon Britain, this friendly cultural innovation was adopted from *ilke leoden*, "that tribe, people, nation."[14] And the *Sæxisce menn*, after all, spoke a language called *Ænglisc* as well as *Sæxisc*. To see Layamon's conception of British history replayed as English history, one must accept the difference between the pagan Saxon *leode* of Vortigern's and Arthur's era and the Christian English *leode* of Layamon's own time.[15] One must also accept--for the purpose of reading this fiction, to be sure--the idea of a providential design to the events of history.

   Layamon's conception of such a design in the history of Britain is by no means his own creation. In fact, the whole communal narrative of the *adventus saxonum* had from its beginnings been fraught with this interpretation of history, derived ultimately from Gildas, the mysterious, sainted monk who wrote the *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* of 540 CE. Gildas, who unintentionally provided the first few members in the framework of the legendary history of Britain, wished only to show that his people, the Britons who had held the island since time immemorial, had been justly punished by God for their treachery, their religious backsliding, and their internal squabbles.[16] This punishment had taken the form of the coming of the Saxons, who thus found themselves placed into British history, along with pestilence, as scourges of a justly angered God.[17]

   As Nicholas Howe has shown, the Anglo-Saxons developed Gildas's narrative into their own migration myth, changing the story to make themselves the beneficiaries of divine Providence as opposed to its mere instruments. In texts as disparate as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and the Old English verse Exodus, Howe argues, the *adventus Saxonum* was moved from its place at the end of British history to one at the beginning of English history. Thus the Anglo-Saxons thus became a chosen people, led out of the Egypt of continental Germanic paganism into the Promised Land of insular Christianity.[18]

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   In the hands of Norman writers like Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, the history of Britain from the Trojan Brutus to the last British ruler, Cadwallader, is in principle a simple dynastic history. The British dynasties that ruled the island until the Roman conquest and the later "Coming of the Saxons" were the predecessors of the Normans, the most recent conquerors of the island, and as such they were subject to the rise and fall of political fortunes. I don't know whether Geoffrey or Wace thought that either a Fukayaman or a Joachite "end of history" had arrived with the Norman conquest of England. As orthodox Christian clerics they were presumably not supposed to believe any such thing, but in any naive conception of history such a belief is probably most comfortable--and comforting. Layamon's view of history, however, afforded no such perspective.

   The perspective of Layamon is made clear in his excursus on the re-founding of London by King Lud, the last king of the Britons to rule free of the threat of foreign invasion.[19] King Lud, Layamon tells us, loved London best of all his towns, so he fortified it with a great wall and ordered the most prosperous men of the realm to devote half their wealth to constructing dwellings in the city; he also *heyede þæ burg and makede heo swiðe hende*, "improved the city and made it quite handsome,," after making the *unstronge* ("lowborn" or perhaps "infirm") men move outside the walls (*Brut*, 3528-38). He set aside the old name of the city, Trinovant or "New Troy," the one it had held since the Trojan settlement, and named it after himself as Kaer Lud *þat seoððen sculden moni mon / þennen þe king weoren dæd demen of his weorken*, "so that afterwards, when the king was dead, many men would think well of his deeds," 3541-42). This British Ozymandias suffers, however, the same irony of history as his ancient Egyptian counterpart:

   Seoððen her com vncuð folc, faren in þessere þeode
   And nemneden þa burh Lundin an heore leodewisen.
   Seoððen comen Sæxisce men and Lundene heo cleopeden;

þe nome ileste longe inne þisse londe.
Seoðfen comen Normans mid heore niðcraften
And nemneden heo Lundres –þes leodes heo amærden!
Swa is al this lond iuaren for uncuðe leoden
þeo þis londe hæbbeð biwunnen and eft beoð idriuene hennene;
and eft hit biyeten oðeræ the vncuðe weoren
And falden þene ælden nomen æfter heore wille
Of gode þe buryen and wenden heore nomen,
Swa þat nis her burh nan in þissere Bruttene
þa habbe hire nome æld þe me arst hire onstalde. (3545-55)

(Later foreigners [the Romans] came here, came among this people, and called the city Lundin in their speech. Later the Saxon men came, and they called it Lundene--that name lasted a long time in this country. Later the Normans came, with their evil ways, and named it Lundres; they ruined this people! Thus has this land fared ill because of the foreigners who have conquered this land and were later driven hence; and afterwards it has fallen into the hands of other foreigners, and they have at their will dropped the old names of the major cities, and have changed their names so that there is no city in this land of Britain that still has the old name that people first gave it.) (my translation)

   In Michael Swanton's reading of this passage, "the implication is clear, that all conquerors are themselves eventually absorbed--or absorbed--and it is implicitly understood that the Norman yoke is unlikely to prove permanent."[20] Swanton's is an appealing reading, but it does not, I think, work well with other parts of the text. Take for example the very final lines of the poem, which tell us that

Þæs Bruttes on ælc ende foren to Walisce lond,
and heore layen leofeden and heore leodene þæuwen;
and yet wunieð þære swa he doð, auermære.
And Ænglisce kinges walden þas londes,
And Bruttes hit loseden þis lond and þas leoden,
þat neuere seoððen mære kinges neoren here.
Þa yet ne com þæs ilke dæi, beo heonneuorð alse hit mæi;
iwurðe þæt iwurðe, iwurðe Godes wille. (16088-95)

(The Britons departed from every corner [of Britain] for Wales, and lived by their laws and the folkways of their nation; and will live there still, as they do, evermore. And English kings ruled these lands, and the Britons lost these lands and these nations, so that never again since then have they been kings here. That day has not come yet, whatever might happen in the future; what will be will be, God's will be done.) (my translation)

   This ending thus complicates the issue, for it does not even address the Norman conquest, which is a factor in Layamon's history of London's namings; from it one might conclude that the English kings who succeeded Cadwallader have not been displaced by "vncuþe folc" of Normandy. Not only that, it seems to have forgotten the prophecy of Arthur's return, which I discussed above. Yet it contains within itself a swerve, for we are told to expect the

Britons to remain in Wales forevermore, while the penultimate line leaves open the possibility that British kings might yet regain kingship in Britain, "þis lond and þas leoden" (16090).

   Absorption of the conquerors, or their overthrow, are indeed possibilities that may be read from the history of Britain, as well as from the history that has intervened between Cadwaller's era and La3amon's. To that extent, Swanton is correct. But other grim or happy possibilities may also be read from the *Brut*: depopulation by war, famine, or pestilence; punishment by divine wrath; a messianic era of peace and justice after Arthur or his avatar

returns; subjection to a foreign empire; and others. London may again be renamed, or not. History, for Layamon, has a providential design we may discern after the event. It does not, however, come with a set of simple rules to predict the interplay of human, natural, and divine factors, or the outcome of such. That history will continue to unfold until the final day is the sole certain prediction La3amon would let us make about the future.

Problems of interpretation seem to multiply the more one reads the *Brut*. Are they due to the carelessness of a naive compiler of popular legends, likely to write down the latest thought that came into his mind, no matter if it sat ill with the idea he had expressed a hundred or three thousand lines previously.[21] I think not. Such contradictions, I believe, arise from Layamon's attempt to express a theme that was, strictly speaking, not expressible on the political or the poetic language of the late twelfth century. That theme is the virtual unity of the English *leode* with the British *lond*, or if you will, of the British *leode* with the English *lond*. We know that later British nationalism was founded on this identification, so that it made sense to speak of Arthur as the once and future king of the English.[22] But when Layamon wrote, such a conception was still three or four centuries in the future.[23] Thus it can only appear confusedly and inchoately in a writer whose context of discourse does not match his vision.[24]

Thus too the sometimes maddening "ambivalence" that Layamon, an archaizing "Anglo-Saxonist" in poetry, a priest among the English people, a critic of the Norman's evil ways, projects.[25] How can it be that this writer portrays the Saxon conquerors of Britain in such a negative light? Part of the answer lies, of course in the providential history I mentioned above, which has been adduced by Donoghue to explain Layamon's ambivalence towards the Saxons.[26] The rest of the answer lies in the play of ethnic identies within the *Brut*. Layamon decouples the Angle from the Saxon, making the heathen nation an "other" of the Christian English nation, or as I suggested above, his evil shadow.[27] Thus it is possible to merge, at least partially, the Englishman with the Briton, to consider the possibility that history's ironic and unexpected turns will yet redeem the lost national identities of the island's legendary and even mythic past.

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Layamon's ambivalence, if such it be, results in part from his desire to find a use in his own time and place for his antiquarian musings on the tales that Geoffrey and Wace passed on to him.[28] To quote Claude Calame, writing of Pindar's treatment of the foundation myth of Cyrene, "historical or legendary, the past that is narratively constructed is always a function of the present."[29] In these terms, we can say that Layamon reconstructed a lost English language and revised an alien myth to create a past that would be usable in the present, enabling his contemporaries to re-imagine the future. That his project had, apart from the marvelous *Brut*, no tangible results in his own time is not due to any shortcomings of the poet, for most often "poetry makes nothing happen." That Layamon, the English Homer, even today finds fewer readers than he deserves is surely an accident of political history, and also an accident, perhaps, of literary history.[30]

Notes

1. There is no evidence that Layamon used Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* as a source, although he claims to have--in an English version--at *Brut* 16-28. There he also claims to have used another book, co-authored by St. Albin and Augustine of Canterbury. I see no need to regard "Albin" as an error for either Alcuin or Alban. The imaginary book seems to be based on a misunderstanding of Bede's preface, in which he acknowledges the research assistance of Abbot Albinus of Canterbury in assembling materials about the Church in that diocese and its suffragan sees. A reference to the accomplishments in that region of the "discipulis beati papae Gregorii . . . [preserved in] vel monimentis literarum vel seniorum traditione" might have been misread to suggest a joint literary enterprise, although Augustine, who lived three or four generations before Albinus, is not named in the preface. (He was, of course, the chief of the *discipuli Gregorii* who evangelized Kent.) See *Baedae Opera Historica,* I (London 1962), 4-7. At *Roman de Brut*, vv. 7-8 Wace announces that he has translated truthfully from his (unnamed) source(s)--rather unimaginative when one considers Geoffrey's claim to have translated the *Historia* from a book in the language of the ancient Britons.

2. Layamon, as we shall see below, compresses, expands, and deletes passages from the *Roman*. In addition, he often turns what is narrative or indirect speech in Wace into lengthy "epic" speeches of the sort familiar to readers of the *Iliad* and *Beowulf*.

3. An extensive discussion of Layamon's versification may be found in S.K. Brehe, "'Rhythmical Alliteration': Ælfric's Prose and Layamon's Metre," in *The Text and Tradition of Layamon's* Brut, ed. Françoise Le Saux (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 65-87. See also Thomas Cable, "Layamon's *Brut* and the Misreading of Old English Meter," *Language and Civilization: A Concerted Profusion of Essays and Studies in Honor of Otto Hirsch*, ed. Claudia Blank 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1992), 1:173-82.

4. *Beowulf* is certainly the earliest English epic, but it is hardly the English *national* epic. Most of the action takes place among the Danes, whose contribution to English history begins only in the ninth century. The poem's hero, a Geat, is from a tribe quite removed from any connection with specifically English history or legend.

5. Lucy Perry sums matters up quite nicely in "Origins and Originality: Reading Lawman's *Brut* and the Rejection of British Library MS. Cotton Otho C.xiii," *Arthuriana* 10 (2000), 69-71.

6. See the "Introduction" to *Lawman's Brut*, *or Hystoria Brutonum, e*d. and trans. W.R.J. Barron and C.S. Weinberg (New York, 1995), p. ix.

7. See Françoise Le Saux, *Layamon's* Brut: *The Poem and Its Sources* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 1-13, esp. p. 10.

8. All references to Wace, inserted parenthetically in my text, are to the edition and translation by Judith Weiss, *Roman de Brut: A History of the British* (Exeter, 1999).

9. All line references to Layamon, inserted parenthetically in my text, are to the edition and translation of *Lawman's Brut* (New York 1995) by Barron and Weinberg. Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Middle English are taken from the same edition.

10. This was the explanation of the discrepancy offered by Frederic Madden, Layamon's first editor. See Daniel Donoghue, "Layamon's Ambivalence," *Speculum* 65 (1990), 563.

11. Judith Weiss, "Introduction" to *Roman de Brut*, p. xx.

12. I discuss below Layamon's observation that Britain has repeatedly been invaded and conquered by *uncuðe folc* (Brut 3543): "strangers," "foreigners," or "aliens."

13. For a discussion of the traditional roles of women in Germanic epic, see Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse, 1986), pp. 1-6.

14. Barron and Weinberg, rather unadvisedly, I think, translate *þa ilki leoden* as "foreigners." The Middle English noun *leoden* (Old English *leod*) denotes a *gens*--a people or an ethnic unit, or the territory they

inhabit. It clearly has the former sense in this instance. Many *gentes* dwell in foreign lands, of course, but for Layamon Britain itself is populated

by a number of different *gentes*, one of them the Saxon migrants from foreign parts. The Middle English adjective *ilke* (Old English *ilca*) means simply "(the) same." See notes 12 above and 29 below.

15. I adapt this formulation from remarks made by Eric G. Stanley at the Layamon 2000 International Conference, King's College, London, 7 August 2000.

16. "Interea volente deo purgare familiam suam et tanta malorum labe infectam auditu tantum tribulationies emendare. . . . (God, meanwhile, wished to purge his family, and to cleanse it from such an infection of evil by the mere news of trouble). *De excidio Britonum*, 22, in Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom (London, 1978), pp. 25, 96. In the "Historical Introduction" to this Volume, John Morris rightly observes that *De excidio* "was not written as history" (p. 1).

17. Nicholas Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989), pp. 49-71.

18. Howe, *Migration and Mythmaking*, pp. 8-49.

19. Jumping ahead in his chronological narrative, Geoffrey tells this story, of the change of New Troy's name by King Lud, in connection with the founding of Troia Nova by Brutus. See *Historia Regum Britanniae*, ed. Acton Griscom (London, 1929), 1, xvii-xviii, pp. 251-52. In this he is followed by Wace, who adds the different versions of the name "London" (*Roman*, vv. 121-46), and a general comment about how foreign invaders have destroyed old places in Britain or renamed them. Layamon moves the excursus to its proper place in the chronicle (*Brut*, ll. 3528-55).

20. Michael Swanton, *English Literature before Chaucer* (New York, 1987), p. 178.

21. J.S.P. Tatlock thought that Layamon was "highly intelligent, [and] had high poetic gifts," and that "his sure-handed transformation of [the Roman de Brut] into a different medium shows a man of real powers." See *The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae and its Early Vernacular Versions* (Berkeley, 1950), p. 489. However, "Lawman shows almost no classical culture" (p. 493), and he was "a man of small reading" (p. 497) with only a "general knowledge" of continental European geography (pp. 499-500). Tatlock does not say directly that Layamon was a rude, unlettered genius "warbling his native wood-notes wild," but the romantic stereotype is implied in the contrast between "high powers" and "small reading." Critics of Tatlock's time generally endorsed this view, as in Dorothy Everett's judicious if dated essay "Layamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Verse," in *Essays in Middle English Literature*, ed. Patricia Kean (Oxford, 1959), pp. 23-45, esp. 33-34.

22. The *locus classicus* is at Book XXI, chapter 7, of Malory's *Morte Darthur*: "Many men say that there yx wryteen upon the tumbe thys HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS." See *The Works of Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugene Vinaver, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1948), 3, 1242. By the late nineteenth century Irish nationalists spoke scornfully of Irish loyalists as "West Britons." In James Joyce's "The Dead," for example, the nationalist Molly Ivors taunts the anglophone and anglophile Gabrial Conroy as being a "West Briton." See *Dubliners; Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Robert Scholes (New York, 1967), p. 139-41.

23. Speaking of the British State after 1800, Tom Nairn has commented that "absorption, not federation, had always been the principle of its development as early as the period of Norman feudalism." See *The Break-Up of Britain*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1981), p. 12. Later, Nairn cites with approval Ernest Gellner's observation that the multinational state was normal for much of human history, and points out that the unitary national state has become the norm only since about 1800 (pp. 317-18). Thus the centrifugal forces that split most of Ireland off from the United Kingdom, and have more recently led to limited self-rule for Scotland and Wales, are the product of modern ethnic nationalisms, very different social formations from the national consciousness that can be observed in English/British culture after the thirteenth century.

24. In his influential *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London, 1991), Benedict Anderson argues persuasively that nationalism as we know it today did not come into existence until the late eighteenth century at the earliest, when the modern "press" had developed; moreover, the rise of nationalism was dependent upon the ideological formation of European colonial imperialism. However, it is also true that an earlier, different, and also historically conditioned national consciousness preceded the modern formations. A Pan-British or even pan-Insular sense of national identity, with the English at the apex of several "sub-nations" was certainly being promoted by English elites by the time Shakespeare staged *Henry V* in the late sixteenth century. See Hugh A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History* (Montreal 1982), pp. 31-50. In *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick and London, 1990), Allen J. Frantzen has shown that the creation of "Anglo-Saxon" (studies) in the sixteenth century was heavily invested with the desire to rediscover the "original" English Church and nation. On specifically medieval ideas of nationality, and the difficulties of interpretation in the subject, the following should be consulted: Robert W. Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York, 1966)

and Stephen J. Harris, "Bede, Social Practice, and the Problem with Foreigners," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 13 (1998), 97-107, with its copious and useful annotation (link). Harris, incidentally, goes further with his author than I do in this essay: he concludes that Bede distinguishes the Anglians--and their church--from the "other" Anglo-Saxons. Without making too much of it, I will note that Layamon's old parish of Arely Kings, in the diocese of Worcester, lies in Anglian Mercia, not all that far from the border with the West Saxon kingdom that had taken the "high kingship" of Britain from Mercia in the ninth century.

25. See Donoghue, "Layamon's Ambivalence," p. 556, and his references.

26. Donoghue, "Layamon's Ambivalence," pp. 558-61.

27. Ian Kirby some years ago proposed that "Layamon systematically distinguishes the Saxons from the English, in "Angles and Saxons in Lawman's Brut," *Studia Neophilologica* 26 (1964), 51-62. Neil Wright, however, has more recently produced convincing evidence that Layamon does not adhere to this distinction until "toward the end of the poem," and that he bases his distinction upon religion: the Saxons are pagan and the English are Christian. See "Angles and Saxons in Layamon's *Brut*: A Reassessment," *Text and Tradition*, ed. Le Saux, pp. 169-70. In the same Volume, James Noble argues that the distinction is valid, and that it depends upon the Saxons' status as invaders as opposed to the lawful

immigrants, the "Ænglis" who accepted "stewardship" of Britain after the great waves of plague during Cadwallader's reign; see "Layamon's 'Ambivalence' Reconsidered," *Text and Tradition*, pp. 181-82. My argument is not affected by Wright's analysis, since I, like Noble, regard the opposition of Saxons and Angles as something that develops over the course of the narrative, not as one that informs it from the very beginning. Wright's unpacking of the opposition early in the poem, I think, increases its importance to the final state toward which the narrative moves. In saying this I do not endorse the view that *Brut* is an expression of Layamon's patriotism, found, for example, in C.S. Lewis's "Introduction" to *Selections From Layamon's Brut*, ed. G.L. Brook (Oxford, 1963), pp. xii-xiii.

28. The definitive discussion of this topic is Eric G. Stanley, "Layamon's Antiquarian Sentiments," *Medium Ævum* 38 (1969), 23-37.

29. Claude Calame, "Narrating the Foundation of a City: The Symbolic Birth of Cyrene," *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. Lowell Edmunds (Baltimore, 1990), p. 281.

30. I wish to thank the following individuals for their comments and suggestions, which have greatly improved this essay: Allen J. Frantzen, James Noble, Herbert Pilch, SuzAnne Runge, Eric Stanley, Kenneth Tiller, Jane Zatta, and an anonymous reader for *Essays in Medieval Studies*. The flaws that remain, of course, are my sole responsibility.