















## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## DEDICATION

To Krysta

“I will love with urgency and not with haste”



noble church”), may have had contact with the Welsh,<sup>2</sup> and may have had Scandinavian family connections (Frankis). Because his main source is a French-language text, we know that he read French; because he was a priest, he may have known Latin; and because of his style, he may have been familiar with classical Latin epics, Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, and Anglo-Saxon sermons. The relative status of the French-speaking aristocracy and the Saxon-descended English, the likely affective connotations of the English language, developments in technology, and various domestic and international political dynamics all figure into criticism of the text.

Generically, the *Brut* is a Matter of Britain chronicle. While Lazamon thinks of himself as a historian, most modern historians agree that his subject had no historical referent. Rather, the *Brut* and its immediate sources present a founding myth of the British people. In this, the poet follows a historiographical tradition that he inherited from Robert Wace’s *Roman de Brut* (ca. 1155) (Weiss, Introduction, xii), itself a French version of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *De Gestis Britonum*, commonly known as *Historia Regum Britanniae* (ca. 1130) (Reeve vii). His stated intention is to separate the truth from the fiction in his sources and to present an account of who the Britons were. The most well-known section of the *Brut*, sometimes published on its own, is assuredly the section telling the story of King Arthur. This section, about a quarter of the whole, presents the most nuanced characters in the poem and may have influenced later Arthurian tradition, such as the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (ca. 1400), which in turn influenced Thomas Malory’s *Morte Darthur* (ca. 1470). Important though the Arthurian is, Lazamon’s project on the whole aims to present a story of the founding, rise, and fall of the Britons.

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<sup>2</sup> For conjectures about Welsh connections, see Wickham-Crowley, ““Going Native””; Meecham-Jones; and Miller.



chances for individual heroism in battle,<sup>6</sup> and Arthur fights Frolle in a one-on-one, chivalrous duel. However, the poem's heroes are mostly kings, not knights, and they rarely evince a chivalric ethos. The temporal situation, while "long ago," certainly does not evoke the charmed world that enables "the freeing of romance from familiar place or chronology" that Helen Cooper considers "almost a defining feature of the genre" (Cooper 4).<sup>7</sup> Rather than the ideal of chivalry, the implicit guiding virtue for *Lazamon* is the intention to benefit one's nation.

### *Questions in Lazamon Criticism*

Grouping *Lazamon* scholarship into the following broad themes helps organize critical concerns: kingship, peace, and race/nation. In what follows, I will identify some fault lines among the scholarship and indicate how this study relates to those conflicts.

The question of what makes a good king<sup>8</sup> is clearly important to *Lazamon*, leading Rosamund Allen to state the following as a common insight: "Lazamon's message is the importance of a strong ruler" ("Broad Spears Broke," 66). As most of the *Brut*'s main characters are kings, the rules of kings consistently form the narrative's epochs, and most scholars agree that the history crescendos with the rule of Arthur. While they generally accept the crescendo of the narrative on the simple basis of the Arthur section's length, critics disagree about what sort of judgment to place on Arthur. Some read this section as *Lazamon*'s explorations of the ideal king, one who perfectly fulfills all the shadowy types

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<sup>6</sup> Donahue was perhaps the first to notice this fact (*Lawman's Brut*, 131); Le Saux repeats and expands on his claims (*The Poem and Its Sources*, 46), and Buczynski picks up the Single Combat theme, as well.

<sup>7</sup> However, Cooper does consider Monmouth a predecessor to the romance genre, who provided a space for romance narratives, even though he himself wrote "epic history" (23-24).

<sup>8</sup> Most of the rulers in the *Brut* are male, but the text also relates the rules of three queens.









sympathies with his racial kin, the Anglo-Saxons currently under domination by the Normans; much of the rationale for this position depends on Lazamon's use of Anglo-Saxon heroic verse style.<sup>13</sup> Other scholars see Lazamon as appropriating Anglo-Saxon legal traditions so that he can advocate for those traditions' use in Norman-ruled England; according to this view, Lazamon's ultimate goal is peace, and the means he suggests to arrive at peace is use of these older laws.<sup>14</sup> Others read Lazamon primarily as a historian who uses legal or antiquated language to create the impression of dignity and historicity, either for his own text or for the landscape of Britain.<sup>15</sup> Fittingly for the *translatio imperii* structure, others read the work as valorizing the Britons by imputing Anglo-Saxon heroic virtues to them. Elizabeth J. Bryan sums up the consensus of this last reading when she says "the 'British people' constitute the work's main character" ("Lazamon's Four Helens," 63). This project contributes to the understanding of race construction in the *Brut* by showing how violence both constructs and results from the Britons' understanding of themselves as a race.

Finally, one strand of criticism contends that Lazamon sees race and nationality as performative because of their dependence on language—since a person can learn a new language, and since language is the bearer of culture, a person can change cultures. Based on this theory of racial malleability, some have argued that interpretation and communication are important in the *Brut* as a means to achieve power. Thus, hegemony

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Wickham-Crowley, "'Going Native'"; Helbert; Miller; Rider; Stanley, "Lazamon's Antiquarian Sentiments"; Tiller, *Lazamon's Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History*; Davies; and Cannon, "The Style and Authorship of the Otho Revision."

<sup>14</sup> Proponents of this view include Kleinman, "*Frið* and *Grið*"; Cannon, "Lazamon and the Laws of Men"; Yeager; and Helbert.

<sup>15</sup> Bellis; Harrison; and Yeager.



To understand violence, I use the lens of phenomenology, especially the works of Emmanuel Levinas and Jean-Luc Marion. Phenomenology is a particularly appropriate lens for violence, mostly, as Michael Staudigl argues, because of the way that it conceives of the subject and his agency. This strain of philosophy is indispensable for violence studies from his point of view because it resists reducing a person involved in violence to either “a purpose-rational actor” unaffected by limiting forces “or to a powerless agent” entirely determined by such forces (Introduction to *Phenomenologies of Violence*, 14). Through these philosophies, it becomes clear that violence plays out between the poles of activity and passivity.<sup>18</sup> By applying a concern for agency, a study of violence can illuminate the structural similarities among *Lazamon*’s various concerns. A concern for one’s agency informs the medieval definition of honor and the stakes that the poet and his characters see in violence, peacemaking, marriage, and identity.

Another important theoretician of violence is René Girard. This anthropologist is an established thinker who locates violence at the heart of human existence. He finds violence especially in myths of origin, making his thought immediately applicable to the *Brut*. The patterns that he identifies are easily demonstrable in the *Brut*, and they help to explain how peace results from various violent actions, as well. Finally, Steven Pinker’s book *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* informs this project’s classifications of violence. Pinker uses neuroscience to separate motivations for violent action, and while all of them can be reduced to a concern for identity, as Staudigl argues, the ability to perceive different motivations helps to differentiate patterns of violence

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<sup>18</sup> Staudigl thinks of violence in terms of “subjectification and de-subjectification” (Introduction to *Phenomenologies of Violence*, 5). This may be helpful language, but I find that, applied to the *Brut*, it misses the heart of the question; for *Lawman*, the essential characteristic of a violent subject is agency.



but it is not always proportionate to the poet's. At times, I accord more attention to certain episodes, and a variety of factors influence that decision: the scenes may establish a pattern that will be developed later; depict a transition between states of peace and violence; illustrate a foundational principle; or fold multiple motivations for violence into a single scene. Following these methods, this project contributes to the study of the *Brut* as a whole as well as to the study of the Arthuriad because it puts the Arthur section in the larger context of the entire poem.

### *Argument Overview*

This project focuses on violence in the hope that that focus will contribute to understandings of the established concerns, namely what makes a good king, the character of peace, and the identity of the Britons. A good king is a master of violence, according to the rules the poem establishes; peace needs violent institution and maintenance; and violence both sets up and results from the ways that the Britons imagine themselves. However, the grandest claim that this project makes is that the poem's overall trajectory reveals fundamental contradictions that contribute to the Britons' ultimate loss of hegemony over the land.

Chapter two uses the early parts of the *Brut* to establish the rules according to which violence operates in the text's world. The crucial themes at play are unity, agency, and identity. The first part of the *Brut* concerns itself with dividing the Britons from other peoples and unifying the Britons among themselves. A major way in which the Britons unify themselves is through violence against others, and they separate themselves from other racial groups in order to head off the threat of blood feuds. The second chapter makes it clear that the Britons imagine themselves as a large family, with the father-as-



The final chapter focuses on Arthur. I argue that Arthur operates according to the rules established in previous reigns: he forms an unquestionable identity for himself, keeps the peace through spectacular violence, and expels invaders from his land. However, Arthur's success in establishing this identity for himself, and by extension the Britons, leads directly to the conflict with Rome that overstretches his military, resulting in his final battle with Modred. Thus, the trajectory of *Lazamon's* plot demonstrates the ultimate futility of the very logic he traces in the early parts of the poem.<sup>19</sup> As a result, the *Brut* can function as social critique in ways both similar to and different from those acknowledged by previous studies.

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<sup>19</sup> In this way, my argument shares similarities with what has been called the Harvard School of interpreting Virgil's *Aeneid*. Putnam gives the closest parallel, perhaps, but Johnson and Lyne also give readings of the *Aeneid* similar to my reading of the *Brut*.





### *The Centrality of Violence*

The relentless violence of the world the *Brut* paints has long been recognized in scholarship on the poem. Marie Françoise Alamichel finds that, for Lazamon, all human existence is “solitary confinement” (“Space in the *Brut*,” 189), and Fiona Tolhurst writes of the “brutally masculinist world of the poem” (204). In addition, as Kenneth J. Tiller points out, Lazamon uses verbs like “win” and “take” to describe how he “trampled” his various sources into a single narrative (“The Truth,” 35). This combative language features prominently in Lazamon’s descriptions of conquerors, and its presence in the prologue only reinforces the inescapable nature of violence in the world of the poem. Nor should readers be surprised; Mark D. Meyerson et al. point out that violence was “normative social practice, a form of social discourse” for medieval people, as opposed to modern Western attitudes, in which violence is often “aberrant, antisocial, pathological” (5-6). Françoise Le Saux even feels that “[i]t is a commonplace that the world of the *Brut* is a violent one” (“Paradigms of Evil,” 193).

Other scholars, notably Lynch and Allen, read Lazamon as an exception to an Arthurian literary tradition infatuated with war. Lynch claims that Lazamon presents “an isolated view of peace as ‘good’ in itself, blessedly free from war” (“Peace Is Good After War,” 144).<sup>2</sup> For her part, Allen argues that Lazamon presents violence in a way that reveals his distaste for it. Allen provides impressive analysis of the descriptions of war, pointing out that Lazamon moves agency away from humans and toward objects (“Broad Spears Broke,” 60). Despite compelling evidence, both critics recognize that an aversion to war might even work against the morals that Lazamon wants readers to draw from his

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter five for a thorough discussion of Lynch’s peaceful reading.



studies other histories written by monks, and unlike his findings from those sources (693-4), the ordained priest Lazamon does not press farther back in history to Adam as an originator of history or genealogy, although he does cite St. Bede, introducing like the monastics a providential reading of history. For the most part, though, like the secular clerics whose work he expands, he begins with violent divine judgment. Because there is no reference to creation, to Eden, or to the Fall, the text does not imagine a time before violence. Rather, humanity's races and the shape of the entire world begin with divine violence. Further, the sons of Noah raise the founding myth of the various continents, specifically their "simultaneously whole and divided" state (Akbari 37). Like the T-O map that often associates Asia, Africa, and Europe with a respective son of Noah, Lazamon's allusion raises in the first few lines of his poem the specter of unity and division. Alamichel sees unity and division as "two key words as far as Arthur and his kingdom are concerned," suggesting that Arthur's main task is to unify himself and his kingdom under a desirable order ("King Arthur's Dual Personality," 315). As surely as the tension between unity and division informs the Arthurian section of the *Brut*, it also informs the rest of the poem. The *Brut* concerns a people, as the present chapter will show, whose unity will depend upon separating themselves from other peoples, and the poet foregrounds the negotiation between forces of cohesion and dispersion, the primary such force being violence.

Having paid his dues to the ultimate context of divine history and, allusively, to the context of global history, Lazamon moves on to the originary point of secular history, the Trojan War. At this point, as well, the poet highlights the violence of the story, saying, "the Greeks had won Troy through fighting" and "laid waste that land and killed



that restrains instrumental violence itself depends on ongoing violence against mutual enemies.

In this pattern, *Lazamon* echoes the prevailing political theory of his time. Richard Kaeuper synthesizes the theme of order through violence in the works of Orderic Vitalis, Suger, and Galbert of Bruges, all early twelfth-century political theorists who justified the regrettable violence imposed by a king through appeals for order, which guarantees less violence in aggregate (12-19). The cultural anxiety about order and its relationship to violence may be due to historical developments after the fracturing of Charlemagne's empire (19), and especially around the time of "the Anarchy," a mid-twelfth-century civil war, which Catherine A.M. Clarke points out was particularly devastating, according to contemporary historians ("Crossing the Rubicon," 61). Further, according to Christopher Baswell, in the *Roman d'Eneas*, a twelfth-century French adaptation of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Turnus represents the specter of "the chaos of private war," an "old danger," but one that continued to loom through the twelfth century (206-08).<sup>4</sup>

Order is also a concern in the genres with which *Lazamon*'s work intersects, especially romance, epic, and chronicle. Cooper proposes that Geoffrey of Monmouth might be the originator of English romance, although his *Brut* does not quite qualify because it is not vernacular, making it more of an epic history (23). Similarities between *Lazamon*'s *Brut*, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and the *Peterborough Chronicle* have led to enlightening interpretations,<sup>5</sup> and chronicle, too, inherently concerns itself with causes

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<sup>4</sup> Hyams also states that private war was still a legitimate concern throughout this time period (265).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Sheppard, *Families of the King*; Donahue, "The Darkly Chronicled King"; Stanley, "Lazamon's Antiquarian Sentiments"; Bredehoft; and Tiller, "Lazamon's *Brut* and the Poetics of the *Peterborough Chronicle*."



Having caused the death of his mother, who “became dead” in childbirth (149), and of his father, whom he accidentally shoots in the chest while hunting (159-160), the *Brut*’s eponymous hero, Brutus, finds himself “cast out” from his people (164) and “wander[ing] sorrowful” (165) in search of community. Alone on the “sea-streams” (165), Brutus needs both a community, which will help him attain his prophesied “worship” (146), and a stable source of sustenance. He soon comes to Greece, “where he found his kin” (166), who are prospering but are all slaves to the Greeks on whose land they tried to build their new homes. Brutus immediately ingratiates himself among the Trojan slaves (174-5) by being “generous, which is the foundation of worship” (176). Soon, the Trojans ask Brutus to be their leader and deliver them from slavery. Carole Weinberg proposes that *Lazamon* has the Trojans ask to be led “out of that land” (182), while neither Wace nor Geoffrey includes such language, in order to strengthen the parallel between Brutus and the biblical heroes Moses and Joshua (“Recasting the Role?” 49). In that case, Brutus’ divine appointment justifies both his leadership and the violence he enacts to free the Trojans.

Brutus agrees to his people’s request, and after preparing the people for war, he sends a telling message to Pandrasus, the king of the Greeks. The message demands that the king give the Trojans freedom and land, and his reasoning highlights the value of honor and dominance in this early conflict:<sup>8</sup>

For þan weorldes scome and for þan muchele grome	Because of the world-wide shame and the great dishonor
þat Dardanisc kun þe we beoð of icomene	With which the Dardanian race (from whom we descend)
Woneð in þisse londe leode to sconde	Dwell in this land (such a shame to the people),

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<sup>8</sup> As *Lazamon*’s text is unfamiliar to many readers in its entirety, I will provide full quotations, including the Middle English, as relevant.





and he has no other” (375). Brutus, the prisoner of war, and the Greek soldiers all take for granted that the brother is irreplaceable to Pandrasus. The reliability of the plan demonstrates the cultural assumption of familial duty that all the participants share with Lazamon and his audience, just as Throop finds in medieval thoughts on revenge.

The progress of the war continues to emphasize the reversal of dominance, as well. No longer an exile, now at the head of a people and an army, “Brutus came after them and then he laid into them / with sword and with spear. He thoroughly pursued the king’s host / on land and on water: he put them down” (275-277). Brutus and his Trojans have reclaimed agency: they are now the actors, and the Greeks respond in confusion. Even Pandrasus, the symbol of the Greeks as a people, reacts rather than plots: “The king himself fled; he saw his friends fall” (278). Unlike Brutus, who plans and implements effective tactics in order to control the situation, Pandrasus is surprised by the deaths of his countrymen and finds himself harried. This state of affairs continues through a fight between Brutus and Pandrasus’ brother until it ends in a scene of utter disintegration, where “many heads and many hands fell at their feet” (290). Winning the battle, then, coincides with completely dismembering the Greeks, and the sight of that violence denies agency to Pandrasus, who must now react to what Brutus has before decided to do.

Le Saux’s very impressive systematic comparison of Lazamon with his various sources reports that Lazamon tends to replace Wace’s technical details of battle with “the ‘clash-of-arms’ motif” (*The Poem and Its Sources*, 33). She concludes that the technicalities of military strategy interest Lazamon less than “the *issue* of the battles, the *result* of a given tactical choice” (34; emphasis original). Further, Allen emphasizes the quality of Lazamon’s battle descriptions, which decentralize “human agency” and replace







not be effaced and gave shape to the violence within specific local communities” (105). Using very different methodology, then, Das finds, as Pinker does, that kinship bonds and other “ongoing relationships” can limit revenge. The revenge-dampening effects of kinship and utilitarian relationships play a large part in the *Brut* and in Membricius’ suggestion. Further, because all violence is about identity, rewriting the Trojan identity to include the Greeks they have just fought also relieves some of the impetus for violence. Thus, in setting the status quo in this way, Lazamon presents a social strategy that makes intuitive sense.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to Ignoien, Membricius recommends that the Trojans demand a litany of goods, including corn, gold, treasure, and horses (471-2). He ends, though, with one further telling condition: “and all his best provisions that his men have” (473). There is some sense that possessions, for their intrinsic worth, also serve to encourage peace, but this passage also shows that possessions can be valuable for their implications for identity. Providing the Trojans with much corn, treasure, and provisions will put them on the same level as Pandrasus’ thanes. Just like marriage, then, paying the victors in the conflict rewrites the identities of both the Greeks and the Trojans so that the Greeks publicly and to their own disadvantage have acknowledged the Trojans’ equality. The Trojans are definitively no longer slaves.

Both Das and Pinker see interpersonal relationships, including the very important category of blood relationship, as a damper on the impulse to avenge wrongs. The interplay between revenge and relationship is often at the heart of conflict in the *Brut*, especially when the poem considers the question of whether different races can live

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<sup>11</sup> Only much later will we see how the Britons’ isolationism fails. It is necessary first to acknowledge its utility and reasonableness.



possessions. In fact, the language describing this raid echoes that used before to describe a hunt. Earlier, at the uninhabited Logice, all of whose people have been massacred by outlaws, the Trojans did “all their will” to the deer (567). Effectively, the Trojans treat the Mauritians like deer, to whom they can do all their will.<sup>12</sup> Just as they carried the carcasses of the deer they had hunted back to their ships from Logice, so they also carry back to their ships enough spoils of their foray into Mauritanie to satiate their desires. No narrator’s digression condemns this raid, nor does the text impose any hermeneutic on Brutus’ violence when he ravages Armorica and erects a castle there (819-827). Violently taking from people outside the Trojan nation is a non-issue.

This goods-focused violence provides the baseline of human actions, and even though, by itself, it is unremarkable, it can destroy social cooperation if it occurs within the group. Therefore, kings must curtail it for the sake of social cooperation. If a king fails to do so, his subjects quickly descend into anarchy, characterized again by instrumental violence. The best way to stop this devolution is to impose upon the people laws buttressed with severe punishments for breaking them and to encourage the leaders of the people to interact with each other like family. Brutus does exactly these things, and his laws explicitly make the Britons better moral agents. He institutes capital punishment for crimes, thereby encouraging his people to “let love dwell between them” (1041) and to “respect each others’ rights” (1042). As a result, the people “became just men” and “loved wisdom” (1046). The threat of hanging in retribution for doing evil, when used to support a positive contrary to such evil, makes the Britons just. The death or

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<sup>12</sup> This phrase recurs innumerable times in the *Brut*, usually in connection with a leader who takes possession of a land.





Corineus uses his strength and prowess to cut his enemies' bodies into pieces in order to knit himself to Brutus in a tighter body politic.

The *Brut*'s readers tend to acknowledge that Brutus is a model leader, a prototype of the far more laudable Arthur, and they occasionally remark that his relationship with Corineus models the ideal relationship between lord and vassal. Thus, Weinberg says, "both men [Brutus and Arthur] are accorded a special, mystical status" ("Recasting the Role?" 53), and Alice Sheppard observes that *Lazamon* uses the same words (*luue*, *monscipe*) to describe sexual relationships between men and women and to describe Brutus' mutual love for his lords ("Love Rewritten," 102-03)—a positive move on Sheppard's reading, which emphasizes lordship bonds as the basis of social cooperation in the *Brut*. However, most criticism focuses on Brutus to the exclusion of Corineus, whose career develops the theme of unity expressed in both the prologue and Brutus' experiences in Greece. In this very early part of the poem, outsiders present either danger or an opportunity to solidify the insular Britons' bonds, and overcoming external enemies will continue to exert a unifying force on the Britons throughout the chronicle. Thus, the unification of the early Britons depends on the existence of a mutual foe, and killing others is the exact mechanism through which the Britons achieve the social cohesion necessary for a single leader, Brutus, to establish peace among them.

At the beginning of his first battle, Corineus engages in a brief exchange with Numbert, revealing in its silences the principle at stake in this conflict. Numbert serves King Goffar, who rules in Peyters (Poitou), and he catches Corineus "[driving] the wild deer there" (713). The Trojans, then, have begun despoiling the land, doing their will for the sake of provisions, just as they did in Mauritane. On a mission to discover whether



reply reveals that the honor and shame at stake in this conflict stem from a contest of wills. Asserting one's will over another's wades into a contest over honor.

The conflict over the deer enacts a pattern of violence identified by both Pinker and Girard. Corineus and the Trojans think nothing of their hunting until they receive a challenge over it, and when that challenge comes, Corineus shifts into violence motivated by honor. Pinker mentions that frustrated instrumental violence can easily become emotional (511), and several episodes in the *Brut* show that the "emotion" triggered by frustrated instrumental violence is honor. Thus, Numbert and Corineus both perceive the Trojans' hunt—an act of instrumental violence, as the similarity between *Lazamon's* descriptions of hunting and of ravaging reveals—as a contest of honor. Further, the concept that links possession with honor is will, which itself can be expressed in terms of dominance and activity. When Numbert asserts Goffar's rights, he asserts the king's right to be taken seriously, to have his will considered; Corineus asserts his right to do all his will without limitation on his agency.

Girard sees all violent conflict as resulting from mimetic desire. The fundamental challenge to all human society, he argues, is "the undifferentiated reciprocity of mimetic conflict," in which a person's desire for a possession grows stronger when he sees that another person desires to possess the same thing. When both parties try to gain possession of the same good, they find their wills frustrated and enter the violent process of trying to attain the good despite the "obstacle" that each presents to the other ("Mimseis and Violence," 9-10). Girard, then, places possession and will at the heart of violent conflict, just as Corineus and Numbert come to fatal blows over the issue of possessing natural resources. The *Brut's* medieval perspective interprets the conflict of



“great and very strong sword” (776) to “hew” two hundred people to pieces (780). When his sword breaks, he continues his rampage with a “very strong ax” (785), which he uses to split another leader, Suard, “in two, right at the ribs” (801). Corineus is not just strong; he uses his strength to dominate in battle through chopping people into pieces. Chopping people into pieces, in turn, further unifies him with Brutus, whose cause he serves.

On a larger scale, Corineus commands forces that split off from Brutus’ main force. In the second battle of the war with Goffar, Brutus’ force occupies a castle while Corineus’ force hides in the forest until, at a crucial moment while Goffar besieges the castle, Corineus and his men attack the enemy’s unprotected flank, successfully utilizing a pincer move once more. The narrator points out in a balanced line, “Brutus was on one side, Corineus on the other” (876). This larger pincer movement enacts Corineus’ and Brutus’ unification through combat on a strategic scale, their forces dividing for a time to give the two leaders opportunity to more easily dismember their enemies, and through that dismemberment to move the arms of their battle formation literally toward each other until they can join their forces once more. In the same way, they grow together as lord and vassal through the means of dismembering mutual foes, thus sharing the agency that military victory affords. Since agency confers honor, the leaders share the scarce resource of honor and participate in the unifying mechanism that Girard outlines.

Corineus’ final feat on behalf of Brutus’ destiny occurs in the same moment as the Trojans gain full possession over the land of Albion, later named Britain. After they arrive on the island, the Trojans must drive out the giants who lived in the land before them. After the Trojan victory, Brutus pits Corineus against the captured chief giant, Geomagog, to test the giant’s strength. At the end of a hard fight, in which his opponent



Corineus, who was his dear warrior, / a deal of his land and set [it] in his hand” (982-3) and follows with a description of how Corineus imparts his name to the land: “The lord was named Corineus, and that land Corinee” (984). Finally, he recounts how time and future inhabitants change the name to Cornwall (985-6). Already, the grammatical parallels between Brutus and Corineus suggest a degree of equality between them. Both establish their hegemony over the land, signified by the rhyming pair “hand” and “land” (964, 983), whose significance Deborah Marcum notes; both name the land after themselves; and both places still bear the marks of their names. Success in conquest has unified the allies to the point that they share a land, a destiny, and, as Britons, a name. First dividing the bodies of their enemies, then dividing the land among themselves under the aegis of Brutus’ feudal lordship, unites Brutus so closely with Corineus that the two might as well be brothers.

One final aspect of their brotherhood is their mutual agency in conquering and settling. They reduce their enemies to ultimate passivity, fracturing the enemies’ capacity for meaningful action and adaptation to the point of destroying the coherence of even their bodies. Then, they actively settle the land, taking it into their hands to possess and divide among followers, who perform the active verbs “made towns,” “tilled earth,” “sowed corn,” and “mowed meadows” (971-2). Front-and-center is the people’s will, for they “tilled it all as they thought [best]” (973). As for the two chief conquerors, they actively imprint themselves upon the land by giving it their names. Conquest has given them resources they can truly share, including the honor that stems from agency.

Isolation and defeating mutual enemies are means of preserving peace among the Britons. Isolation on their island guarantees that they will not find themselves involved in





with the possibility of peace. Thus, the Britons expect Corineus' particular kind of violence to protect them from the threat of revenge, a very real threat established in the very beginning of the poem. They expect this result because Corineus' violence figures the Britons as an integrated unit, defined against the dismembered others.

The consistency of Corineus' actions need not erase any possibility of critique, however. Burek points to two especially convincing passages that demonstrate that Lazamon's text can critique the insular self-conception of the people whose founding myth it relates. Toward the end of the *Brut*, when the Trojans have long since renamed themselves Britons, the Saxons have gained a permanent foothold on the island. During this time, the Saxons encourage more of their kin to join them by pointing out that the Britons will not know that more will be coming. They will be left in the dark, in turn, because of their refusal to learn the Saxon language (118). Although not, as Burek says, in moral terms, the *Brut* does contain suggestions that the Britons' isolation is a self-defeating foundation for a society. Indeed, Margaret Lamont presents a tangential argument according to which Lazamon presents a complicated relationship with the Saxons. Lamont argues that Lazamon encourages his readers to identify with the Saxons when they are doing good things, even calling them "English" at those points, and not to identify with them when they are betraying others, calling them "Saxons" then. This pattern of "mobility" works "to destabilize firmly fixed group characteristics" among any race, and Lamont sees it as "a hallmark" of the entire poem (309). It is very possible to read the history of the Britons, then, and conclude that their very means of achieving peace threaten their goals.



## *Marriage*

### *The Nation As Family*

Kings can also use nonviolent means to strengthen social bonds, and they frequently attempt to use marriage in this way. After Brutus' death, in an attempt to strengthen his relations with Locrin, the new king, Corineus secures Locrin's promise to marry his daughter Guendoleine. Marriage is a symbol of unity, the social unity it concretizes symbolized in the bodily union of the couple and, ideally, in their offspring. The importance of marriage to social cooperation, furthermore, introduces the major metaphor for British society: a family. Finally, integrating a study of the pacifying effects of marriage into a study of violence reveals the issues of honor and agency that are at stake in marriage.

Historians and literary critics have long recognized that marriage and reproduction are, for medieval rulers, closely linked to hegemony over the land. The function of women as peaceweavers through marriage in medieval literature and politics is so common that it needs but a glancing mention. John Carmi Parson, for instance, sees kings' consorts as performing essential "missions as peaceweavers or mediators," and their bodies as symbols of the king's "control of his domains, literally embodying means by which he might [seize that control]" (255). In the introduction to the volume in which Parson's essay appears, the editors point to how the queen's body "incarnate[es] political alliances and producing heirs" (Meyerson et al. 12). In the literary context of the *Brut*, Maureen Fries argues that gender roles, especially in marriage, are so important that breaking them disrupts the order of the entire kingdom.



sons apportion the land in a T-O design, Locrin taking southern England, Camber taking “that wild land where Welsh men live” (1060), and Albanac taking Scotland to the north. Part of their ruling in peace and love is that, like Brutus and Corineus before, they settle their realms by bequeathing their names to them in parallel fashion. Lazamon gives the geographical region that each inherits, then explains how the place name reflects the name of the relevant brother, and finally mentions any change to the name that has taken place since (1057-66). Though it may be formulaic, the parallelism in the narrator’s etiology emphasizes the unity that the brothers enjoy, ironically founded on their peaceful separation and separate dispensing with the land.

The first threat to their peace comes from a foreign king, Humber, whose threat arises from both his foreignness and his eerie similarity to the Britons. He is “king of the Huns,”<sup>15</sup> and he has “laid waste many lands” and “many hundred islands...from here to Germany” (1075-7). Even worse, he and his “keen” thanes follow “evil customs” (1074). These are not colonizers, as the Britons were, but pirates: they come from afar to despoil. Yet, once they defeat Albanac’s forces, killing him in the process, and “all that land was in his possession” (1095), they proceed south toward Locrin’s territory and “would win Britain with fight” (1097). The parallel with the Trojans when they journeyed from Greece to Britain is present but retains a crucial distinction: the Huns have no national destiny to justify their violence.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Humber’s foreign origin, combined with

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<sup>15</sup> Lit., “king of Hunuze,” but both Allen and Frederic Madden (p. 91) take this to mean “king of Huns.”

<sup>16</sup> Ingledeu attributes the Britons’ glory, as opposed to judgment, in Geoffrey of Monmouth to Diana’s prophecy to Brutus (678); Miller argues that Lazamon participates in Geoffrey’s justification of the Britons through appeal to prophecy; Tiller argues that Lazamon evinces anxiety about the possibility of prophecy’s and the historian’s error, but consistently maintains the perspective that prophecy legitimates empire (Tiller, “Lazamon’s Leir”; Tiller, “The Truth”; Tiller, *Lazamon’s Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History*; and Tiller, “Prophecy and the Body of the King”).



/ to have all the possessions that King Humber owned” (1112-4). What Locrin finds when he boards the ship is a captive noblewoman, Æstrild, with whom he falls in love. The position that Æstrild occupies is ambiguous, as she is both part of the spoils of war and Locrin’s beloved. In part, then, Locrin boards the ship looking to gain loot due to his military agency, then loses his agency to his emotions. That love could mean a loss of agency accords with a Platonic idea of the passions as well as with the early medieval understanding of romantic attraction, which according to Cooper usually affected the woman (230). Locrin’s speech to Æstrild when he first sees her highlights his emotional infatuation, and part of the problem with the relationship is that he prefers the beautiful foreigner, whom he loves, to the British woman whom he has pledged to marry.

Prioritizing his emotions over his word will have devastating consequences.

Locrin’s speech to Æstrild is an emotional one. The poet says,

<p>And he heo mid armen inom eð him wes on heorten And he hire to seide Sel þe scal iwurðen Wifmon þu eart hende and ic þe wlle habben Mid wurðscipen hæze to richen are quene þa while þe ic libbe oðer nulle ic habben For þe ic am swa bliðe swa næs I næuer ær on liue</p>	<p>And he took her in his arms (comfort was in his heart) and he said to her, “Good shall become of you. You are a beautiful woman, and I will have you as our realm’s queen, with great honor. While I live, I will have no other, for I am happier than I ever have been in my life.” (1117-22)</p>
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Locrin’s promises resonate with courtly love tropes. In any case, the scene includes affective love, both in Locrin’s confession that he is happier than ever before and in the narrator’s omniscient pronouncement that pleasure is in the king’s heart. All this emotion contrasts with the objective pledge that Locrin has sworn to Guendoleine and with Corineus’ natural affection for his daughter. The narrator juxtaposes Locrin’s promise to





For his luue moni eotend ic leide dead a þene grund	For his love many giants I laid dead on the ground.
An þu mi muchele swinc mid sare forþeldest	And you repay my great efforts with injury,
Bi-leafest feier and sceone mine dohter Guendoleine	Forsake and shame my fair daughter Guendoleine
For al-þeodisc meiden Æstrild ihate	For the foreign maiden called Æstrild.
þu nast of whulche londe heo com heder liðen	You do not know which land she comes from,
Ne whulc king is hire fader ne whulc quen hire moder	Nor which king is her father, nor which queen her mother,
Ah þu scalt habben for hire luue þat þe is alre laðest	But you shall have for her love what you loath most:
þat al þu scalt to-scæne mid scearpe mire eaxe	I will break you apart with my sharp ax. (1138-55)

Brutus' old friend is furious that Locrin has dishonored his only daughter, and he feels that Locrin's disregard for his daughter reveals a disregard for the bonds that his battles forged with Brutus. Reciting the feats he has performed in Brutus' service, emphasizing his leadership in armed conflicts and mentioning especially the war against the giants, proves his love for his "dear companion" and "royal lord," invoking the memory of Brutus, the former king, even as he speaks to his successor. The theme of mutual loyalty that runs through Corineus' accusing speech reinforces the unifying effects of battle against a mutual foe. He consciously and explicitly states what the plot has already shown, that uniting against a common enemy strengthens the Britons' social bonds. Further, Corineus' outrage and murderous intent combine to illustrate how a loss of honor can motivate revenge, an important pattern in the *Brut*.

Locrin has threatened to sever the bonds of British unity. Corineus intended for the marriage to reinforce their families' close relationship by unifying him with Corineus' daughter. He performs the exact opposite social function as Corineus by denying that union in favor of another. Whereas Corineus hews foreigners in pieces, resulting in



both women (1199-1200). *Wild*, of course, applies to Corineus, as well, who has just attempted regicide for the sake of his honor. While the poem appears to blame Locrin for the strife, the earl's wrath also contributes to the general division that afflicts the Britons at this point in their history.

When Corineus dies and Locrin feels freer, he sends Guendoleine and her son away to Cornwall (1217-8) and openly keeps Æstrild as his queen (1229-30). Guendoleine, however, refuses to accept this dishonor, and like a good military leader, she publicizes her cause and raises an army, leveraging all her influence:

<p>And swiðe heo hit mænde to alle monnen þe hire fader wolde þe while he wes on liue Heo gæderede to-sumne alle hire sibbe freond And alle þa knites þe heo biȝeten mihte And alle þat cuðe folk þat hire freond weoren And alle þa vncuðe to hire comen of wel feola londe for seoluere &amp; for golde And heo rumliche hit ȝef gode þon kempan And bæd heom for heora wurðscipe wreken hire teonan</p>	<p>And she greatly complained about it to all people Whom her father commanded while he was alive. She gathered together all her close relatives And all the knights that she could secure and all the close people that were her friends. And all the unknown came to her from very many lands for silver and for gold, and she generously gave goods to those troops and instructed them to avenge her harms for their worship. (1220-8)</p>
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She is angry, as her father had been, at being dishonored, and to avenge her dishonor, she recruits people who owe her allegiance because of her blood. She carries on Corineus' tradition, then, of valuing bonds created during combat against a mutual foe as well as blood relations. She also leverages her possessions to gain followers, as wise rulers frequently do in the *Brut*. The narrator ends her indirect speech with an appeal to honor, both hers and her followers', but clearly some of her soldiers fight for the intrinsic value

of the silver and gold they will receive afterward. Guendoleine, far from being a good traded among men, is fully capable of using goods to perform the actions of a good monarch and gain honor for herself.

In the ensuing battle, Locrin dies because “an arrow struck him in the heart” (1239); rather than being split apart for his divisive actions, this king dies for love. His demise is romantic, perhaps, but his passions lead to disaster for him, his people, Æstrild, and his daughter. A king’s word is more important than his passions. Æstrild and her daughter Aubren, than whom “there was no fairer child” (1203), die symbolically as well. Guendoleine has them “bound / and thrown in a deep water / where they drowned” (1244-6). She replaces the bonds of marriage that Locrin’s infidelity and deceit had forged and that had caused Æstrild’s ascent with restrictive bonds that render the rival queen incapable of staying afloat. Locrin had caused division by uniting himself with a foreigner and rejecting the intended unification with the family of his father’s faithful companion. Splintering the unity of his own household, he also shatters the cohesion of his kingdom, dividing the loyalties of the British and Cornish. In binding the illegitimate wife and child, Guendoleine returns unity to the isles and repairs the foundation of peace.

Nevertheless, sacrificing Æstrild and Abren, the beautiful trophies that tempted Locrin from his rational duties, is a matter of mourning for Guendoleine and her people.

<p>þa wes Guendoleine leodene læfdi  þa hehte heo ane heste mid haijere  witte  þat me sculde þat ilke water þer  Abren wes adrunken  clepien hit Auren for þane mæidene  Abren  &amp; for Locrines lufe þe wes hire kine-  louerd</p>	<p>Then was Guendoleine the lady of the  land,  Who made a commandment from a  higher inclination  That men should call that same water  where Abren was drowned  Auren for that maiden Abren    And for Locrin’s love, who was her  kin-lord,</p>
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<p>þe streonede Abren vppen Astrild.          Þa hefde heo isclawen þene king &amp; þa          neowe quene &amp; heora child          &amp; Auren hatte ȝet þas æ at Cristes-          chirche heo falleð i þare sæ</p>	<p>Who begat Abren upon Astrild.          Then she had slain the king and the          new queen and her child          And that stream is yet called Auren, at          Christchurch where she falls to the          sea.</p>
<p>Guendoleine wes swiðe strong for al          Brutenne wes on hire hond</p>	<p>Guendoleine was very strong, for all          Britain was in her hand. (1247-55)</p>

Naming a landmark after Abren has a different connotation than naming a river after Humber had. This time, the naming is done “for Locrin’s love” because he “was her kin-lord” (1252). Guendoleine, the victorious leader of an army that has just laid her opponents low, shows deference and even tenderness toward the memories of her husband and rivals. Yet, for the sake of her honor and the good of her son, she does not allow that tenderness to weaken her resolve: the violence is necessary to regain her honor and secure peace in the land. She has to avenge herself on Locrin because honor intrinsically involves dominance, and she has to kill Æstrild and Abren because, if left alive, they would present the continuous threat of reprisal. Guendoleine, then, subjects her emotions to concerns of honor and of peace, reversing the mistake Locrin had made.

Because of the native/foreigner dynamic in this episode, the invocation of racial purity is once again relevant. We have already noted that historians believe kinship to be the basis for all medieval imaginations of social groups (Althoff 160), and Le Saux believes that the family is the major metaphor for political relations in the *Brut*. As the “Détenteur du pouvoir,” the king is “symboliquement le père des sujets dont il est reponsable.” The subject’s debt to the sovereign and the son’s debt to the father is so strong, in fact, that it “s’accompagne d’un effacement du fils, jusqu’à ce que la mort du

roi en fasse à son tour le détenteur du pouvoir royal, et donc paternel” (par. 6).<sup>17</sup> In a more passing way, Wickham-Crowley, who argues that betrayal is a central concern in the poem, finds that *Lazamon* “tends...to use the language of brotherhood or relatedness to emphasize the violation of communal bonds” (“Cannibal Cultures,” 365).

This concept of the nation as a family and of the father as the locus of identity combines with honor in the *Brut* to explain the power of raiding in the poem’s acts of war. Raiding is a frequent strategy, not only in the *Brut*, but also in actual medieval warfare, and it serves both a practical and an ideological purpose. John Gillingham explains that medieval generals tended to prefer ravaging to pitched battles because of the risk involved in large-scale battle (83-84). As Fries points out, medieval England both real and fictional “literally subsumed” women “into the identity of father, husband, or guardian” (26-27).<sup>18</sup> Given the image of the king as father of the nation, which Le Saux draws out, attacking a king’s subjects in the *Brut* amounts to attacking the king’s honor and even right to rule. If the king cannot uphold his obligations to protect, then the imagined social contract that gives him sovereignty becomes suspect. This contract will become even more important in the discussion of the need for strong kings to deter invasion.

Because of the clear importance of familial relationships in the political structure of the *Brut*, the most convincing readings of the poem that look for critiques of the

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<sup>17</sup> “As the holder of power,” the king is “symbolically the father of his subjects for whom he is responsible.” The son’s debt is so strong that it “is accompanied by an effacement of the son until the death of the king in turn makes the son the holder of royal, thus paternal, power.”

<sup>18</sup> This literal patriarchy has violent effects on everyone, but women are among those most strongly affected. Indeed, thanks to the British imagination of people groups as Totalities, women frequently suffer punishment for their male relatives’ real or perceived crimes, as when Arthur cuts the noses off the faces of a traitor’s female relations. Fries calls this “the most grisly of all punishments.”









identities. The marital union between Brutus' biological heir and his own literalizes the positions of the military allies.

The earlier marriage between Brutus and Ignoien enacts a different dynamic between two kin groups, though. Adam J. Kosto reports that people in the early Middle Ages often thought of women given in marriage as hostages. While women were given as literal hostages beginning around AD 1000, that new practice made literal the ways that men used their daughters to make peace agreements before that time (*Hostages in the Middle Ages*, 84-85). Further, Cristian Ispir points out that female hostages represent the giver's potential to make alliances (97). This certainly seems to be how Brutus' marriage to Ignoien works—as a sign of dominance and a forcibly imposed alliance. He joins himself with a Greek woman, but he promptly extracts himself and his people from hers so that the marriage signifies not unity with the Greeks but superiority over them. In this context, the marriage is an extension of the dominance that the violence has wrought. While Brutus intends to leave Greece immediately, he nevertheless forces the Greek king to give up one instrument, his daughter, that he could use to make alliances with other people. By forcing Pandrasus to give him an alliance-making bargaining chip, Brutus casts himself as the Greek king's—forcible and self-declared—equal. Even more importantly, marriage and begetting children enable Brutus to fulfill his destiny of bringing Britain under his dominion, setting in motion the unification of regions within Britain that his sons accomplish. The demand for a bride signifies the then-Trojans' new equality with the Greeks because the Greeks must accept the Trojans as their kin, but the more significant meaning is that Brutus now has the means to procreate and perpetuate

























































instrumental violence and revenge.<sup>3</sup> Instrumental violence, in turn, is caused by mimetic desire. Rival brothers are threatening figures to the imagination of a people involved in such a system because the brothers threaten to erase distinctions, which raises the constant specter of disorder and rampant violence (*Violence and the Sacred*, 61). On a physiological level, twins (and siblings in general) are threatening because their similarity brings to mind the lack of distinctions associated with the sacrificial crisis (56-57).

Many of the characteristics that Girard identifies as part of the sacrificial crisis find referents in the Belin and Brennes episode. Under the influence of Malgod, Brennes begins mimetically to desire what Belin has, the throne. Further, his attempt to gain the throne from Belin is a betrayal of the monarchical order, and it comes about because Malgod whispers in Brennes' ear that Brennes is the same as Belin—the evil adviser seeks to erase the distinction between the brothers. Thus, the civil war that threatens to follow is characterized by a lack of distinction, hence by a violation of order.

Metonymically, the brothers can represent the mimetic desire that, in a disordered society, leads to the proliferation of violence and revenge. Thus, on a Girardian reading, the Belin and Brennes episode reiterates the dangers of violating social distinctions and filial roles. Kleinman argues that Lazamon may have seen East Anglia as a dangerously libertine place because of its inhabitants' traditional disregard for hierarchy (“The Æðelen of Engle,” 126-27).

In the end, the contest between Belin and Brennes avoids the tragic ending of that between Fereus and Poreus, and the eventual renewal of their peace results from the efforts of their mother, herself an anti-type of Iudon. The day before the battle, the queen-

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<sup>3</sup> See the discussion of the Fereus and Poreus episode in chapter two.











The subject passively receives his identity in Levinas, and the same holds partially true in Lazamon. Characters receive selfhood, at least in part, from their parents, and Le Saux points out that all subjects receive their identities from the king (“Relations familiales,” par. 6). Their kinship ties, so important to their identities, are a result of no choice of their own, but of their passive reception of fundamental identity from their forebears.

Tourenne’s appeal depends on the display of her flesh, and Marion’s analysis of flesh elucidates how her request for Brennes’ submission results from that display. Marion traces the givenness of the self even to the moment of birth, speaking of one’s own birth as an experience that, because of its great meaning, gives the subject selfhood. Birth is a fleshly experience that first creates an ego and then gives its self to it, such that the child “receives herself perfectly from what she receives” (*The Erotic Phenomenon*, 205). Primordially, then, the ego receives itself from its birth, which experience it receives from its mother. Further, we can extrapolate from Marion’s analysis the process by which children develop selfhood. They develop selfhood through the flesh-to-flesh experiences of nursing and other interactions with their mothers and other family members. The pleasure a child receives from nursing, for example, gives the child selfhood because it engages the faculty of flesh.<sup>7</sup> In interactions with the mother’s flesh, the child also receives a sense of its own boundaries, the points at which its flesh stops. Although he focuses on romantic love, Marion does briefly but explicitly state that parents, children, and even friends can perform this individualizing function through loving fleshly contact: “I can receive my flesh from the friend, who gives it to me without

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<sup>7</sup> In more technical terms, the pleasure affirms the child’s selfhood because it phenomenizes the intuition given by the mother’s presence and makes the child’s flesh present to the child’s ego, which can then take flesh.

having it, as lover; the friend also embraces me and holds me (but also the mother and the child, the father and the son, etc.)” (220). According to Marion, therefore, a child relates to his parents, and especially his mother, by passively receiving identity through fleshly experience with the mother.

When Tonuene appeals to Brennes to make peace with his brother, baring her body to him functions to emphasize his passivity in relation to her and Belin. She bares and speaks of the parts of her body most closely associated with the birthing and nurturing functions of a mother: her breasts and her womb. In doing so, she invokes the fleshly experience of dependence and receptivity to which Brennes owes his very selfhood. Whereas Brennes has been trying to assert himself as active and honorable, in opposition to his brother, whom he wants to force into passively agreeing to his demands, Tonuene reminds him of his debt to her and his brother. Brennes owes his mother his existence and even the consciousness of self that he uses to assert his rights, and he owes her those things because of the phenomena of birth, flesh-to-flesh nurturing, and face-to-face encounters, all of which he experienced with her before he experienced them with anyone else.

The relationship between brothers flows out of their mutual indebtedness to their parents. Now that she has established a fleshly, familial relation, Tonuene goes on to emphasize the legal and feudal wrong that Brennes has done:

And al forewarde þu breke toward þine breoðer	You break all oaths to your brother.
þu weore his mon bi-cumen and he þe leouede also his sone	You became his man, and he loved you as his son.
Aðes þu him swore swiken þat þu noldest	You swore oaths to him that you would not betray him.



threat, so that conflicts once again spring from one person's denial of passivity. Further, Le Saux acknowledges that the brothers who refuse passivity do so because they feel equal to their elder brothers, erasing the crucial distinction between heir apparent and younger brother. Although different familial relationships are affected by various associations, they all derive from the passive reception of identity from one's parents and king.

I should note a difference between the kind of radical, fleshly passivity that Levinas and Marion discuss and the passive reception of political station. As Levinas demonstrates, the passivity of the subject is logical and inescapable, and claiming autonomy or activity in the face of the Other contradicts one's own mode of being, not to mention that of the Other. Political identity, of course, depends on a socially constructed Totality, and attempting to alter one's place in the political structure, while it does alter one's identity, does not amount to a logical self-construction. Yet, the Britons' foundational metaphor for their race elides this difference.

On a corporate level, Tonuene uses the spectacle of her own body to join not only two brothers, but two peoples together. In one concentrated scene, she reconciles two brothers, both royal and both inheritors of the imperial destiny that followed Brutus out of Greece. She emerges, then, as a metonymic figure, the body politic that gives birth to kin groups that share a fraternal bond, the Britons from Britain and from Brittany. Her body signifies the unity between the Britons and the Normans, casting the Norman Conquest as a means of returning Britain to its ancestral owners. The principle behind Tonuene's speech is that Brennes' actions betray his duties, which are, in turn, based on primal relationships. The oaths Brennes swore gave him an identity as vassal, and his

mother can bring them to bear to convince him to uphold his duties to Belin. As always, peace depends on right family relationships, clear differences between stations in the hierarchy, and a delicate balance between the agency accorded to each member of the political order.

### *Mutual Conquest*

Finding a common enemy can draw allies closer together, as Corineus has already demonstrated, and Belin harnesses that phenomenon to solidify his reunion with his brother. Immediately upon the end of celebrating their new peace, Belin and Brennes hold a counsel and decide to invade France (2560-1). Their own places in the hierarchy now secure, the brothers embark on a campaign to impose their own social structure on another kingdom. This move avoids any resistance to the newly established order in Britain by making it a given in the new conquest, now a much more pressing priority than any misgivings Brennes' followers might secretly nurse. The joint conquest gives the British factions a common enemy, thus uniting them under the renegotiated social identities.

Belin and Brennes' mutual conquest operates to forge peace between them because they can both share honor and agency. It also, however, operates according to a particular facet of the scapegoating mechanism. Le Saux points out that Belin and Brennes justify their new conquest by calling it revenge for Remus' murder by Romulus (a reference to line 2613), and she quips, "l'harmonie fraternelle de Belin et Bennes se trouve affermie grace a un fratricide" ("Relations Familiales," par. 28).<sup>9</sup> This double reference to fraternal strife at the center of conquest makes relevant Girard's theories of

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<sup>9</sup> "The fraternal harmony between Belin and Brennes is strengthened thanks to a fratricide."







poet's attitude toward Ebrauc, the first king to allow his knights to go conquering (“Blisse wes on londe,” 147).<sup>10</sup>

Many literary scholars, then, see that *Lazamon*'s judgments of his kings tend toward requiring their judicious use of violence to establish peace; furthermore, Girard's model and the phenomenology of violence explain how that happens in conquest. Belin and Brennes' appeal to justice functions merely to give them a good that they can share: the spoils of war against a community far removed. The strength of the analogy between this episode and Girard's pattern increases with the reference to another fratricide. The similarities between the fraternal strife at home and that in Rome allow the Britons to feel purified from their own disorder and violence by bringing just violence to a different disordered system. In addition, the victim that they choose to solidify their own reinstated order has committed a crime very similar to that which Belin and Brennes have narrowly avoided committing themselves. Their own crime, in turn, had the capacity to shake the very foundations of British society, family, and royal supremacy; turning their aggressions toward a king who murdered his own brother pretends to seek justice for just such a destabilizing crime. Thus, the choice of victim allows for their antagonism to unite against a scapegoat similar enough to themselves to purge their aggression but far enough removed from them to avoid any perpetuation of the violence within their nation. Because Belin and Brennes choose to avenge a crime similar to the one they are trying to overcome, but which was committed by someone other than them, their mutual conquest of Rome can give the Britons peace.

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<sup>10</sup> A further consideration of Ebrauc's example occurs in the next chapter.

The other important point that Girard makes concerns the staying power of peace founded on scapegoating: the peace will always erode. Girard sees sacrificial rites as systematic reenactments of the original sacrificial violence, occurring perpetually because mimetic conflicts arise continually (“Mimesis and Violence”). Additionally, the system will always lose efficacy over time, the ritual sacrifices becoming too ritualized, too dead. When this happens, the sacrificial crisis repeats itself and issues in another scapegoating event (*Violence and the Sacred*, 49). Thus, peace founded on scapegoating enables further violence against other surrogate victims until the sacrificial crisis repeats itself and the belligerents institute a new sacrificial system. The scapegoating process perpetuates itself, perpetuating limited violence. A long view of Lazamon’s project can illuminate these patterns in ways that approaches focusing on a single character, such as Arthur, cannot.

### *Hostages and Dilemmas*

One theme that Belin and Brennes’ continental conquest illuminates is the uses of hostage-taking for making peace. This section will draw out how the practice of taking hostages involves many of the common motivations for violence in the *Brut*, including revenge, instrumental manipulation, dominance, and honor; it will also draw out how claiming agency comes into play in this practice and why killing hostages does not effect peace. On the way to conquer Rome, the two receive messengers who offer tribute and hostages in exchange for peace. Tribute, hostages, and oaths renegotiating the relative identities of the victor and loser combine into the usual formula for making international peace.



our dear children / than that...we all be dead” (2665-6). Once sure that they have saved Rome and its lands from the ravaging of war (2667-9), they can “turn against” Belin and Brennes “and then attack them / so that they shall never return safe to their land” (2671-2). For the sake of hegemony, the Romans hand over their children, knowing that the children will probably die.

Belin accepts the offer, and he and Brennes decide to conquer Germany instead of Rome (2734). As planned, the Romans send a force to attack Belin and Brennes on a second front while the Britons are engaged in their war against the Germans (2740-1). Angry at the betrayal, the brothers defeat the Germans and proceed back to Rome. They attack the city but cannot breach the walls, so they withdraw, lay siege, and consider their next action (2844-7).<sup>11</sup> Balin and Brennes decide to hang the hostages, but their conversation reveals that they are doing so for more than tactical reasons. “They shall hang,” they say to each other, “and avenge our harms on our enemies” (2850-1). More than a coercive one, hanging hostages “in front of their parents” (2854) serves a vengeful purpose for the brothers.

Hanging the hostages not only serves as revenge for the Britons; it also spurs the Romans to revenge. The narrator comments in an aside, “Therefore it turned out much worse” because the Roman nobles “swore with oaths” that “neither for life nor for death would they ever make peace” (2856-8). When explaining why executing the hostages worsens the war, the narrator emphasizes the proximity and physical visibility of the gallows: the best men of Rome “before their eyes beheld and saw / that their children were hanged on high trees” (2861-2). The repetition of “eyes,” “beheld,” and “saw”

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<sup>11</sup> For an analysis of heroism in this scene, see Donoghue 548-9.

hammers home the importance of the experience of witnessing the death of the children, but the grisly spectacle has no tactical or strategic benefit. It avenges the Britons' harms and causes the Romans to seek revenge, but it does not cow the Romans into asking for peace again or help the Britons take the city.

On the surface, the logic of hostage-taking is simple deterrence, but as this episode reveals, there are different principles at work in hostage-taking practices in the *Brut*. On a theoretical level, "a debtor puts the hostage's treatment and ultimately life entirely in the hands of a creditor or enemy," so that the stronger the affective link between hostage and debtor, the surer the agreement (Kosto, *Hostages in the Middle Ages*, 34). In terms of the categories of violence, taking a hostage allows a victor to wield the threat of vengeful violence even after a war has ended. If the defeated party later breaks the terms of the agreement and the victor kills the hostages, the victor has carried out revenge against the insubordinate loser. In theory, the threat of this revenge could be used as an incentive for the loser to cooperate. Moreover, this dynamic of revenge supposedly curtails violence because of the kinship bond between the hostages and the vanquished leader. The kinship bond works in two ways: it gives incentive for the loser to maintain the terms of peace because he shares blood with the hostages, who therefore are part of his racial identity, and it gives the victor power over the loser's blood relations. Such power over blood relations provides the victor an outlet for his anger, should the loser not accept his new place in the hierarchy—he can take blood vengeance on the effigies of the offending rebel, and that vengeance is all the more satisfying because of the closeness of the hostage's relationship to the loser. Consistently with the view of the nation as family, Ispir states that hostage-taking implies "an axiological contract, where





sources record the execution of hostages, even when the hostage-giver broke the terms of the agreement.

In the *Brut*, as in more traditional historical sources, hostages are executed infrequently; when they are executed, the killing has no discernible effect, unless it be to galvanize the underdog's resistance to the killer's dominance. Whatever the execution may communicate, then, it likely no longer aims to coerce the parents of the hostages. Rather, hanging the Roman hostages probably signifies a rejection of any further alliance between the Britons and their enemies. Belin and Brennes may even intend to provoke the Romans instead of trying to cow them into submission. The gesture may amount to a declaration of no quarter, even inviting the Roman nobles to swear never to make peace, as if inviting a blood feud until the bitter end. A Girardian perspective adds that executing the hostages, thus cutting off any prospective alliance with the Romans, can solidify the Britons among each other by violently separating them from their enemies. In this way, executing hostages works in similar ways to fighting mutual enemies.

The reason that hostageship might work, either as a deterrent or to build alliances, is that the practice takes advantage of kinship ties. Since the Britons conceive of their entire political structure and, indeed, their very identity along familial lines, they put their faith in the care that their enemies would invest in their children. By extension, they also put their faith in their ability to influence the hostages they take, incorporating those hostages into their political and filial system. Unless the hostages marry into a British family—an unlikely outcome for the early, very xenophobic parts of the *Brut*—they will likely continue to be lower in the hierarchy than the Britons, but they will exist within that hierarchy, anyway. Kosto also sees this logic operating in hostageship, concluding





territory wars with Luces. Nevertheless, he does not conquer Britain all at once, initially losing many battles to Cassibelaunus and Androgeus. Yet, the narrator certainly approves of Caesar's leadership: he calls Caesar a "fierce knight" and "the wisest man," and he reports that Caesar's good laws "yet stand in Rome" (3597-3600). His motivations include dominance and honor,<sup>15</sup> as well as revenge.<sup>16</sup>

Despite having motivations that could very easily become emotional, Caesar remains for the most part detached enough from his motivations to remain prudent in his deployment of violence so that his patterns of violence mostly look instrumental. He understands when retreat is a better option than fierce fighting, as when he "saw" Androgeus coming to interrupt his battle with Nennius (3760); knowing he will soon be outnumbered, Caesar promptly lets go of his sword stuck in Nennius' shield and "turned to flee like hell" (3762). In this scene, Caesar's life depends on his ability literally to see beyond the violence that currently engages him and prudently to make decisions about the likelihood that violence will be the most effective means of achieving his goals. It also depends on his ability to prioritize: he has to be willing literally to let go of his sword and figuratively to let go of the individual battle in order to increase his chances of attaining his ultimate goal. Again, some two hundred lines later, in the middle of another campaign to conquer Britain, Caesar orchestrates a midnight retreat back to his ships because "he was aware of his harm," i.e., he knew his disadvantageous position and the casualties inflicted on his army (3980).

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<sup>15</sup> These are his general reasons for wanting to conquer the world, an ambition reported in lines 3590-2.

<sup>16</sup> This is his reason for wanting to conquer Britain, in particular, and it is expressed in lines 3633-4.







(511). When the pattern occurs in the *Brut*, however, it does so because characters have coded the frustration of their wills as resistance to their dominance.

Julius Caesar is an effective leader, an example against which the audience should measure future British kings and emperors. Most of his effectiveness consists of his ability to master violent action and use it exclusively to his benefit. He mostly avoids being blindly sucked into patterns of violence, instead retreating strategically when necessary. His objectivity in the midst of the fog of war, his ability to extract himself from the chaos immediately around him, and his prudent use of non-violent forms of coercion make him an effective conqueror. Nevertheless, even Caesar is not immune from some of the violent excesses that threaten empire-builders, experiencing the temptation to become enraged when Cassibelaunus does not immediately bow to his wishes and cede Britain to him. The Britons' reticence to submit and the protracted war with Caesar serves to increase Britain's national honor without reducing Caesar's admirable qualities.

#### *Cassibelaunus and Androgeus: The Moralization Gap*

The Cassibelaunus-Androgeus episode, which occurs during Caesar's continuing conquest, illuminates another principle of violence: the Moralization Gap, Pinker's name for the "diverging narratives of a harmful event in the eyes of the aggressor, the victim, and a neutral party." That is, the term "Moralization Gap" names the phenomenon whereby the victim of a violent act interprets the harm as greater than the perpetrator does. In real situations, the Moralization Gap plays out "[l]ike opposing counsel in a lawsuit over a tort," in which "the social plaintiff will emphasize the deliberateness, or at least the depraved indifference, of the defendant's action, together with the pain and



The difference between the ways the two kings tell their mutual story illustrates the Moralization Gap. The two parties downplay their own acts of violence and magnify the harms they have suffered, and they participate in escalating reprisals. Seeing no other way out, Androgeus sends an invitation to Julius Caesar to come take Britain. Caesar takes advantage of the division between the two relatives and causes Cassibelaunus to retreat until the British king, fearing for his life, sends a message to Androgeus asking for mercy: “For I have not done so much wrong to you that I should suffer death for it” (4373). Their positions reversed, Cassibelaunus now downplays his wrongs against Androgeus. In response, Androgeus gives a litany of his uncle’s misdeeds. He attributes Cassibelaunus’ aggressions to the other’s *mod*, or pride, and points out all the good he himself has done for the kingdom. Not only has the king done “un-wisdom,” because his “pride drove him on” (4391), but he has displayed hatred against Androgeus so irrational that it spreads into hatred of all that his nephew values (4390). Androgeus feels that Cassibelaunus has deceived himself into believing that he alone was responsible for the Britons’ earlier victory over Caesar—a point he denies twice in almost exactly the same words (4394, 4401)—and that his misfortunes at the hands of Androgeus and Julius Caesar have redeemed the value of his word (4406). From Androgeus’ point of view, Cassibelaunus repaid a loyal vassal’s heroic valor (4396-7) with unreasonable aggression,<sup>21</sup> and while Cassibelaunus’ anger is entirely unjust, Androgeus’ saintly record gives him every right to the violence he has inflicted.

This approach contrasts sharply with Cassibelaunus’ insistence that his actions do not deserve death. Just as *Æuclin* and *Harigal* hit each other harder and harder because of

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<sup>21</sup> The complaint that the king has not properly rewarded his vassals draws on the Anglo-Saxon theory of kingship, concerned with reciprocal obligations, which Sheppard explains so well.





### *Honor in Marriage and Tribute*

During the era when Rome technically owns Britain, the Britons have a complicated relationship with the Romans. At times, beginning with Androgeus, they ask the Romans to protect them, accepting vassal status in return. Repeatedly, however, they defy Roman rule and refuse to pay tribute, causing the Romans to invade again and again. One episode in the midst of all this back-and-forth reinforces the lessons in peacemaking that the audience has already learned from Tonuene. Once again, a mother makes the peace. These episodes demonstrate the identity of dominance with honor, a central correlation that explains many of the *Brut*'s plot points, and they add some nuances to the ability of marriage to encourage peace.

The first British king after Caesar's conquest to withhold treasure from Rome is Wider, who decides that he will refuse to pay tribute and who kills any Roman he finds living in Britain (4590-1). Immediately concerned with "the shame [Wider] had done him" (4595), the current Roman emperor, Claudius, invades. Over the course of the first engagement, Wider dies and his brother Arviragus becomes king. Strife continues under the new king, illustrating the stakes of imperial conquest: both sides are concerned with the matter of tribute, and loss of life occurs on each side primarily because of the implications for the rulers'—and through them, the peoples'—honor. In its turn, honor is bound up with identity and dominance.

When Arviragus hears that Claudius has invaded for the second time, he asks his knights, "[W]ill you help me with great strength / to win my worship here" (4708-9). Claudius hears that the Britons "will not recognize me / nor...hold me as lord" (4726-7). He considers it "great shame" (4728) to lose the "great worship" that his "ancestors won"



reproduce. We have already traced the significance of the means to sire children with respect to honor. For Brutus, the promise of future children amounted to the promise of hegemony over land. Begetting sons allowed him to establish himself and his people as master of Britain, and Ignouen provided him with that opportunity. Claudius extends the same promise to Arviragus, but he also extends a promise of a level of agency to compensate the British king for submitting to Rome. Levinas explains another facet of agency in his analysis of paternity.

For Levinas, relating to a child as the parent accomplishes a move toward transcendence and something of what Martin Heidegger's *Dasein*<sup>22</sup> wishes to achieve: constructing an identity (*Totality and Infinity*, 272). While being one's own source is logically impossible for Levinas, there is a qualified way in which a father can be the source of the son's personhood. In the relationship of paternity, the subject is, in fact, the source of a person like enough to the subject that he is the source of himself. More importantly to an analysis of *Lazamon's* text, Levinas's model accounts for the perception that procreation continues the lives of the parents into the future. Because of the obvious sharing of genetic material between a parent and a child, combined with the fact that human life continues through generations, "the parent's future...is itself opened up" (Mensch 168), continuing into almost infinite possible futures, especially if the father begets more than one child. Only in the relationship of paternity, then, can one approximate the dream of *Dasein*, realizing one's own potential, creating one's own identity.

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<sup>22</sup> *Dasein* (lit. "Being-there") is essentially Heidegger's name for human nature. The aim of *Being and Time* is to illuminate how humans perceive being, and one of the modes of being that Heidegger wants to explain is the human—*Dasein*.



By the logic that ties honor to agency, violence effects honor by definition: avenging oneself on one's enemies reclaims honor, and the violence performs the honor. This principle flows from the coincidence of honor and dominance because the coincidence implies that, if losing one's dominance decreases one's honor, as in Claudius' case, then asserting one's dominance through violence increases one's honor. Imposing violence upon the enemy is the same thing as asserting dominance and thus the same thing as reclaiming honor. The same pattern operates when goods enter the mixture, as when tribute is a sign of dominance and, thereby, of honor.

Girard makes very similar points, using the Greek term *kudos* instead of *honor*. Through his analysis of Greek tragedy, he arrives at a definition of *kudos* as “semidivine prestige, ...mystical election attained by military victory,” and it “passes to the man who strikes the hardest—the victor of the moment” (*Violence and the Sacred*, 152). In the *Brut*, the “victor of the moment” gains honor, which compels deference, even if it does not quite reach the heights of “semidivine prestige.” A failure to respect someone's honor can be described in morally condemnatory terms, such as *betrayal*, and it almost always results in the dishonored person enacting violence. This is precisely because of the equivalency between honor and dominance.

Historically speaking, the unity of honor and violence was strong in the Middle Ages. Kaeuper includes honor as part of the very definition of chivalry, which “results from the powerful bonding of prowess [i.e., the capacity for skillful violence] to honour, piety, status, and love” (125). While Lazamon is not fully invested in the claims of chivalry, his characters do exhibit this mixture of values. Further, “any society animated by a code of honour will be highly competitive” and will demonstrate something like a



is identical to reducing his honor, and Claudius accordingly interprets Arviragus' reticence to yield his "right" as an imputation of shame.

When dominance is so clearly at the center of the dynamics of honor and tribute, the spectrum between activity and passivity is similarly central. Violence reduces a king's ability to demand tribute or protect his people, and doing so reduces the king's active status. He is no longer the primary actor, but loses some of that activity and becomes reactive in relation to the aggressor. As a result, only embodied action reducing the offending party to passivity in turn will restore the lost identity. Bodies and peoples in conflict have access to each other's selfhoods through the concept of honor, and that is the core of the struggle for identity in the *Brut*.

Honor is at the heart of British social organization, and it frequently motivates violence; however, there are ways in which it can avoid self-perpetuation, thus resulting in peace for a time. Honor-motivated violence can preempt cycles of revenge by making a spectacle of those who defy the king's honor, thus discouraging further retribution. Because this pattern reduces the risk of cyclical violence, one man exerting total dominance—and thereby gaining the honor of preeminence—effectively averts self-perpetuating violence. This logic, then, amounts to a justification of the state or of judicial systems, and it informs, for example, Severus' appeal to the Britons, discussed below. When honor-motivated violence does not fulfill these conditions, as in territory wars between large-scale empires, it invites cycles of war. This is the pitfall in effect when Belin and Brennes' conquest of Rome results in centuries of strife between Rome and Britain. In addition to creating a struggle for dominance, these conquests also





themselves, but they also orchestrate peace between their knights (4924-5). Genuis can act as mediator between the factions because she links their identities to each other, putting them into a shared Totality. In addition, the existence of her son Constantin proves that Genuis, a Roman, has fulfilled the politically necessary function of giving the king heirs to continue his bloodline. Emphasizing the bond can, therefore, work to restore peace.

The success of Genuis' peaceweaving demonstrates the centrality of many of the themes we have already noticed, especially unity and agency. Through marriage, a king and his queen can unify both themselves and their people groups, and in this situation, union with a foreigner provides peace for the Britons. In addition, the parents actively donate personhood to their child, thus securing Arviragus' activity in relation to his British subjects and incentivizing his passive cooperation with the Roman demand for tribute.

### *Anarchic Obligations*

The peace that Arviragus has forged with Rome lasts until his great-grandson dies without an heir. The ensuing succession crisis results in periodic British refusal to pay tribute to Rome, frequent Roman reconquests, and frequent usurpations by ambitious lower nobles. The downward spiral halts when one of the usurpers, Coel, makes peace with the Romans by giving his daughter, Helene, to the Roman general who comes to avenge the previous British king. Helene gives birth to another Constantin, who rules well in Britain until he is called by his father's people in Rome to come institute order there. Constantin and his relative Maximien both choose to leave Britain, thus exposing the Britons to violence, and that pattern provides an archetype most memorably reenacted

by Arthur. To start the pattern, Constantin makes his choice out of loyalty to his kin. The current emperor, Maxenz, has been ruling so poorly that Romans have been leaving their home and traveling to Britain because Constantin comes from Roman stock. The exiles appeal to Constantin, asking him to “advise them / how they might avenge their harms / upon Maxenz, who had killed their honor” (5546-8). Finally, the king decides to go to Rome himself “and avenge them on Maxenz, who had shamed his kin” (5552).

Here, Constantin acts in accordance with his kinship bonds, the foundation of social cohesion. His father was Roman, so he owes the Romans vengeance to reclaim their honor. As explained above, inflicting violence can reclaim honor and even inherently accomplishes the honor. Thus, since the stakes are honor and since the Romans are his kin, Constantin’s options are limited. He obeys, then, the established patterns of action for a good king. Yet, obeying the demands of kinship and honor exposes Constantin’s people to oppression. A duke named Octaves, who emerges from Wales, “slew the earls and enslaved the freemen. / He mutilated the reeves; he left none alone” (5589-90). The result of his harrying is that “all this kingdom Octaves took to his hand” (5591). Constantin cannot return to take Britain back from Octaves because of his new responsibilities as emperor of Rome (5595-6), so he quickly educates his mother’s uncle Traher and sends him to conquer the island (5598-9). Traher’s attempts are unsuccessful, and in the end, Octaves kills all the Romans in Britain: “the great and the rich, they slew all alike,” and “wheresoever he might recognize [a Roman], he never left a single one [alive]” (5676-7).

Lynch notes that Lazamon seems to correlate Octaves’ total destruction with long-lasting peace (“Blisse wes on londe,” 53); in addition, this episode reveals the

consequences of a ruler's priorities. Constantin prioritizes his lands in Southern Europe to the detriment of Britain. Whereas he chooses to go himself to avenge the honor of the Romans, he sends only a hastily trained deputy to take Britain back from Octaves. It would be difficult to argue that *Lazamon* condemns Constantin for either choice because Constantin acts consistently with the rules of hegemony established so far in the *Brut*: he responds to the diminished honor of his kin, and he feels responsible for the land he conquers as a result. However, Constantin's choices certainly do cause harm to the Britons. Thus, the king acts nobly, but his predicament illustrates a conflict between noble values. The stress that the *Brut*'s political theory puts on family relations demands that Constantin go to Rome, and the stress that the *Brut* puts on the responsibility of a ruler to maintain the peace of his conquered lands demands that he stay there. Yet, when Constantin sends a Roman host to retake Britain, the purely Welsh Octaves sees them as outsiders, and Constantin's absence creates a power vacuum. The vacuum itself is a function of founding royal authority on a king's projected image because if a king must project an image of undeniable superiority, then one who sends weak deputies invites contestations of his rule. Constantin finds himself in a no-win situation, and any blame-finding disperses responsibility for the tragedy too broadly for meaningful moralizing.

Historically, the means available for a king to exert authority over the geographical area he ruled allowed for much potential rebellion. As Chris Dennis argues, relying on the physical presence of troops and medieval methods of communication limited a king's real power to exert authority "at any one moment...to the area where he was to be found" (Dennis 33). A system of peacekeeping that requires a king to be physically present in order to enforce his laws is, for obvious reasons, difficult to

maintain, and medieval kings tried to establish systems of protection that would enable them to enforce laws without their presence (Lambert 3). Thus, an absentee king always away on conquest, or always away to oversee affairs in a distant land, presented real dangers to medieval Britons, and Lazamon's poem draws on that danger when it tells the story of the competing loyalties that Constantin must negotiate.

The unsatisfying result of any attempt to find someone to blame for Octaves' ascendancy demonstrates the balance necessary to understand Lazamon's theory of royal succession. We could try to place the blame on one of Constantin's ancestors, but even that endeavor would defer the point of blame too far into the past to make the judgment meaningful unless one traced the ultimate cause back to the inability of King Luces, several generations previously, to perpetuate his bloodline with a direct heir. It is the legitimacy and succession crisis in this section of the poem that calls into question the heavy emphasis that some critics put on a performative model of kingship. More convincingly, Marcum argues that authority in the *Brut* inevitably includes ownership of land on the Anglo-Norman model. This model stipulates that a king own the land and distribute it to vassals, who then owe the king "warranty, homage, service," while the king owes his vassals "inheritable rights" (389). Marcum's model of authority does not dispense with the performative duties of the king or with the king's obligations to his people, which Sheppard wants to protect, but neither does it ignore that Lazamon writes in Anglo-Norman England or the clearly important issues of land ownership and legitimate succession. The importance of succession reflects political theory in Lazamon's time, as well: Brenda Bolton and Christine Meek take it as fundamental that medieval political theory required rulers to possess both authority and power to be

legitimate (2). Thus, the inclusive political theory that Marcum proposes captures Lazamon's attitudes toward succession such that it can explain the crisis that begins with Luces' death more fully than any of the other options proposed by Lazamon scholars.

Octaves actually rules well enough, but when, at the end of his life, he has only a female heir (fitting, perhaps, for a persistent conflict with Rome that began with the lack of an heir), he resorts to inviting the Romans back to Britain. He offers his daughter Orient to the Emperor Maximien, who accepts and rules Britain well. However, Lazamon reports that Maximien is "too merry" (5832) and, therefore, goes back to Rome to "avenge his harms upon Gracien and Valentin" (5830). Whatever it means for a character in the *Brut* to be "too merry," it must include being discontent with what one has, for Lazamon contrasts that assertion with the observation that "this land was very good then, and he had it all under foot" (5833). Maximien should have remained in Britain and settled with what he had, Lazamon implies; too much ambition in a king can translate into threat for his people.

Maximien goes off conquering, leaving Adionard as his regent in Britain and setting Conan up as vassal in Brittany, which the Britons under Maximien rename (5894). He gets all the way to Rome and avenges himself on Gracien and Valentin, but their kin rise up, free the imprisoned Romans, and kill Maximien. Valentin then begins to rule Rome, and Gracien takes Britain. Gracien turns out to be such a bad ruler that non-nobles, Ethelbald and Alfwald, gather support from some commoners and kill Gracien in the woods (6116-50).

Maximien's ambition, then, causes him to forsake Britain, and concern for his honor and his kin in Rome lead to his death. In this case, the desire to conquer land and to

avenge affronts to honor cause negative consequences for the Britons. Lazamon even explicitly condemns Maximien for his conquering (“too merry,” 5832); and yet, conquering and avenging honor are far from intrinsically dangerous in the *Brut*. The operative difference between Ebrauc, the first conquering British king, and the cases of Constantin and Maximien is that they choose to leave Britain because of kinship bonds pulling them toward Rome. Thus, these two emperors choose naturally and rightly, but their rules and misrules demonstrate why kinship bonds with foreign peoples present dangers to the Britons. Whereas Genuis wove peace for a time, intermarriage also has unintended consequences that work against British peace during the reigns of Constantin and Maximien. If his loyalty is divided among kin too far apart from each other, a king will be unable to perform his duties to both peoples.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Conclusion: Romans Leave*

Eventually, a troublesome vassal ceases to be worth the effort necessary to keep him in line—so says the Roman emissary Febus after he saves the Britons from Melga and Wanis, whom the next chapter will discuss. The Romans will no longer assist the Britons against their enemies even for promises of fidelity and tribute, Febus states, because the Britons have proven themselves incapable of keeping their oaths of fealty (6231-2). He bequeaths Britain to the Britons to “hold it in [their] own hand” (6238), emphasizing a cost-benefit analysis as his reason: “We have gained many thousands of pounds from this land / ...but they are very dearly purchased” (6241-2). Here, Rome acts not as a malevolent conqueror but as a benevolent overlord. The Britons chafed against

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<sup>23</sup> This point, as well, has potential for timely critique. Anglo-Norman England, sometime around Lazamon’s lifetime, experienced many conflicts over the right of the English kings to control land in Brittany.

the honor and tribute they had sworn to give Rome, and now, relieved of the obligation, they also sacrifice the security they had enjoyed as vassals under Rome's protection. A strong overlord is necessary for protection from invasion, but the Britons have rejected for the last time the security they could have enjoyed for the price of submitting to Rome.

This first experiment with intermarriage and empire ultimately places insular kinship and its attendant violence back in the center of Lazamon's concerns. The Britons refuse to acknowledge the authority of anyone not of their blood, and when there is no king present on the island who shares their blood, they refuse to debase themselves by paying tribute for long. They made peace through intermarriage with the Romans, and while some of the resulting kings rule better because of their Roman ties, they are also liable, by the very logic that leads to peace through marriage, to choose to move too far away from Britain. Neither the Britons nor the Romans are faithful enough to provide much long-lasting peace.

Julius Caesar's conquest demonstrates the long-lasting power of national honor and the drive to avenge one's kin. Caesar also provides a good example of judicious uses of violence because he is always willing to retreat when necessary and, usually, aware of when retreat is necessary. The conflict between Androgeus and Cassibelaunus illustrates the Moralization Gap, which accounts for the psychology of resistance to violently imposed order and conquest. The back-and-forth between paying and not paying tribute to Rome reveals that geographical distance causes an emperor's perceived authority to diminish, and the dynamic of tribute reveals the workings of honor: paying tribute constitutes submission, which implies a loss of honor, and the act of exerting violence upon an offender accomplishes, in the act itself, regaining one's honor. The Britons reject



Roman authority until the Romans finally give up trying to subdue their underlings, revealing that the Britons cannot be governed by an emperor in a different land and, more generally, that a conquered people always has the potential to rebel.

Finally, the succession crisis that results in the back-and-forth with Rome has emptied Britain of its ruling class. The various usurpations that arise from Britain's distance from Rome, plus the absence of a strong resident heir, leave Britain ripe for invasion and rebellion. The next chapter will consider the qualities that allow kings successfully to reinstate order and deter invasion.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Contested Britain

Britain's dealings with Rome provide a lot of data for understanding the rules for empire in the *Brut*, just as the first 2,000 lines provide data for understanding the Britons' self-conception. All of the patterns that determine Layamon's attitude toward violent action and various methods of making peace continue to operate in the final pre-Arthur section of the poem. This chapter will consider a variety of leaders and enemies, focusing on some notable successes and failures. Throughout these episodes, a central question at work is how the Britons can defend themselves from invasion, and the answer, naturally a violent one, is to trust in the deterrence of a strong king. Ebrauc, Leil, and Ruhhudibras showcase how strong kings can either use violence to protect peace in the realm or fail to do so. King Maurus illustrates a successful use of violent spectacle to deter invasion and create an identity for himself. The pirates Melga and Wanis, who attack Briatin during the Roman vassalage, reveal the disastrous consequences of the lack of a strong king as well as of the evacuation of Britain's nobility that occurs after Constantin. Vortiger, who uses various covert and violent means to usurp the British throne, serves as an example of too much ambition for power and too little consideration of others' wills. When the Britons finally execute Hengest, the Saxon who outsmarts Vortiger, their process of deliberating about how to do so invites analysis of how violence creates identity not just for the enactor but also for the recipient. Finally, Uther's struggle against the Saxons introduces the idea that honor, gained through dominance, constitutes a king's identity.

Trusting in one man's deterrence places identity once again in the center of the *Brut's* concern regarding the identity a king must project for himself and for his people.

### *Strong Kings*

Although it becomes very relevant after the succession debacle that follows Constantin's move to Rome, the principle of the need for a strong king starts much earlier in the *Brut*. Brutus' settling efforts established the importance of capital punishment to maintaining order among the Britons: his immediate successors, after Loclin, develop Lazamon's political vision in important ways. Not only foreign peoples, but also the Britons themselves are susceptible to the temptation to break the king's peace, and one major factor that determines whether society is open to such threats is the king's strength. The *Brut* is full of kings who do not live up to Brutus' stern precedent, but a positive example will help to clarify some of the rules for good kingship. Guendoleine's son and grandson each have crucial flaws that trouble their reigns, but her great-grandson exhibits the qualities of a good ruler. The narrator says,

þe was ihaten Ebrauc æðelest alre  
kingen  
þe æuer sculde halden lond oþer bi-  
witen leode  
Al his cun he wurðede richen and  
wrecchen  
þa richen he lette beon stille þa  
wrecchen hefden heore wille  
þat lond heo lette tilien him tuwen  
hired-men to  
blisse wes on londe a feole kunne  
þinge

[one son of Membriz] who was called  
Ebrauc, the noblest of all kings  
that should ever hold the land or look  
after the people.  
He respected all his kin, rich or poor;  
he let the rich be, and the poor had  
their will.  
He made the land to be tilled; hired  
men set themselves to it.  
Bliss was in the land in all kinds of  
things.

Heo heold swiðe god grið ne breac na  
man his frið

They held very good peace; no man  
would break his peace.

Cnihtes he hæfde gode stronge and  
wode

He had good knights, strong and  
energetic. (1306-13)

Ebrauc is a good king, the first one since Brutus whose character is not marred in some way. The narrator's description of his reign points out that the land experiences "bliss" because of the freedom that the king extends to his nobles and the aid that he extends to the poor. Not only that, but he shows respect to everyone and accords a measure of agency to everyone, even allowing the poor to have "their will." The word that Lazamon uses to describe Ebrauc's respect is *wurðede*, related to the modern English *worship* as well as to the concept of honor. Thus, although good kings enforce their laws strictly, for which this passage also praises Ebrauc, and although their agency in enforcing the law over everyone gives them the preeminent honor in the land, they must also show honor to their vassals. Considering his vassals' needs and wills gives Ebrauc the lordship bonds he needs to maintain good relations with his knights. Finally, it is very important for the peace of the realm that Ebrauc's knights are strong and *wode*, a word that applies in the general sense of *energetic* but also frequently appears as a descriptor of knights in the midst of battle, meaning something more like *battle-mad*.

Describing the knights as *wode* lays bare the double bind to which Ebrauc and all British kings are subjected. On one hand, their purpose is to provide for their people and maintain peace; on the other hand, they maintain peace through a monopoly on violence, "the pre-conditions for war," and all this amounts to "a systemic problem for peace in Lazamon," says Lynch ("Blisse wes on londe," 47). This tension comes to a head when the energy that makes Ebrauc's knights so useful overflows, and they "willed to go to war" (Lazamon 1314). Although Ebrauc knows that "their god was angry with them" for their aggression (1314-5), he respects their wishes. To direct their energies, Ebrauc sends

“his noble knights” conquering in France (1318-9). The first king after Brutus to thoroughly institute peace, to serve as an effective deterrent to both insurrection and invasion, finds himself in need of a scapegoat. To avoid civil unrest, he must find an outsider to antagonize, creating the same kind of harmony and unity with his knights that Brutus found with Corineus. The difference, of course, is that Brutus’ violence settles a land, whereas Ebrauc’s knights conquer one that is not theirs through prophecy. The source of Lazamon’s anxiety, though, is that there is little viable alternative for a successful king.

Ebrauc’s good reign passes to his son, who rules uneventfully, and then to his grandson Leil, whose reign shows how a king can lose his land’s peace. Leil starts out “[holding] the land well” and enforcing “strong laws” (1390). However, “toward his life’s end... / all his noble earls and his great barons / made much unrest, and they would not hold the peace for [the sake of] the king” (1391-3). Unlike Ebrauc, whose peace no one was willing to break, Leil in his old age loses his grip on his nobles. This is the rhetoric Kaeuper thinks of when he claims that “Lazamon links proud and competitive knighthood with disorder” (119). Other agents of disorder plague the kings of Britain, though, including loose social structure (Kleinman, “The Æðelen of Engle”), the constant and often unexplained motive of betrayal (Wickham-Crowley, “Cannibal Cultures”), and resistance to being conquered (Tiller, “The Truth”). Above, Baswell has already noted that localized violence and private war remained a possibility and a threat throughout the century immediately preceding Lazamon, and Allen points out that “[a]ll four of the kings Lawman might have known, Henry II, Richard, John, and Henry III, faced rebellion, all from their own family circle” (“Eorles and Beornes,” 14). The most significant difference

between Leil and Ebrauc, however, is a “gap” between king and men along a more thane-like structure than the feudal one Kaeuper probably has in mind (Sheppard, “Of This Is a King’s Body Made”; Dennis, “Image-Making for the Conquerors of England,” 51). Leil loses control of his lords, the means by which he keeps order. As surely as a good king rules sternly and executes justice against peace-breakers, he must also retain good relations with the knights who guarantee the reach of his law. A king must know how to use violence and how to maintain control over the instruments of that violence.

Lazamon’s disapproval of these power struggles appears to be informed by the realities of his historical contexts as much as by an intellectual commitment to political theory. Lazamon’s utilitarian use of the strength of kings is one point of evidence in favor of the peace-loving poet that Lynch proposes behind the *Brut*’s construction. The poet’s respect for peacemaking authority is also what leads Stanley and Brennan to claim that the ability to uphold peace is the primary criterion in Lazamon’s mind when he evaluates rulers. Thematizing violence makes visible how crucial mastery over the uses of violence is for a king, even when the king uses his mastery of violence to create peace.

The lawlessness that began in Leil’s rule continues into the rule of his son, Ruhhudibras, who restores peace by enforcing “strong laws” and instituting capital punishment as the price of breaking the peace (1404-7). This episode reinforces the importance of violence to the king’s peacekeeping efforts that first came into play during Brutus’ rule: the Britons devolve into instrumental violence without the leadership of a king who enforces laws with the threat of death. Anarchy characterized by instrumental violence is the default condition of unchecked Britons. This saga of kings from Ebrauc to Ruhhudibras also highlights the importance of the king’s image. Unless he projects the

image of someone who can override willful barons, Leil cannot control his nobles and thus cannot guarantee peace for his people.

The need for a strong king who wields violence correctly and absolutely results from the inescapability of violence in the *Brut*. Precisely because the poem establishes a world that began in violence and never escapes, it must conceive of peace as dependent upon the threat of violence. Das states that “in the regions of the imaginary, violence creates divisions and connections that point to the tremendous dangers that human beings pose to each other” (12). As a part of the imaginary, literary representations of violence can have this effect. The embodied experience of violence, then, can account for the constant reinforcement of the necessity of a strong king for deterrence. Violence creates the knowledge of vulnerability for Das, and it arises from the knowledge of vulnerability for Levinas.<sup>1</sup> In either case, incidents of violence highlight vulnerability and, thereby, instigate fear, prioritize the need for safety, and lead to hope in deterrence. Lazamon’s focus on the necessity of a strong king reveals the anxiety about vulnerability that is at the heart of the Britons’ political structure; further, the poem thereby reveals the centrality of violence to the chronicle’s plot and the Britons’ worldview.

The *Brut*’s logic of peace through violence is what Levinas would call the peace of empires, which ends in tyranny because, in its pursuit of “the non-violence of the totality,” it fails to “secur[e] itself against the violence from which this non-violence lives” (*Totality and Infinity*, 46). By contrast,

ethics involves self-limitation. The ethical person does not do all that his free spontaneity suggests—in particular, he does not do all that he has power to do with regard to the Other. To do so would be to treat the person as a thing, as a

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of Levinas on the knowledge of vulnerability, see the section on Vortiger in the present chapter.

mere means to his ends. Ethics, in other words, reveals itself in the imbalance of power. A society, for example, shows its ethical aspect in its treatment of the most vulnerable, those least able to resist its action. Nothing limits society's treatment of this class except itself. Its motive for doing so is not the power of this class, but rather the ethical calling into question of its spontaneity. (Mensch 32)

In the *Brut*, the only way to curb abuse of the vulnerable is to trust in the agency of the king, who in the best of circumstances is given opportunity to prove that he can bring others to total passivity. In Levinas's words, the king will "do all that he has power to do," and in Laȝamon's parlance, he will "do all his will." Limiting his spontaneity produces a weak image, and mercy is itself a spontaneous action, equally as possible as violence. Thus, in setting up a system to curb spontaneity (i.e., instrumental violence, characterized in the *Brut* by doing "al heora iwilla," "all their will"), the Britons invest such spontaneity in a single person, to whom in turn they give the responsibility of upholding the entire nation's honor.

In his discussion of *cyclothymia*, Girard argues that systems of this sort inevitably fall back into violence. The term *cyclothymia* is a psychological description of fortune's wheel. *Thymia*, or kudos, never remains with a single person forever, but constantly shifts hands. Because of the constant reversal of roles in cyclothymia, the net effect of a system characterized by cyclothymia is the erasure of differences (*Violence and the Sacred*, 154-58). Crucial differences in the *Brut* include that between a king and a vassal, between rulers, between siblings, and between peoples. That erasure of differences, so threatening in the story of Fereus and Poreus, then results in a general grab for honor—kudos, for Girard. A state of affairs characterized by mimetic desire, revenge, and a struggle for honor builds into a sacrificial crisis—i.e., more violence. Founding a society on a single



man's kudos, figured in the medieval mind as worship, then, founds society on the very quality that ensures continual return to violence.

*Maurus: A Success Story*

Another example of ideal kingly use of violence is Maurus' execution of Rodric, and this example illustrates how spectacular violence can guide witness interpretation in a way that encourages long-term peace. Maurus is the child of Arviragus and Genuis, whose marriage wove peace between the Britons and the Romans under Claudius' rule and then again under Vespasian's. He is "sent to Rome to learn in school, / where he was so well taught that he was a scholar and a good knight" (4935-6). Once he has grown into his potential, he receives a message that his father has died and that "he must come soon to his kingdom" (4939). The word that *Lazamon* uses for *kingdom* is *kinedom*, a formulation that links the kingdom to the concept of kin. Maurus obeys the summons "immediately" (4940), following the compulsion of kinship bonds to take control of the land. His response shows a benefit of intermarriage with a power such as Rome, in that it allows the British crown prince to receive quality training, which he then uses in service of his people's welfare. The Britons' inclusion in a foreign Totality, provided that their rulers continue to honor the obligations put upon them by their blood ties to Britain, can work in their favor.

At one point in his rule, Maurus confronts an invasion by a Pictish army led by the evil Rodric. The narrator takes pains to emphasize just how evil Rodric is, suggesting that he sees adulthood as the opportunity to "beg[i]n doing evil." To that end, he sets out from home and "did evil and never good" (4950-1). He "buried many hundreds" of people (4952) before he lands in Scotland, where he "wasted all that land," inflicts "the

greatest of harms,” and “pillaged and did harm” (4953-4). In response, Maurus sends out a summons for soldiers, appealing to their “honor” (4958), and marches against Rodric. The battle finishes swiftly with the Picts losing. Rodric “was slain there, and then pulled apart by horses” (4963). After this symbolic execution, Maurus “did a noteworthy thing” (4964): he commissions a stone, on which he inscribes the details of the battle he just won and of how he dismembered Rodric (4964-9). The narrator approves, calling the stone “very marvelous” and engraved with “marvelous letters” (4967-8).<sup>2</sup> Upon the stone, Maurus records “how he slew Rodric and drew him apart with horses, / and how he overcame the Picts in battle” (4968-9). The narrator approves not only of the marker, but also of the king’s engraving the battle upon the land by setting up the stone, which “yet stands there / and will stand as long as the world lasts” (4971). Even better, Maurus gives the battleground a name, which also lasts into the poet’s day (4972-5). Maurus renders his dominance and agency over his realm unquestionable by dominating the bodies of the Picts and their leader and by erecting a landmark and naming a place. The Britons continue to enforce their superiority when they round up the 1,500 Pictish knights who remain alive after the battle. Trapping the fleeing Picts, the Britons “captured them all and slew none of them. / They bound them fast and brought them to the king, / that the king should decide their fate, whether to slay them or hang them” (4898-91). Deprived even of the free movement of their bodies, the Picts are entirely at the mercy of the Britons. They exercise the only option available to them when they ask for the king’s mercy, promising to become his vassals (4992-5).

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<sup>2</sup> The word I translate *letters* is *run-stauen*, and as Roberts shows, there is no settled interpretation of the kenning (455-56). Regardless, all translations include the sense that there is writing on the stone.

In a change of pace, Maurus grants mercy to the remaining knights, sparing their lives and parceling out land for them. Whereas the narrator gives the Picts' request in direct speech to add drama, the next line relates the king's decision in jarring matter-of-fact fashion, saying, "The king did just as they asked" (4996). In fact, the king acts not only mercifully but generously, giving his subdued foes "a great deal of land" (4997). On the other hand, the land that he gives them is in "Catenes" (4998), which Allen takes to mean Caithness, on the far northern tip of Scotland. Thus, while both merciful and generous, Maurus does follow the conventional wisdom of the *Brut*, according to which the presence of foreigners in Britain threatens the king's peace. Octaves will later solve the problem of Romans in Britain by slaughtering all of them, but Maurus favors increasing distance between the Britons and potential enemies, as Membricius had advised Brutus to do so long ago.

After they establish farms on their new land, the Picts send messengers to ask the Britons for women so that they can start families. "When the Britons heard this," however, "it seemed shameful to them," so they "told them to go away and flee from their land" (5012-3). This refusal follows the same logic that governed Brutus' marriage to Ignoien, but with the Britons on the other end. Having established their superiority and the Picts' contemptibility, the Britons perceive marriage with the Picts, with its attendant alliances, as an admission of equality with a lesser people. The lowly Picts deserve no incorporation into the Britons' familial system. Consistently with the economy of honor in the *Brut*, "the Picts were shamed" by the refusal (5015). The Britons' enforcing their superiority automatically and reciprocally dishonors the Picts. According to the usual patterns, the Picts should retaliate with rage, but Lazamon has them demurely turn "to

their kin” in Ireland and repeat their request (5016). Lacking the strength to take revenge for their shame, the Picts have no choice but to accept the Britons’ decision. The king of Ireland grants their request, the Picts establish a Gaelic-speaking community on their land, and *Lazamon* finishes the story, “thus they are there now and evermore” (5023). While this unexpected story leaves room for peace in the *Brut*’s world, it demonstrates the choices left to someone contemplating vengeance—he can either act violently or overlook the harm altogether. Thus, the options available in scenarios in which characters could choose revenge are activity and passivity; choosing not to take revenge amounts to foregoing agency in favor of accepting passivity. The Britons’ might, reinforced by the spectacle of Rodric’s death and the resulting intimidation, deters any attempt at vengeance. The Picts have accepted the identity of a vanquished and separated people, an identity imposed on them by their loss in battle and by the dismemberment of their leader. In this case, then, the Britons accede to their goal of using violence to impose an identity upon their foes, thereby claiming the identity of victor for themselves.

As well as relating a conflict between Totalities, this story involves the same theme of unity that has guided so much of the *Brut*’s concerns. Burek, for instance, sees Rodric’s dismemberment as a foreshadowing of “the permanent divide created between the British and Pictish peoples” when the Picts are denied wives. She reads the denial as consistent with the Britons’ self-understanding as a cohesive unit that cannot be compromised by intermarriage (114). When two self-contained systems, imagined as Totalities, come into contact with each other, they automatically define themselves against each other, thus putting themselves into a struggle for place in a hierarchy. Once the Picts have entered Britain, they must either disappear through genocide or exile, or be

established in the hierarchy. Violence creates identity, and international violence determines the identities of the agonists because it pits two self-contained systems of meaning and identity against each other.

As well as deterring the Picts from avenging their shame, Maurus' monument allows him to control future interpretations of the battle and execution. Using spectacles and monuments as aids to guide witnesses' interpretation is a special case falling under the general category of behavior that constructs a Totality.<sup>3</sup> Maurus is at pains to construct an identity for himself, and he does so through demonstrating his superiority over Rodric. To better ensure that the narrative will favor him, he uses the monument inscribed with the violent story. He cannot continue violently to impose his own narrative upon any dissenters, for constant recourse to violence signals a loss of real power, as Carroll remarks (29). Thus, he needs an objective, visible testament to his narrative.

Even so, Rodric's docile followers are by far an exception to the rule, and future generations of Picts, who now own land on the same island as the Britons, will persistently break British peace. Vortiger's struggles against the Picts that he double-crosses dramatize the much more common pattern of repeated attempts to enact violent revenge. The obligation to avenge one's kin, the destructive consequences of a king's binding himself to evil foreigners, and the dictates of kinship obligations all come crashing together in Vortiger's arc.

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<sup>3</sup> For an interesting tangential discussion of the role of witnesses in medieval dueling violence, see Falk.

*Melga and Wanis: A King's Deterrence*

Before Melga and Wanis appear, Britain has undergone a depletion of its nobility. When Constantin leaves to go to Rome, the illegitimate Octaves kills many of the highborn Britons so that he can take over. When Octaves dies, he leaves no heir, so he asks Maximien to reinstitute order. Maximien soon leaves and goes back to Rome, taking a large portion of Britain's knights with him. He also commands his regent in Britain, Aðionard, to send women to aid the settling process in the newly colonized Brittany. The land's noble stock thus significantly depleted, Aðionard reigns, but there are too few kings' or dukes' sons left to rule. The land is extremely vulnerable to Melga and Wanis' opportunism because it lacks both a king and the security infrastructure provided by his knights and lords.

Not only is Britain almost devoid of nobles, but it will soon have far fewer women, as well. Conan, whom Maximien has set up as king in Brittany, asks Aðionard for women from Britain to help Conan's people colonize Brittany. In particular, he asks for Aðionard's own daughter Ursele to be his queen. Aðionard responds in a way that the narrator says deserves honor (5950), agreeing immediately. He says, "May Conan have honor because he desires my daughter" (5951), and he promises to send many more women along with her, threatening them with torture and death if they refuse (5952-5). The poem thus emphatically establishes the propriety of alliances between Britain and Brittany. The two peoples share kinship bonds already because Conan settled Brittany, and furthering those bonds through marriage is honorable. Like Locrin's marriage to Guendoleine and Brennes' to the Duke of Burgundy's daughter, this alliance between

two allies honors both parties by appropriately linking their political and family structures.

The number of women slated to go to Brittany swells when the British women hear that Ursele will go. For love of the princess, “more [women] than they reckoned” volunteer to help settle Brittany (5964). In the end, twenty-seven ships full of women depart from Britain (5967), but they never arrive at their destination. They encounter a storm that renders them entirely powerless, and the form of the poem emphasizes their passivity in relation to the active voice that describes the elements. While “the wind arose upon them” and the “hail and rain arose,” the women and the sailors “shuddered for fear” at the sight (5973-5). The ship-bound humans can only react to the very forceful weather. Their passivity only increases as many ships sink and the women seem to be left aboard their ships without captains to steer them. In romance, women cast in rudderless ships typically serve as an allegory for the Church at the mercy of the forces of chaos with only God to guide her. However, according to Cooper, “[t]he very danger of being adrift in a rudderless boat,” paradoxically ensures that the protagonists live through their peril (107). This familiar trope probably would have suggested itself to *Lazamon* and his audience, especially because Ursele was an important medieval saint. However, unlike the ordinary course of the trope, Ursele’s ships are spotted by two “outlaws” (*Lazamon* 5995). This pair of outlaws, cast out from Denmark and Norway, spy the ships and assuming that they carry riches and “some rich king” (6015) declare that they will “deprive him of his life-days,” but only “if he is not of our laws” (6021). Having thus taken advantage of the unlucky king, they will “take in hand their silver and their gold” and “boast about the profit” (6022-3).

Reduced to passivity, the women are entirely vulnerable to the pirates' violence. Melga and Wanis, for their part, signal that possessions, dominance, and honor motivate their violence. They want to take the silver and gold that they imagine is on the ships, presumably for the intrinsic value of the treasure. They also want to impose their laws upon the king whom they surprise. Because establishing one's laws is the function of a king, their ambition to impose laws upon a king signals that Melga and Wanis aim to exert power over their victims. Finally, they also plan to boast to their followers about their conquest, revealing that they intend to leverage their instrumental violence for its implications for their reputation, their honor such as it is among depraved pirates.

When the outlaws discover the actual contents of the ships, they inflict gendered violence upon the women. Ursele receives a harsher martyrdom in Lazamon's *Brut* than she does in its sources. Julia Marvin points out that she "is not allowed the chastity and dignity of a quick martyrdom" ("The English *Brut* Tradition," 229). Indeed, in Lazamon's version, Melga subjects Ursele not only to rape, imparting "shame" to her (6038), but subsequently to gang rape by his followers (6039-40). By contrast, in Wace the pirates simply pressure the captive women to have sex with them, then kill the ones who refuse (155).

As Fincke and Shichtman argue about the Arthurian portion of the *Brut*, rape "coalesces several anxieties about the maintenance of boundaries," specifically, "the boundaries between those born to wealth and those born to poverty, between those trained to fight and those who are not" (68). Those distinctions have been compromised by the long and persistent depletion of British nobility. Because "Conan had led very many [knights] to Armoriche, / and Maximien led many to Rome," Melga and Wanis



hear that “Britain was emptied of knights” (Lazamon 6047). As before when they seized the opportunity to exploit Ursele’s ships, the Scandinavian partners now invade Scotland, where they, like Rodric, “rode through the land and harried and burned; / they took possessions and slew that people” before heading south for Britain (6051-4). Parallel to their capture of the women, the pirates now take control of Britain because the island has been left adrift without strong guides, and the pirates see an opportunity to gain riches and dominance. To protect the land from such threats, Britain needs not only a strong king, but also, in this instance, good knights to follow the king.

This time, when invaders come south from Scotland, the Britons have no strong king such as Maurus to protect them. Afraid of the oncoming slaughter, the Britons send to Rome, asking Maximien for help. Maximien sends Gracien, with whom he has made peace, but after driving out Melga and Wanis, Gracien rules too harshly and “the people were hateful to him” (6110). In response, a pair of brothers, “noble-born churls” from East Anglia (6114-5), send word to Gracien that they want to meet and ask for his mercy (6122-3). When Gracien accepts the offer, however, the brothers and their 700 followers, all churls, carry “a strong staff” and, concealed in their clothes, “very long knives” (6121-8). Because they do not appear threatening, the churls are able to ask Gracien’s soldiers where he is, and the soldiers point the way without suspecting anything. The churls find the king hunting in a forest, trick him, and ambush him. They use their knives to “cut him all to pieces” (6149). Britain descends once again into chaos after they kill a king whom his people hated so much that a group of churls take it upon themselves to assassinate him. “Then was every churl as bold as an earl,” the narrator reports, “and all the lowborn as [bold as if] they were kings’ sons” (6154-5). News comes quickly to Melga and Wanis

that lowborn Britons “had set all this kingdom in churls’ hands” (6161). Glad to hear of the chaos in Britain, the two pirates invade once more. The Britons receive help again from Rome, but the general that Rome sends, Febus, warns that Rome will not help again. The next time Melga and Wanis invade, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Guencelin, goes to ask Aldroein, the King of Brittany, to deliver Britain from their threat. In his speech requesting help, he says, “For your father took all the strong knights from Britain / ...and thus is Britain’s land emptied of people” (6356, 6359).

In his speech, Guencelin mentions to Aldroein, “You are of our kin” (6371). The archbishop puts his case so well “that King Aldroein understood it” (6372) and promises to send his brother Constantin. Like Maurus before him, who came from Rome to protect his father’s kingdom, and like the first Constantin, who heeded a call to go from Britain to Rome, this second Constantin goes to his relatives’ kingdom and institutes peace. Thus, Maximien’s institution of a British bloodline in Brittany, although it causes a nobility leak, also provides for a royal bloodline that can come back and take control of Britain. Thanks to the new Constantin’s timely arrival, in Robert M. Stein’s words, “Britain is repopulated with Britons” (110). It also operates, of course, to justify the Norman invasion as a repetition of this repopulation.

Because they are opportunists, Melga and Wanis repeatedly invade Britain when they think that its rulers are personally weak or lack the forces necessary to repel their attack. Especially if members of the lower classes hold sway in the realm, rather than a king, the pirates feel optimistic about their chances of conquering Britain. Thus, the threat of invasion increases significantly when the people lack a strong king or indeed a king at all. One way a sovereign can mitigate the danger of such invasions is to project an image

of untouchable strength. Setting himself up as unambiguously possessed of the will to power and the ability to enforce that will can intimidate opportunistic invaders like Melga and Wanis. Crucial to his image of untouchable strength are demonstrations of his mastery of violence, such as Maurus displays, and a network of loyal knights, through whom he can extend his power and protection over a larger territory.

Staudigl argues that violence is always about “the *meaningful* constitution of...the genesis of the self” (Introduction, 20)—that is, about identity construction—and we have noted that the identity any king ought to construct for himself, in Lazamon’s view, is that of a strong, dominant ruler capable of keeping the peace. Pinker, too, concludes that an evolutionary use for revenge includes establishing a reputation that deters aggression (534-40). Dennis makes a similar argument about historical kings, that image-making was of central concern for kings who needed to legitimate themselves in the eyes of their conquered subjects and “to reconcile their conquered populations” (34). In this way, the king’s responsibilities include creating a representation of himself not open to any revision or reinterpretation and readily apparent to the beholder. An effective king presents himself to his subjects and to any potential invaders as an indomitable force who always accomplishes his will. Any vacillation, ambiguity, or complication of character threatens the king’s control over his territory and may result in unsanctioned violence. The principle of deterrence through constructing and imposing identities continues throughout the *Brut* and lies at the heart of the empire-making project.

There are both literary and historical reasons to read identity-creation as the creation of an unambiguous image. As Alamichel states, “We know precious little about [the *Brut*’s kings], for kings are public figures: private matters must never come to the

fore or the results are inevitably disastrous” (“King Arthur’s Dual Personality,” 303). She means that *Lazamon*’s kings do not undergo psychological development or change in the way that a modern character would, and this is one way to say that the poet expects his kings not to make visible a side of themselves out of line with their projection of authority and dominance. Parry reads Arthur as *Lazamon*’s best king precisely because he uses “brutality” to establish a reputation for himself as one whom “the world is incapable of impeding” because of his “indomitable will” (“Arthur and Possibility,” 64-65). Allowing themselves to be humans on the same level as other psychologically complex humans makes them vulnerable like all other humans, thus open to attack. An unambiguous image of unopposable will, established through the use of violence, not only deters the Britons from rebelling against their king but also foreigners from invading.

The political culture that surrounded *Lazamon*, as glimpsed through the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, also valued the deterrent function of a king. Dennis points out that this account of contemporary events appears to approve of the conquest of Cnut of Denmark because of the inefficacy of his predecessor Æthelred’s rule, noting the following entry: “and the deterrent in which the whole English race had confidence was no better [than that]” (47). Ispir suggests that part of King John’s reason for using hostages, rather than simply guaranteeing an agreement, was “displaying power” so that his vassals would accept his dominance on the basis of the visible signs of his control over them (95). Brown reports that, in the twelfth century, Henry II’s legal innovations attempted to replace the Anglo-Saxon system of each individual’s publicly avenging his wrongs with a royal monopoly on vengeance, but legal vengeance was still carried out in full view of

the community. For that reason, the king's image as a legitimate legal force who was able to uphold peace depended upon his ministers' visibly imposing violence (213-16).

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is less enthusiastic about William of Normandy, portraying him as stately and impressive but cruel (Dennis, 42-46). The Anglo-Saxons may have resented William's disregard for their expectations of a king, including the lordship bond that Sheppard finds so important to the Anglo-Saxons, but they seem to have respected William anyway. His rejection of lordship obligations led to a greater "gap" between William and his subjects" than had existed between the Anglo-Saxons and others of their kings; nevertheless, that gap "actually strengthened his position" because "[f]ear and resentment induced awe, and that only increased the longer he stayed on the throne" (51). The expectation that a king protect his borders from external threat, then, led Cnut of Denmark and William of Normandy to create unambiguously stern images of themselves in order to cultivate legitimacy. William's sternness increased his legitimacy, but John's overuse of hostages for the same purpose undermined his. Lazamon's political theory, then, is close to that of kings who had ruled Britain in the century before his lifetime. In both literary and historical registers, Lazamon's text highlights the importance of a king's strong persona. Violence, as a means of claiming agency, is indispensable to the project of creating a utilitarian monarchical identity.

Constantin of Brittany rules well and puts Britain back in order, but his good reign is cut short when a Pict named Cadal assassinates him. The narrator provides the Pict with no motivation for this treason; in fact, he explicitly denies any recognizable motive. Constantin has treated the Pict with the utmost kindness, inviting him into the court and treating him in "no other way than as his brother" (Lazamon 6450). When

Cadal invites the king to ride out into the forest with him, the king does not even question the request; he agrees immediately. They ride out together, dismount, and sit on the ground, and the knight leans close to Constantin in an intimate, confidential gesture. Just when the king reciprocates the forward lean, Cadal stabs him in the heart and runs away.

One distinguishing feature the reader knows about Cadal is his race. He does not try to seize the throne; he does not rob the king; the king has not dishonored him or his people. He simply runs back to Scotland, and the primary association the narrator expects the reader to make is between Picts and wanton violent treason—treason that is all the worse for the intimate relationship it betrays. The Pictish knight is evil not only because he kills the King of Britain, but especially because he thereby betrays a man who treated him as a surrogate brother. Imputing treason, in particular, to Cadal vilifies the Pict, and betrayal comes into play at “every stage of the history....The verb and related nouns such as *leod-swike* and *lauerd-swike* occur in contexts of individual responsibility, of ethnic or racial responsibility, and of treachery concerning a ruler’s responsibility” (Wickham-Crowley, “Cannibal Cultures,” 364). Picts are depicted as inherently evil. Anyone seeking to make alliances with them—as Vortiger will do—surely should expect no positive outcome.

### *Vortiger: The Problem with Ambition*

#### *Manipulating the Picts*

Lazamon scholars overwhelmingly recognize the importance of Vortiger.<sup>4</sup> The usurper king who first invites the loathsome pagan Saxons to England provides a close

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<sup>4</sup> Studies that read Vortiger as an important datum in understanding other parts of the *Brut* include Burek; Parry, “Lawman’s Vortigern”; Wickham-Crowley, “Cannibal Cultures”; Donahue, “The Darkly

and instructive foil to the coming reign of the more laudable Arthur. In many ways, Vortiger is the anti-Arthur: he rejects any claim that his kin or religion could make upon him, his motivation is purely confined to accruing power, his actions result in the Britons' loss of their land and security, and he constantly reacts to aggressors rather than initiating conquest. All these contrasts are important for understanding Vortiger's narrative function, but an accurate evaluation of his use of violence will recognize the identity-creation in which Vortiger engages, a creation that aims at a dark exaggeration of the identity at which other kings aim. Whereas most flawed kings fail to achieve enough agency, Vortiger fails in the opposite direction, attempting to resist any obligation to his kin. Because he wishes to deny any claim on him by his kin whatsoever, Vortiger's power grab amounts to an attempt at individual autonomy, a project of selfhood against which Levinas reacts very strongly. Seeing *Laȝamon's* use of Vortiger through the lens of Levinas's analysis of autonomy reinforces the importance of blood loyalty and sets a limit on a king's personal agency, thus clarifying the identity for which kings ought to aim.

First, I will justify speaking of Vortiger as an aspiring autonomous individual. In using the term *autonomy*, I mean that Vortiger wants to wield power without regard for anyone else's will. His goal is to be able to accomplish his will without having anyone else's will require anything of him. Accordingly, he wants to deny his own people's claim over him, in preference for determining his own actions at all times. Levinas explains why this is inherently a violent impulse, and Kaeuper points to "proud violence," the tool that lords use to protect their honor and their independence from the

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Chronicle King"; Le Saux, "Relations familiales"; Lynch, "'Blisse wes on londe,'""; Parry, "Narrators, Messengers, and *Laȝamon's Brut*"; Stanley, "*Laȝamon's* Antiquarian Sentiments"; and Weaver.

king, two closely linked ingredients of identity (8). Although never quite using the language of autonomy, Parry does come close. He argues that Vortiger's evil is his adaptability for the sake of his own power, such that he fills "the role of a shape-shifter: the being who is never who he is; the being who holds allegiance to no other being, group, standard, principle...while he invents and reinvents himself only for himself..." ("Lawman's Vortigern," 330). Vortiger "is never who he is" in the sense that he attempts to jettison an essential part of himself. He rejects his kin, the source of his core, inherited identity.

Further, being the sole agent in one's development is an existentialist ideal: Heidegger classically argues that the nature of human beings, Dasein, is to make one's own being an issue for oneself—to be involved in the constant project of self-creation. For him, the goal of "the *authentic Self*," which he differentiates pointedly from the impersonal "*they-self*," is to "[discover] the world in its own way and [bring] it close," to "[disclose] to itself its own authentic being" (167; emphasis original). The fact that selfhood develops in relationship with other people is lamentable for Heidegger, and he says of the they-self that it "proximally misses itself and covers itself up" (168). Ethan Kleinberg reads Levinas's reaction against autonomy as a reaction against exactly this competitive model of self-creation, saying, "Both Heidegger and his critique of the Western metaphysical tradition were central to Levinas's project." Levinas's misgivings about Heidegger amount to a conviction that philosophy "could not return to the investigation of the individual being and that being's own personal horizon" because it needed an account of "the relation of an individual being to an other" (249). In an attitude similar to Heidegger's, Vortiger sees the origin of his identity, the British people, as a



point from which to distance himself; he wants to act upon the Britons as if separating from a “*they-self*” so that he can exercise his own “*authentic*” will, regardless of others’ wills. In the *Brut*’s parlance, he wants to dishonor his kin for the sake of his own unlimited honor. Levinas and Lazamon, however, see this ambition as destructive both to the person who acts on it and to those whom his actions affect.

After Constantin’s death at the hands of a traitorous Pict, the realm is predictably thrown into chaos and doubt. Constantin has previously put his oldest son Costanz in a monastery “because of men’s evil counsel” (Lazamon 6440), and no good noble wants to crown a monk (6587). Cloistering the crown prince is bad counsel because he ought to be trained and ready to rule in case of emergencies such as the one caused by the king’s assassination. The youngest son, Uther, is still breastfeeding (6585). Most of the nobles decide, therefore, to crown the middle son, Aurelius Ambrosius (6584). Vortiger, however, wants to crown Costanz so that he can convince the young, ignorant king to confer power on Vortiger as his steward. He easily convinces Costanz to leave the monastery, but the abbot “leaped upon a horse and rode after Vortiger,” yelling out,

Seie me þu wode cniht whi dest þu swa muchel vnriht þu bi-nimest us ure broðer. Let hine and nim þene oðer Nim Ambrosie þat child and make of him ænne king. And ne wrað þu noht Sæint Benediht ne do þu him nan vn-riht.	Tell me, you mad knight, why you do so much injustice! You have taken our brother from us. Leave him and take that other one. Take Amborius, that child, and make him king. Don’t make St. Benedict angry by doing injustice to him. (6565-8)
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Hearing the abbot’s words, however, Vortiger grabs him and threatens to hang him unless he releases Costanz of the duties of holy orders (6570-3). When he returns to the council in London, he frightens his fellow nobles into accepting Costanz. Although they do not want to defy the Church by removing a monk from his monastery, they “dared not

gainsay his words” (6609) because “Vortiger was very strong, the greatest man in Britain” (6608).

Even this early in the narrative, Vortiger demonstrates his parodic use of violence, using it as other kings do, yet with crucial differences. At this point, he has used his physical strength to coerce a representative of the Church, and he has used his landholdings and ability to summon soldiers to hold the other nobles hostage. Vortiger rules neither by the laws of the land nor by the laws of nature; rather, he exemplifies the instrumental violence that laws should restrain. Vortiger builds his rule as steward, and later as king, not on law or legitimacy, but on his own strength and cunning, in service of his selfish ends. He uses violence as a tool and is cunningly aware of when he should rely on other means of persuasion, as when he entices rather than coerces Costanz to agree to his plan. He threatens violence when he knows he has the upper hand as against the abbot and against the other nobles, but he has not yet had to follow through on those threats, so he can still control others’ wills instead of having to override them. He also sets himself up as an unopposable force, constructing an identity for himself like that of a legitimate king.

However, he does all these things to reach his own goal of ruling illegitimately. The abbot’s reproach suggests that Vortiger ignores not only his duty as part of the British race, but also his duty to his religion. Costanz’s status as a monk, which allows the abbot to refer to the prince as “our brother,” puts a filial duty on Costanz, one in which the Christian Vortiger also shares. The monks are brothers, part of a spiritual filial hierarchy that extends its Totality all the way to Rome; since Vortiger has been baptized into that system, even if he himself is not a monk, then his betrayal of the Church carries

the same moral valences as his betrayal of his king's sons. He desires to manipulate and usurp the king, and to serve that end he sets the wrong king on the throne. Once he himself ascends to the throne, he will not rule well, and the only law in the land will be his unbridled desires.

Vortiger places the crown on Costanz's head himself (6616-7) because no clergy "dared for God's [sake] do the crime / of taking that childe monk and making [him] Britain's king" (6613-4). The narrator makes much of this point, stating, "There was no man there that might do the Christian ceremony"<sup>5</sup> or bless the new king (6618-9). By usurping the role of the clergy after already having convinced a monk to betray his vows, Vortiger positions himself as the ultimate spiritual authority. His actions delegitimize Costanz as king and make Vortiger a traitor to more than his political system. As a result, the narrator breaks into prophecy: "The beginning was unseemly, and so was the end. / He forsook God's reign; therefore, he had sorrow" (6621-2). It is portentous that Vortiger's power play begins by defying the lordship of the ultimate authority, just as he will later defy or subvert any earthly authority but his own.

Vortiger gradually convinces Costanz to give him more and more power until the king says, "do all your will, and I will not resist. / But one thing only: I will be called king" (6667-8). This is a corruption of one of the ways kings make peace with each other in other conflicts: by reorganizing the hierarchy. Whereas Belin and Brennes accept suits for peace on the condition that their adversaries recognize them as overlords and promise yearly tribute, Costanz settles for the name of king only, an acknowledgment of his authority without the attendant power that would make the authority meaningful. He is

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<sup>5</sup> For this line, I am indebted to Allen's translation.



these men very much treasure” (6704-12). Unlike Costanz, Vortiger controls Britain’s resources and uses them to buy loyalty. However, he buys the loyalty of the wrong people, preferring the wicked Picts to his own blood. Thus, he supplants the Britons by insulting their prowess and bereaving them of their agency over the land. Under Brutus, the Britons actively took control of the land and wielded its resources; under Vortiger, they endure the ignominy of occupation by a foreign force.

Using mercenaries is one of Vortiger’s grave mistakes, and *Lazamon*’s negative associations with mercenaries probably have historical roots. Michael Prestwich reports that, although unpopular, mercenaries “had a major role during the Norman period” (147). John C. Appleby concurs, saying that “the Angevin kings of England appear to have been the first systematically to employ mercenaries” (97). Henry I, for example, used mercenaries and retained them in England, but his nobles pressed him to expel them from the land, possibly for genuine concerns over peace, as “England in a time of civil war was an attractive target to such men” (Prestwich 148). In this case, the weakness that comes with civil war encourages foreigners to seize power. Once again, kingly deterrence is necessary for peace. Perhaps even worse from *Lazamon*’s perspective, they exhibited bad “behaviour towards the church and the civilian population” (Appleby 97). Around the time of the Anarchy, mercenaries became more and more common, but also more and more problematic. Allen, in fact, claims that “the ideals of chivalry and courage were being undermined...by the increasing use of mercenaries” (“Broad Spears Broke,”” 66). The danger posed by mercenaries—especially foreign ones who are awarded British land—during a time of civil war will come back to haunt Vortiger in his future dealings with the Saxons.





With all obstacles out of his way, Vortiger assumes the throne. The poet describes him during his rule as “mad,” “wild,” “rash,” and “bold” (6857). Tellingly, he “had his will in all things” (6858)—language that before described the fruits of instrumental violence. He treats the political game like a hunt in the same way that the Trojans treated the deer they carried back to their ships in Brutus’ day. Because he wants to exercise his will in all things, he cannot tolerate any obligation to others. He elevates the Picts so that he can control the Britons, but he has to eliminate them to avoid owing them for their services. Any sort of obligation compromises the total lack of passivity to which Vortiger aspires, so he must turn to betrayal to undercut any ally he might use on his path to power. Vortiger’s motivation, then, is autonomy—to exercise all his will with no consideration of anyone else’s. In order to shed any such restriction, he must reject any claim upon him from his people, which would require him to react to their wills. He must also reject any claim upon him from allies like the Picts. However, his craftiness and desire for autonomy will ultimately work against him, and his downfall illustrates the foolishness of rejecting the Totalities that give him meaning.

#### *Allied with the Saxons*

Manipulating the Picts is a misstep for Vortiger, as the Picts left in Scotland never forget his treachery and harry the northern reaches of Britain constantly; the narrator reports that they “avenged their kin enough” (6861). Betraying the Picts in the same intimate way that Cadal had betrayed Constantin exposes Vortiger to reprisal in the style of a blood feud, and their revenge becomes a problem that Vortiger goes to great lengths to solve. Compounding the Pictish threat, word reaches Vortiger that Constantin’s two remaining sons, Aurelius and Uther, have been living in Brittany and have been knighted









seems to have made a lasting impact on future kings, as mercenaries remained uncommon in England for the rest of the thirteenth century (Appleby 98).

Hengest's line about being hated for Vortiger's sake also hearkens back to Genuis' appeal to Arviragus. Genuis had pleaded to her husband to make peace, or else "I and my child will be hated" (Lazamon 4908). In parallel fashion, once he believes that Hengest is hated for his sake, Vortiger's next major misstep is to unite himself in marriage with a Saxon woman. Predictably, he relinquishes his agency to her and her people. Hengest, having gained the king's permission to bring his family to Britain and having cunningly staked out land for himself, responds by inviting Vortiger to a feast at his new lodging, as a good vassal should. During the feast, Hengest goes "into the room where Rouwenne waited" and has her bedecked in all her finery. She then appears in the hall where the feast rages, holding "a golden bowl / filled with wine that was wondrously good" and led by "highborn men" (7135-7). When she appears before Vortiger, the narrator calls her "the fairest of all things" (7138). She kneels and initiates a Saxon drinking ritual called the wassail, but she only speaks Saxon, while Vortiger only speaks British. More than one scholar has pointed out the parallels between this scene and the later one in which Rouwenne initiates the wassail ritual so that she can poison Vortiger's son, Vortimer.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the parallels are striking, and in each case, Rouwenne subdues a British man who considers himself to be more powerful than she is. In the case of her son-in-law, she kills her target; in the case of her future husband, she poisons his mind.

A knight who volunteers to translate refers to Rouwenne as "the fairest of women" (7148), and the end of the ritual includes Rouwenne's kissing Vortiger three

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<sup>8</sup> Weaver 5; Burek 116-7; Le Saux, "Relationes familiares," par. 37.







isolation. Adding isolation to his hunger for power strengthens the associations between Vortiger and the project of autonomy. Parry comments that Vortiger's very "nature is deeply invested, in contrast to Arthur's, in isolation" ("Lawman's Vortigern," 331).

When the British nobles finally confront their illegitimate king and threaten insurrection, they appeal to his impending isolation to persuade him to change his allegiance back to what it should be. "You forsake God's laws for [the sake of] uncivilized people," they tell the king, "and will not hear our Lord for [the sake of] these heathen knights" (Lazamon 7267-8). Vortiger's betrayal will ultimately be counter-productive, the people argue, because if he will not change his course, they will rebel and "drive them from the land" (7271), leaving Vortiger alone with the Britons whom he has mistreated. Even if they lose this conflict, the nobles say, the king will find himself isolated among the heathens, who will either reject him as king (7277) or lead him into apostasy and eternal damnation (7281). Forsaking God and his people, breaking the social bonds he has a duty to uphold, will isolate Vortiger from potential supporters. Betraying the natural bonds of tribe and religion is ultimately self-destructive, and no one can survive as a rock or island, as Vortiger wishes to do. His attempt to achieve autonomy undercuts the *Brut's* foundational image for the nation: a family. Despite the activity in relation to his subjects that the king-as-father retains, the poem's monarchs do exist in a network of responsibilities. Denying those responsibilities for the sake of exaggerated dominance betrays the familial quality of the nation, thus obviating any possibility of cooperation. The Britons, who stake their peaceful coexistence on their insularity and cohesion, cannot thrive under a king who invests far too much in his own power.























the Amalekites treated the Israelites cruelly, just as the Saxons have treated the Britons cruelly; God commanded the Israelites to kill all the Amalekites, just as genocide is one of the best options for avoiding further war with the Saxons; and Samuel kills Agag with a sword, just as Aldolf will kill Hengest with a sword. Ældadus means to position the Britons as God's chosen people, innocent victims of heathen aggression, just as surely as he means to reinforce Hengest's position outside God's covenant and thus outside consideration as a person of consequence. Integral to the identities thus asserted is Samuel's speech to Agag just before killing him, in which the prophet emphasizes the harm that the Amalekites have done to the people of God: "you attacked Jerusalem" (8330) and "slew many good men and deprived them of life-day" (8332). Hengest has killed many Britons, most notably in the massacre at Amesbury, where the Saxons deceived the Britons into coming unarmed (7543-7619). Further, Samuel intentionally creates a spectacle by dragging Agag into a square and tying him to a post before hacking him to pieces. Aldolf likewise drags Hengest through the city of Coningsburg before binding him outside the city and beheading him. Although Aldolf does not speak to Hengest before the execution, Samuel's speech has served to interpret the implications of the violence for the relevant people's identities.

The spectacle of Hengest's death shares many traits with Rodric's: it occurs publicly, it divides the victim's body into pieces, and it consists of both violence and words that determine the meaning of the violence. It also participates in the rhetorical move to which Falke traces the possibility of violence, "[t]ransforming the body into a symbol" so that the "basis for empathy disappears" ("Framing Embodiment," 74). Falke's claims apply directly to Hengest's case: telling a biblical story transforms

Hengest into a literary type of Agag, making him a symbol of broken covenants and sacrifices to God. Hengest is now a symbol of a people and a threat to be overcome, so the Britons have a responsibility to kill him. Crucially for the kinship-minded *Brut*, one of the Totalities to which the Britons reduce Hengest is a metonym for his people. The metonymic function of national leaders follows the logic of the nation-as-family, in which the father-king grounds the meaning of each identity in the Totality. It also follows other ideologies, such as the king's very body as "the body politic" (Parry, "Arthur and Possibility," 71), and it informs battle speeches that appeal to a people's honor and impugn the honor of a race by ceremoniously disposing of its leader. Finally, it accounts for why a work whose "main character" is "the 'British people'" (Bryan, "Lazamon's Four Helens," 63), makes "individual leaders responsible for the collective identity and political integrity of their people" (Sheppard, *Families of the King*, 153). The Saxon leader, then, comes to represent the entire Saxon people, who have wronged and slain the Britons. Through this reduction to a representative of his entire people group, Hengest can gather to his own body all the Britons' rage against the Saxons. Positioning the one-to-one, identical correlation between Hengest the person and his Saxons covers over all the ways in which Hengest is not truly reducible to any referent, but it performs the necessary work of concentrating British desire for revenge onto a single, destructible body.

By isolating the victim and creating the simultaneous desire and incapacity to withdraw from the source of the pain, torture diffuses the subject's capacity for meaningful action, reducing him to passivity, indeed. Because of the recurrence of the theme of passivity, torture can serve as a microcosm of the goal of violence in general. Like the torturer, the successful military leader—in the *Brut*, the king who can deter

invasion—aims to reduce his opponents to passivity, himself claiming the power to bestow identities. On a larger scale, violence also enables dys-appearance, in which the subject of torture and witnesses can see the victim's flesh as a body, an object; that dys-appearance then allows the inflictor of torture to reduce the victim to a Totality or a symbol whose meaning can be delimited.

*Uther: Kingly Identity*

Without projecting the proper identity, the king leaves his realm open to either rebellion or invasion, and he may even lose the identity of king altogether. Violence, then, acts to reinforce that identity, and from the importance of the king's identity derives the importance of his bodily health and capacity for inflicting violence. Violence enables a king to project his identity before others by enabling him to close off the possible meanings that recipients of his violence may have for witnesses, and it works only if the king can stop at some point and rely on softer power.

This chapter has already shown that part of the king's identity is "a working monopoly of the means of violence associated with war," an especially strong necessity for kings in England, where the nobles were less autonomous than in France (Kaeuper 109). Brown argues that the royal European obligation to keep peace originates with Charlemagne, who claimed the sole right to violent vengeance by divine right (71). That claim varied by time, place, and king in its ability to be enforced, but Lambert summarizes many different historians when he claims that a significant change took place in thirteenth-century England, when the Angevins first effectively positioned the crown as the only legitimate dispenser of vengeance (13). Similarly, the most utilitarian identity for a king to project is that of a master of violence, as was historically true in England.

Girard puts these observations in starker terms, observing that kudos “belongs to the man who manages to convince others, and who believes himself, that his violence is completely irresistible.” The point of attaining kudos through violence is to become “a master...unchallenged and unchallengeable” (*Violence and the Sacred*, 152).

When Uther succeeds his brother Aurelius, who has been poisoned by a Saxon posing as a doctor, he immediately must repel a Saxon invasion. Word of Aurelius’ death reaches Hengest’s sons Octa and Ebissa, who live in the northern territories, where Aurelius has granted them land (Lazamon 9101-2). On Octa’s suggestion, they decide that they will “renounce Christianity / ...and become heathens” (9111-2). Once again, pagans are untrustworthy, and allowing them to own land on the island makes it very difficult to keep the Britons safe from their treachery. Octa summons soldiers of various races and leads a coalition of Irish and Germans, many of whom fled a previous battle (9117-8). The Saxons make natural allies with other pagans, and because they are stouter and less cowardly, they naturally lead the others. The pagan coalition wins the first battle of this new war, driving Uther and his Britons into a forest at the top of a hill and laying siege to the British position. Uther turns to Gorlois, the Earl of Cornwall, because “great is [his] wisdom” (9166).

Gorlois, in turn, devises a plan, but not before he gives a speech emphasizing the religious difference between the Britons and Saxons. “Tell me, Uther Pendragon,” he reproves the king, “why you hang your head down. / Do you not know that God alone is better than all of us together?” (9172-3). The earl’s Christian triumphalism both continues to mark the Saxons as undeserving of consideration and valorizes the British struggle against them. The difference between the good, Christian Britons and the bad,

pagan Saxons now secure, Gorlois can propose a sneaky course of action. Rather than leading a charge against their enemy in a pitched battle, he recommends infiltrating the enemy camp at night and attacking while the heathens sleep. Still, he conceives of his plan as valorous, describing the attack he imagines in martial, not covert, terms. Let “each noble man lay on them vigorously” he says, “and with the might of our Lord assert our rights” (9195, 9197). When he describes the nighttime battle, the narrator agrees with his character’s sentiment, reporting that the Britons “slew the heathens with great strength” (9205). When the Saxons’ “fallow locks flew across the fields” (9206), the proper order with the Britons on top and the pagans on the bottom has been restored. The Britons have forced the Saxons to seek separation from the Britons, a positive outcome because of the immense danger of sharing space with non-Christians. Uther’s forces capture the Saxons leaders.

The victory allows Uther to establish peace throughout the land. He “went forth / into Northumbria with great bliss / and then to Scotland and set it all in his own hand” (9222-4). Having defeated the greatest threats to his peace, the king can now take control of the entire island. He enforces British hegemony over the land, and peace comes because the other peoples who live there, like the Picts in Scotland, agree to accept his rule. The peace is so good “that each could go in [peace] / from land to land, even if he bore gold in his hand” (9225-6); on the heels of unquestioned victory, the king’s deterrence protects the innocent from even the simplest crime. The narrator is extremely enthusiastic about Uther’s reign at this point, claiming that “he did a work of peace that no king had been able to do before / from the time that Brutus came here” (9227-8). Now that the pagans have left, the Britons can live in peace to an unprecedented degree. Next,

Uther calls all his people to join him in London to celebrate Easter. All the “earls,” “churls,” “bishops,” and “book-learned men” obey the summons (9233), and the nobles make a stately entrance: “Noble men soon to London came; / they brought wife, they brought child, as Uther the king had commanded” (9237-8). The king attends mass (9239), and Gorlois receives special mention when he enters “with many knights with him” (9240). All the pomp and circumstance of the large gathering follows from Uther’s great victory and impressive peace.

At the feast, however, Uther falls into an all-too-familiar trap. From his place on his throne, he notices “Earl Gorlois’ wife,” Ygærne, “the most beautiful of all women” (9250), and like Vortiger a generation earlier, he loses his self-control.

<p>Ofte he hire lokede on and leitede mid  e3ene  Ofte he his birles sende fron to hire  borde  Ofte he hire loh to and makede hire  letes  And heo hine leofliche biheold ah  inæt whær heo hine luuede  Næs þe king noht swa wis ne swa  3ære-witele  þat imong his du3eðe his þoht cuðe  dernen  Swa longe þe king þis him droh þat  Gorlois iwærð him wrað</p>	<p>Often he looked at her with gleaming  eyes,  Often he sent his cupbearers to her  table,  Often he smiled at her and gestured at  her,  And she looked at him lovingly, but I  know not whether she loved him.  The king was not so wise nor so  sharp-witted  That he could hide his thoughts from  his companions.  The king drew this out so long that  Gorlois became angry. (9251-7)</p>
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The narrator’s repetition of the word *often* and characterization of Uther as lacking subtlety emphasize the king’s pandering to Ygærne. The woman possesses much more discretion, such that even the omniscient narrator cannot say how she felt, but the king certainly is not skilled at navigating his passions. Given the carelessness with which Uther acts, Gorlois naturally feels angry.

Gorlois takes his wife and leaves without asking the king's permission, and Uther responds following the pattern of the Morality Gap. He sends twelve knights after Gorlois, "the noblest of men,"

<p>And beden hine an hizinge cumen to þan kinge And don þan kinge god riht and beon icnowen of his pliht þat he hafde þene king iscend and from his borde wes iwende He and his cnihtes mid muchele vn- rihte For þe king him wæs glad wið and for he hailede in his wif And 3if he nalde a3ein cumen and his gult beon icnawen</p> <p>þe king him wold after and don al his mahten Binimen him al his lond and his seoluer and his gold</p>	<p>And commanded him to come to the king at once And do the king justice and acknowledge his crime, That he had shamed the king and left his table, He and his knights, with great injustice Because the king was glad with him and drank to his wife, [But] if he would not return and acknowledge his guilt,</p> <p>The king would pursue him and do everything in his power, Take all his land and his silver and his gold from him. (9263-71)</p>
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Ignoring the provocation that he has put upon the earl, Uther sees only the shame that Gorlois' departure imputes to Uther. The king downplays his fault by reframing it as innocent merrymaking. True to Pinker's formula, Uther insists on legal language. His indirect speech uses the word *right*, or *justice*, twice and twice demands that Gorlois acknowledge his wrongdoing. He expresses his demand once with the word *pliht*, i.e., *crime*, and once with the word *gult*, i.e., *guilt*. The king sets up the conflict between him and the Earl of Cornwall as a matter of justice and the king's honor. Insofar as upholding justice and everyone's rights is the peacetime function of a king, he has turned his own shameful lust into an affront to his official duties. Because of the honor that attends agency and the hierarchy of wills, he also interprets Gorlois' sudden departure as shameful for the king because Gorlois does not submit his own will to that of the king.



Framed in this way, Uther is in the right for demanding the honor due to him and the lawful submission of his vassal. That legal move enables him, then, to make the final threat of violence.

Gorlois responds with an entirely different perspective:

Næi swa me helpe Drihte þa scop þas dazes lihte	So help me God, who shaped this day's light,
Nulle ich nauere aʒæn cumen no his grið ʒirnen	I will never again come nor request his peace.
Ne scal he neuere on liue me scende of mine wife	Nor shall he ever, as long as I live, shame my wife away from me.
And suggeð Vðer kinge at Tintaieol he mai me finden	And tell King Uther that he can find me at Tintaieol.
ʒif he þider wule ride þer ich him wulle abiden	If he will ride there, I will wait for him,
And þer he scal habbe hærd gome and mucle weorldes scome	And there he will have a hard fight and very great shame. (9274-9)

Gorlois, who gained Uther's favor by boldly asserting Christian superiority over pagans, begins his defiant speech with an appeal to God, whom he implicitly acknowledges as the source of his strength. Beginning thus, he puts Uther's temporal power into perspective, claiming to act justly himself because he obeys God's laws, even if he does not obey Uther's authority. Then, he refuses to ask for Uther's peace, effectively removing himself from Uther's service. Again, the king's peace serves as a metonym for his rule, and by refusing to seek reconciliation with Uther, Gorlois cuts himself off from the political system that Uther heads. His motivation, of course, is that Uther has shamed him by so blatantly desiring his wife, and he expresses the unity of shame and possession of the woman with the interesting expression, "me scende of mine wife" (9276). The word *scende*, which usually denotes *shame* and is used as a transitive verb where the object is the person who has been shamed, here seems to take both *me* and *mine wife* as its objects.

As a result, the phrase pithily combines the action of seducing Gorlois' wife with the action of shaming Gorlois. The earl as much as the king sees the coming conflict as one of honor, but he emphasizes his own shame, not that which he reciprocally put on Uther. Because honor motivates the conflict, Gorlois now also has the justification to threaten violence, which he anticipates using in order to reclaim his honor and heap more dishonor on the king.

Gorlois goes to Cornwall, where he fortifies two castles and prepares for a siege while Uther advances. In preparation for the war, Gorlois "sent messages all across Britain / and bade every noble man come to him / for gold and for silver and for other good gifts" (9292-4). He sets himself up as the king's equal, using his possessions as Guendoleine had to buy loyalty, but concentrating, unlike Vortiger, on the noble Britons and the best recruits. In parallel fashion, "all across the land that stood in [Uther's] hand, / the people of many races traveled together / and came to London, to the people's king" (9314-6). While it sounds as though Uther uses non-Britons as troops, the text emphasizes his position as king of the British people to paint the coming battle as a struggle between two very British claimants to righteous independence. Uther will win the battle, and Gorlois will die, but the king sacrifices British unity and the life of a valiant Christian warrior from the always-positive Cornwall for the sake of his own lust.

Just like Locrin and Vortiger, Uther loses his agency to his passions. After his siege has lasted for seven days, he confides in a knight named Ulfin, "give me some advice, or I will surely die. / I cannot live, so greatly do I long / for the fair Ygærne" (9341-3). As Vortiger's lust figuratively poisoned him and brought him under the control of the evil Saxons, so Uther's lust acts upon him as a sickness. The romance trope of

love-sickness here signifies the loss of agency, figured as a loss of health, to one's base desires. Knowing that his state is dishonorable, Uther admonishes Ulfin, "Keep these words a secret" (9343). As this chapter has already argued, one crucial characteristic of a successfully deterrent kingly image is that it must be simple. That is, it must be simply unopposable, without qualification. In this way, kings use violence to distance themselves from the vulnerability that they exploit in their enemies. Militarily, they must retain absolute agency. Parry, too, argues that a good king in the *Brut* is "an irresistible force in the world," "a kind of overarching will" so strong that his army and even history itself become "extension[s] of his will" ("Arthur and Possibility," 65-71). For this reason, kings use spectacle and erect monuments to control the interpretations of their actions. If any reinterpretation happens, it will compromise the king's ability to control witnesses and the identity he has created. This is why, there must be no invisible side to a king, because the invisible side would be his vulnerability. His will to power and his capacity to bring about that will must remain at all times fully seen and fully comprehended, without remainder or complication. Because he understands the rules according to which honor and a king's identity work, Uther insists that his desires, which have compromised his agency, remain secret. Their publication would mean public recognition of his weakness and his loss of kingly identity.

While he seems to approve of the potential adultery, "much wisdom was with" Ulfin (9338), and he gives the good advice that violence cannot solve all problems for a king. He cautions Uther that defeating Ygærne's husband cannot win her love: "If you think to win Ygærne with such harm / then she would have done as no woman ever does" (Lazamon 9352-3). Instead, Ulfin counsels Uther to send Ygærne gifts of gold and silver

(9355-6). Uther can use violence to overcome wills that oppose his, forcing Gorlois to give up his wife and perhaps forcing Ygærne to sleep with Uther, but he cannot use violence to force Ygærne to love him. There are limits, then, to what a king's persona can accomplish. Although a strong king with an indisputable position on the top of the hierarchy is the best guard against anarchy and invasion, at some point a king must be able to stop killing and rest upon the projection of his power, his ability to control the narrative. Further, as Vortiger's cautionary tale implies, the king must honor his vassals and take their wills into account when he makes decisions.

In his war with Gorlois, Uther has made the terrible mistake of trying to override the Earl of Cornwall's will when he should have tried to cooperate. In the same way, all kings can attempt to cow onlookers into keeping the king's peace, but carrying out justice upon a criminal overrides the criminal's will rather than changing it. In fact, the spectacle of peacekeeping violence depends upon the criminal's will's remaining defiant so that the king can be seen to triumph over it. Effective deterrence depends upon the witnesses' certainty that their wills cannot prevail against the king, just as the vanquished criminal's will could not. This is much the same lesson as Julius Caesar taught when he persuaded his recently conquered French vassals to support his invasion of Britain.

However, Uther and Ulfin are not above deception to achieve Uther's desire. Ulfin recommends asking Merlin for help. Merlin breaks into prophecy, proclaiming that "the son that will come from Uther Pendragon / and from Ygærne" (9419-20) will, among other things, "command the thanes in Rome" and "conquer peoples and establish his laws" (9408, 9418). Merlin uses his magic to make Uther "in all things as if [he] were the earl" (9458). When Uther presents himself at Tintaieol Castle in the guise of Gorlois,

Ygærne sleeps with him because she “thought for sure that he was Gorlois” and “in no way recognized Uther the king at all” (9506-7). In the middle of the story, the narrator pauses to reiterate a condensed prophecy: Uther “begot on her a well-known man, / fiercest of all kings that ever lived among men, / and he was called Arthur” (9510-12). Lazamon makes a point of protecting Ygærne’s innocence in the affair, repeating after the mention of Arthur that the duchess “knew not at all who lay in her arms, / for she thought the entire time that it was the Earl Gorlois” (9513-14). Nevertheless, the narrative covers over the king’s roughshod violation of Ygærne’s will, focusing instead on Arthur’s destiny. Uther’s knights, thinking that he has abandoned them, dress up one of the nobles in the king’s armor and attack so fiercely that they kill Gorlois himself. Like King David, Uther lets others fight for him and sacrifices a loyal follower because he lusts for the earl’s wife. Unlike David’s case, however, neither Uther’s prophet nor the story takes him to task for his transgression, and once the loose ends have been tied, “Uther lived long with much bliss” (9620). As it had for Brutus, destiny functions to justify violence. Because of the added dynamic of prophecy, erstwhile rules for violence are suspended for Uther, who does manage to attain his will through war.

One important element in projecting a strong identity is vigor, and when Uther’s health begins to fail late in his rule, so does his ability to deter insurrection. Seeing that Uther is sick, “the Britons became very impudent; / they often worked discord because they had no fear” (9625-6). When he hears that the Saxons have invaded Scotland, killing “many and innumerable Scots” (9669), he deputizes his relative Lot to meet the challenge. Publicly investing Lot with authority, Uther “commanded his dear knights” to obey Lot “as if he were the people’s king” (9677-8). When Lot has trouble defeating the

Saxons, the Britons “became arrogant and immeasurably proud / and were fearless because of the king’s age” (9684-5). Without a strong king to rein them in, the Britons cannot function together.

Uther solves this problem in the same way that kings usually solve discipline problems, the same way Brutus originally brought his people to heel: he threatens them. He summons them all together on pain of death and dismemberment (9696-9700) and defeats the Saxons, culminating in his speech over Octa’s body (9776-82). In this speech, Uther specifically resents “hoker-worden,” insults, against his puissance (9777). The Saxon challenge to his rule thus is coded both as a contest of dominance and as an insult to the king as a person of consequence. Their insolence implies that Uther is as good as dead because of his infirmity (9779); thus, the stakes in his fight with the Saxons are his identity as an agent with the ability to carry out his will. Only enacting violence against them allows him to reclaim his honor and his dominant, hegemonic position in Britain. He must prove that he has the ability to carry out violence against those who oppose his will in order to prove that the Britons and potential invaders should beware (Buczynski 173-74).<sup>15</sup>

This identity, in turn, can be figured as the life of the king. Tiller mentions letters exchanged between Henry II and the King of France during the rebellion of Henry II’s son, the Young King. In this correspondence, the King of France refuses to extradite the Young King because he claims that Henry II is “dead” (“Lazamon’s Leir,” 173-74). Henry II was not literally dead, but he had appointed his son successor before his death,

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<sup>15</sup> Buczynski notes in passing the importance of a king’s good health. While Lazamon does “not provide exceptional martial prowess as a sine qua non for good kingship” and attributes such prowess even to bad kings, still “A successful king has to remain in good health” (“Battling against Men and Monsters,” 143).

leading his rival to proclaim him metaphorically dead. Thus, having given up the right to rule, Henry has also given up the identity of a king, and like Uther, he is accused of having died because he can no longer actively assert his power. In the same way, Uther has designated someone else to lead his army, compromising his control over his people.

Uther resents the Saxons' assumption that they had no need to consider his will—that he was not worthy of honor or able to dominate invaders. This insult is an issue of identity because it concerns honor and dominance, but it also has implications for the honor of the Britons' ancestors, as Uther's pre-battle speech reveals. In that speech, Uther predicts that God will grant the Britons victory over Octa, who "threatened to capture me" (9745), and he appeals to his soldiers' ancestral honor: "Think of your ancestors, how good they were at fighting; / think of your worship that I have provided for you" (9746-7). Once again, Octa's threat irks Uther's sense of honor, but the metaphor of nation as family is also at work. Uther appeals to his soldiers' ancestors, a move that, as Arthur's speech over Colgrim's body will demonstrate, has implications for the source of their identity. As their king, he acts as the ground of meaning for those under his rule, imagined as a Totality, so that an insult against his honor amounts to an insult against theirs. The soldiers ought to fight well and live up to their ancestors' memories because it is in their nature—in their blood. Furthermore, they are superior to the Saxons by nature.

The dynamic according to which forging and imposing identities are two sides of a coin follows Girard's logic and flows from the analysis of autonomy above. Girard writes that kudos occurs "*always at the expense of other men*" (*Violence and the Sacred*, 152; emphasis original). Just as when one aims for autonomy, denying one's vulnerability in favor of actively creating an identity is a grasping project. As Levinas states,

conceiving of other people as if their meaning could be known, perhaps through knowing their place in the hierarchy, implies “[p]ossessing, knowing, and grasping,” and those words “are synonyms of power” (*Time and the Other*, 90). To create one’s own identity, to impose meaning upon another human, is to deny that the other person can ever have any further meaning and, therefore, is to do violence to that person. The project of establishing a kingly identity and its corollary, imposing an identity upon other people, is necessarily violent.

Uther’s career demonstrates two important principles of violence in the *Brut*: violence can create an identity for a king, and violence must result in the correct identity for a king to avoid negative consequences. Because honor results inherently from dominance, and because dominance results inherently from violent victory, violence imposes identities. Such imposition often has implications for the contestants’ bloodlines, and the honor of one’s kin involves this sort of violence in revenge and genocide. Once a king, by virtue of his position’s inherent place in the hierarchy, enters a contest for dominance, his best option is to project the identity of an unopposable force. If he ever fails to do so, his people are liable to ignore his laws, and other peoples are liable to invade; he may even lose the identity of king. The objective of using violence to create a kingly identity is to close off the possible meanings that recipients of the violence can have, and killing is both metaphorical and actual in this attempt. However, the king must, at some point, be able to stop killing. The point of enacting violence in order to impose identities on the king and his enemies is to coerce witnesses into submission. A criminal or invader whom a king kills never submits; the good of this violence is in the effects upon those left behind after the executed parties.



## *Conclusion*

The section of the *Brut* between the Romans' departure and Arthur's accession adds nuance to many of the themes already broached by the previous epochs. The threat of foreigners, the spectrum between activity and passivity, using violence done to bodies to send messages—all these themes continue to inform the characters' uses of violence, but they reveal much about the proper function and identity of a king in this section. The threats presented by the pirates Melga and Wanis and the Pictish Rodric introduce the utility of international reputation: the pirates, especially, attack Britain when the Britons have a weak reputation. Stifling instrumental violence imposed by outsiders requires a reputation for stern action against such threats, and Maurus uses the opportunity that Rodric's invasion affords to enact meaning-making violence against Rodric's body. Maurus' spectacle manages to result in his control over the meaning of the violence to the point that Rodric's followers avenge neither their leader nor their honor when they are rebuffed by the Britons. Thus, Maurus gives a best-case scenario, in which violent action gives the king control over the narrative and allows him to stop imposing violence without losing agency.

The individual responsible for the nation's stern reputation is, of course, the king. To a point, then, a domineering king serves a useful deterrent function. However, Vortiger's negative example shows the limits of a king's dominance. Vortiger's desire for unlimited power leads him to reject his people and his religion because they make claims upon him. His career exposes his motivations and their striking similarity to the project of autonomy that Levinas denounces as ontologically impossible and deceptive. Not only does Vortiger's brand of autonomy deny any obligations to anyone, but it also denies his

own true mode of being. In reality, as the Britons' belief in the metaphor of family shows, Vortiger owes many things to many people; his attempt to reject any obligation, therefore, denies the essence of his selfhood. As a denial of his humanity, Vortiger's ambition cannot last, and he resorts to inviting armed foreigners into his realm, to whom he ultimately yields the agency for which he has fought so hard. Vortiger's example reveals that total activity is impossible for a king to achieve, and it reinforces the importance of family as a figure of the nation. Denying family ties and other obligations is outside the realm of kingly identity-creation.

Hengest's execution underscores the mechanisms by which violence can create and impose identities. As in other cases from other parts of the *Brut*, those who inflict violence upon Hengest do so in order to delimit the meanings that their violence and his person can have. They wish to inscribe upon him and, by extension, his people, the identity of dog—in common parlance, they wish to dehumanize him. The phenomenological analysis of the flesh clarifies what dehumanization means in this context. If the self of a subject necessarily transcends any concepts imposed upon it, then denying Hengest the possibility of such transcendence denies his mode of being in favor of a meaning limited to the utilitarian and vengeful one imposed by the Britons. Further, the very experience of fleshly pain leads to this kind of dehumanization, causing the subject's body to dys-appear even to him, isolating and objectifying him. Converting his body into an object and a symbol rather than the seat of personhood, combined with the speeches given on the occasion, control the meaning of the death.

Finally, Uther's rule demonstrates the fundamental importance of the king's personal, bodily capacities. Because the king must create an unassailable identity for







Colgrim's liege lord Childric in a forest in Scotland. As king of not only Saxony but also other Northern European nations, Childric classifies as an emperor and a great initial threat to Arthur, whose destiny is to claim the title of emperor for himself.

Besieged and hungry, Colgrim proposes that Childric sue for Arthur's peace, and the emperor agrees. Knowing what makes a good peace treaty, Childric offers fealty and hostages (10378-80). Arthur accepts the terms and gives a speech that demonstrates the stakes he sees in the conflict.

<p>Iþonked wurðe Drihtene þe alle domes waldeð þat Childric þe stronge is sad of mine londe Mi lond he hafeð to-dæled al his duzeðe cnihtes Me seoluen he þohte driuen ut of mire leoden Halden me for hæne and habben mine riche And mi cun ai for-uaren mi uolc al fordemed</p>	<p>Thank God, who passes all judgment, That Childric the strong is dismayed in my land My land he has parceled out to all his fellow knights Myself he thought to drive out of my land Held me in contempt and have my kingdom And attack all my kin and judge my people. (10392-7)</p>
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He resents that Childric has parceled out British land to give it to his knights, and the stakes in that action are honor: as Ebissa and Octa had done to Uther, Childric has treated Arthur as having no consequence, incapable of defending his possessions against Saxon aggression. Arthur recognizes his role as a deterrent, and he knows that, because of the centrality of that role, an enemy who threatens the wellbeing of his people also threatens his identity as a king.

Blood relation also raises tensions, as Arthur infers that Childric had plans to drive Arthur out of Britain, to kill his relatives, and to pass judgment on his people. Thus, Childric's aggression has threatened Arthur's honor by threatening the lives of his relatives in addition to the wellbeing of his subjects. Not only is Arthur's identity as king

at stake, but so is the identity of the Britons as legitimate inhabitants of Britain and as vassals who receive their identities from their respective places in the order headed by Arthur. Childric has attempted to put himself at the top of the political hierarchy, a move signified by his intent to judge the Britons as a king would; doing so would move the Britons down in the hierarchy. An attack on the British king, therefore, amounts to an attack on the identity and honor of the British people as well. Such a concern is consistent both with the understanding of the king as representative of the people and with the British understanding of the nation as a family. A foreigner who deposes the British king—an act that dishonors the king—has figuratively dishonored the Britons’ father and the entire people through him.

When Arthur condenses his gloating toward the end of the speech, enjoying the reversal of fortunes, he emphasizes the agency he has gained by reducing the Saxons to passivity: Childric “thought to set all my kingdom in his own hand, / but now I have driven him to the death, / [and it is in my power to decide] whatever I want to do, whether to slay or hang [him]” (10415-7). The violence Arthur has enacted has effectively restored his honor precisely because it has reduced Childric to passive acceptance of Arthur’s will. Entirely active in comparison to the entirely passive Childric, Arthur now dominates his enemies and has moved to the top of the hierarchy where, as king, he belongs.

When he decides to accept the offer of peace, Arthur still has honor and agency on his mind. He enjoys imagining the Saxons going “wretchedly to their ships” (10422) and telling their kin at home about Arthur’s generosity. He wants the Saxons to see him as a generous victor because of the implications for his honor—he brought Childric to the

brink of ultimate passivity and had the power to choose of his own, unimpeded will what judgment to pass on his enemy. The invaders will “tell tidings of Arthur the king” (10425), he gloats, “how I have freed them... / and for my generosity’s [sake] succored the wretches” (10426-7). Arthur insists on imposing upon the Saxons the identity of wretches, emphasizing their lowly status in the hierarchy, as if they are peasants. He exults in having the choice and power to be generous to his enemies because only a superior can show generosity and only the wretched desire it.

Despite the fact that Arthur has achieved all these conventional goals, however, the next line after his speech relates the foolishness of accepting the offer of peace: “Here Arthur the king was bereft of nobility” (10428). The omniscient narrator knows that the peace will not last because the Saxons have not been sufficiently cowed, and by letting them go, Arthur loses honor. They do not even reach their homeland before they turn their ships around and return to Britain, motivated by revenge and the prospect of “performing acts of war” (10450).<sup>2</sup> They imagine themselves able to conquer Britain and override Arthur’s will (10447-50), indicating that they do not accept the unopposable version of Arthur that a king must project. The narrator’s condemnation, then, is not likely a condemnation of Arthur’s goals but of his inability to understand that he has yet to reach his goals. Rather than leaving the Saxon leaders alive to tell the tale of his generosity, Arthur needs to demonstrate his superiority beyond any doubt. There are some wills that a king simply must crush; witnesses are important to terrify others into obedience, but Arthur has failed to choose the correct people to be witnesses.

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<sup>2</sup> The phrase in Middle English is “*wilgomen wurchen*.” *Gomen* means *games*, and *wil-* can mean *wild*, such that the compound means “wild games,” or the compound could be a version of the OE *wigplega*, *war-play*, a kenning for *battle*. However one parses this word, the threat of violence remains in the fore.



Even though Arthur has failed to project the correct impression of himself to the Saxons, he engenders fear among the Britons who know him and for that reason, ironically, he lacks counsel. Lazamon reports that “there was no man crazy enough to dare advise [Arthur]” against accepting the offer of peace (10429).<sup>3</sup> Arthur’s law-giving function, which requires him to establish himself as a fearful presence in the eyes of his subjects, here works against his sovereignty in the face of invasion. His subjects fear him to such an extent that they are reluctant to counsel him, even under the threat of continued invasion. Donahue sees Lazamon’s censure at this point as a key to understanding Arthur’s rule throughout. He argues that Arthur, whose early success through his own strength scares off potential advisers, displays a “dark side” in his harshness that is responsible for the king’s ultimate downfall (“The Darkly Chronicled King,” 135-47). Donahue’s argument harmonizes with Hay’s on the importance of *measure* for kings, but James Noble provides a counterpoint. He argues that “Lazamon’s point...is that good kings make good laws to establish and maintain stability...and will go to whatever lengths they deem necessary to ensure that those laws are upheld” (“Lazamon’s Arthur,” 294-95). Because of the constant specter of treason, Noble argues that Arthur’s harshness is justified. Parry agrees that Arthur is the culmination of Lazamon’s vision for kings (“Arthur and Possibility”). Donoghue sees Arthur as “virtuous and powerful,” but argues that “One of the main lessons” is that all kings eventually “suffer defeat and die” (“Lazamon’s Ambivalence,” 562). Stanley attempts to intervene in the discussion by proposing that, while important, mercy is not the highest

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<sup>3</sup> At several other critical moments (for example, around line 13976, the messenger who comes to tell Arthur about Modred’s treason delays an entire day for fear of the king), Arthur’s subordinates fear to give him counsel, so the narrator’s critique of Arthur’s projected image remains constant in the *Brut*.

good for a Christian king fighting pagans. On this view, Arthur's peace with the Saxons is inappropriate because of the religious difference involved ("The Political Notion of Kingship," 134-35).

Focusing on patterns of violence provides more evidence for an ambivalent poet. Later, Arthur does use violence with *measure*, but in his very early success against the Saxons, his mistake is actually that he is not harsh enough on his enemies. To other Christian powers, however, such as Frolle in France and Luces in the Roman campaign, Arthur will act with unattenuated force, seemingly with the narrator's approval. Arthur learns from his first mistake the necessity of enforcing total subjection, so that his brutality and conquests correct earlier mistakes and the mistakes of earlier kings. If harshness is a character flaw for Arthur, then Lazamon delivers a nuanced picture of that flaw, in which it is a great asset as well as a liability. It might be possible to resolve the tension between the utility and liability of harsh rule by suggesting that Arthur ought to be merciful toward his subjects but not toward his enemies. However, even that principle must be further nuanced because kings who are not sufficiently hard on their subjects, such as Leil and Uther, sometimes lose their people's respect and obedience. Lazamon depicts a true dilemma for Arthur.

When the Saxons return and engage in quite horrific ravaging (Lazamon 10456-79), Arthur hangs the hostages he took from them earlier (10529-33), but the execution has no stated effect. The next line moves on to the next plot point, in which Arthur's relative Howel, who lives in Brittany, falls ill. The hostage-hanging does not further galvanize Saxon determination; it does not cow them into submission, and the narrator does not even state that it affects the Britons' sense of satisfaction. Rather, it simply

demonstrates Arthur's reformed perspective on the conflict. No longer will he seek any alliance with the Saxons; the pagans cannot be trusted, so they cannot be good allies. Instead, Arthur will have to override their wills, which are set on colonizing Britain and replacing the Britons, by exacting death upon their kinsmen. He will have to bring the Saxon people, like the hostages, to a position of total passivity and shame.

Accomplishing the rhetorical promise of the hostage-killing, battles are intense vindications for Arthur. Like Brutus before him, he divides his army into sections—but Arthur divides his army into five sections (10541) because his army is greater than Brutus' was. Later, Arthur will commission the Earl of Cornwall, Cador, to intercept and kill Childric, who has broken off from Colgrim and Baldulf's army. In both cases of dividing his forces, Arthur reenacts the first settling of Britain and the first strong bonds between a British king and his nobles, particularly the Earl of Cornwall. Like Corineus, Cador departs with part of Arthur's army in order to unite himself further with the king. As Weinberg notes, Arthur's eradication of these stubborn enemies parallels Brutus' eradication of the giants ("Recasting the Role?" 50-53). The parallel between Corineus and Cador, both of whom are deputized to finish off the leaders of threatening foes, only strengthens Weinberg's reading.

When Arthur mounts the final assault on Colgrim and Baldulf's position, the Britons inflict a horrific slaughter before Arthur finally slays the Saxon leaders. In the midst of the battle, as the king approaches Colgrim, the narrator says, "Then Colgrim could not flee to either side because of the dead bodies" (10681). The preponderance of corpses, which Clarke feels is "one of the most vivid and emotive visions of the battlefield in medieval literature" ("Lazamon's Badon Hill," 368), precisely enacts

Arthur's decisive control over Britain. The dominance he thought he could assert the first time he trapped Childric cannot materialize until Arthur proves his capacity for total victory. Unlike the early Trojans, kings of Britain cannot rely on removing other races geographically, for the Britons must remain in Britain. As a result, Arthur cannot simply evict foes like Melga and Wanis or Colgrim and Childric because they will always return. Rather, Arthur has to annihilate these aggressors, and only a multitude of corpses will guarantee that he can project an aura of absolute dominance over the land.

Just as Colgrim is rendered immobile by the number of dead Saxons around him, so Arthur's dominance is rendered unquestionable by the death toll. This battle, then, operates according to the dynamics of spectacle that were also present in, for example, Maurus' execution of Rodric. In this case, the spectacle is the hill full of bodies, and the speech is yet to come. Regardless, Arthur uses the combination of spectacle and speech to control the meaning of the battle, and the meaning of the battle concerns the identities of the contestants and Arthur's projection of the kingly image. In his struggles against Childric, Arthur learns that he must insist on total dominance over foreign enemies to deter threats to his rule and kingly identity. Whether his harsh treatment of the members of his own court reflects badly on him or not, his decisiveness and capacity for spectacular violence combine to elevate Arthur's rule over those of all his predecessors. He reenacts Brutus' and Belin's careers, but on a much grander scale.

### *Speech Over Colgrim*

The Arthur section contains a disproportionate amount of talking to corpses,<sup>4</sup> and this fascinating phenomenon concentrates diverse motives for violence in dense passages. For example, when Arthur defeats Colgrim and his brother Baldulf, he gives a gloating speech over their dead bodies:

Lien nu þere Colgrim þu were i-  
clumben hæȝe  
and Baldulf þi bro[ð]er lið bi þire side  
nu ich al þis kine-lond sette an eower  
ahȝere hond  
dales and dunes and al mi drihtliche  
uole  
þu clumbe a þissen hulle wunder ane  
hæȝe  
swulc þu woldest to hæuene nu þu  
scalt to hælle  
þer þu miht kenne mucche of þine  
cunne  
And gret þu þer Hengest þe cnihten  
wes fæȝerest  
Ebissa and Ossa Octa and of þine  
cunne ma  
and bide heom þer wunie wintres and  
sumeres  
and we scullen on londe libben in  
blisse  
bidden for eower saulen þat sel ne  
wurðen heom nauære  
and scullen her æuwer ban biside  
Baðe ligen

Lie now there, Colgrim. You climbed  
high.  
And Baldulf your brother lies by your  
side.  
Now I give this kingdom into your  
very hand,  
Valleys and hills and all my lordly  
people.  
You climbed wondrously high up this  
hill  
As if you wanted to reach heaven;  
now you shall go to hell,  
Where you might recognize many of  
your kin.  
And greet there Hengest, who was  
greatest of all knights,  
Ebissa and Ossa, Octa, and more of  
your kin.  
And bid them stay there, through  
winter and summer,  
And we on the earth shall live in bliss  
And pray that no good ever come to  
your souls  
And that you shall both lie here  
beside Bath forever. (10694-706)

Relative positions play a large role in Arthur's triumphant attitude: Colgrim is literally at Arthur's feet after dying on what is literally a high hill, a fact that Arthur compares to Colgrim's attempt to climb high on the symbolic ladder of rule in Britain, only to fall below any Briton's consideration. Heightening the irony, Colgrim's soul is now in hell,

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<sup>4</sup> Griffith notes that *Lazamon* invented this activity independently of any of his acknowledged or unacknowledged sources ("Reading the Landscapes," 649).

lower than even his body, and he stands no chance of escape because the Britons will pray for him never to be forgiven.

The theme of position encodes Arthur's victory as an expression of identity and dominance. Colgrim has tried to gain control over the kingdom, and his death has denied him that control; Arthur points out that fact with irony: "Now I give this kingdom into your very hand." Marcum points out that the poet's use of the land/hand rhyme implies that both Colgrim and Childric aimed for "complete control of the land" (387). Hwanhee Park thinks of this speech as an example of how Arthur "displaces people from their positions to establish his own authority" (8), and Tiller calls the speech an "inverted simile," designed to rhetorically reenact the reversal of power that Arthur's battle has accomplished ("The Truth," 36-37). The irony highlights Colgrim's failure and imparts identity to Colgrim by contrasting it to the identity Colgrim aspired to gain, that of king.

In lines 1096-97, Arthur's use of first-person pronouns makes the issue of dominance even more explicit by identifying himself and Colgrim in opposition to each other: "Valleys and hills and all my lordly people." Colgrim's ambition was to become "lordly" and rule over Arthur's folk, but the battle denies him that opportunity forever. Gareth Griffith suggests that the speech's paradoxes highlight not only the irony of Colgrim's position, but also the geographical location of the battle, which takes place on a hill that overlooks the town of Bath. Further, it is appropriate that the landscape suggests this speech to the poet, given how important landscape is to the *Brut* and to its kings (653-54). Griffith's addition of the landscape adds a helpful layer to the stakes of this battle: Arthur fights not only for political dominance but also for control of the land. The conflict determines identity through the fleshly reality of the violence, but it also

deals with the strong connection between identity and homeland. Ever since Brutus, controlling the land's resources has formed an important part of the Britons' identity and ability to coexist peacefully with each other.

Another part of the rhetorical force of Arthur's gloating derives from his invocation of kinship. At first, he points out that he has just killed both Colgrim and Colgrim's brother Baldulf. Having finished off his kinsman, Arthur is safe from any potential avenging of Colgrim's honor. Arthur's disrespecting Colgrim could, according to the patterns of violence in the *Brut*, motivate the Saxons to exact revenge in order to reinstate their fallen kinsman's honor. After all, the Saxons have avenged themselves in shocking ways before, including by betraying their previous understanding with Arthur. By depriving Colgrim of his kin, Arthur has also deprived him of the chance for posthumous honor. Slaying Baldulf also completes Arthur's dominance, which is related to chances of posthumous honor. Since the ability to dominate gives honor, dominating Baldulf and Colgrim shames them. Their inability to experience satisfaction through revenge cements their shame, and it cements Arthur's dominance over them. Arthur has overcome their wills by killing them, and they can hope for no reversal of that dominance through revenge. Arthur feels that he has irreversibly secured his place in the hierarchy.

The speech's effect expands further when Arthur mentions extended kin—Hengest, Ebissa, Ossa, and Octa. He insists that, just as he has laid Colgrim and his brother low, his ancestors also dominated Colgrim's. Hengest, in particular, who was "greatest of all knights," now dwells in hell, just as Arthur imagines for Colgrim. Introducing the generational trend in which the Saxons fail to conquer the Britons adds a historical dynamic to the contest of wills. Arthur has decidedly established himself over

Colgrim, but he also implies that Colgrim comes from a lesser race, one whose best knight could not overcome the Britons. Colgrim and his ancestors, the sources of his personhood, are both historically and eternally beneath the Britons.

Furthermore, the very human act of speaking reinforces the agency left to the surviving party in the conflict and taken from the deceased. Giving a speech while towering over a dead body enacts the dramatic distance between the living and the dead, and the speaker then exploits that distance as a sign of his dominance over the loser, whose identity is now that of a lowly creature not worthy of respect. The victor has the last word and deprives the vanquished of control over the narrative of his life. Just as kings must project unquestionable versions of themselves to their subordinates and to potential enemies, they must also use dominating violence to impose unquestionable identities upon those whose wills they override. Having defeated Colgrim, Arthur uses his words to impose a meaning upon his fallen enemy. In acting on this impulse, he participates in the same pattern and the same logic as Maurus and Aldolf do when they kill Rodric and Hengest, respectively. Imposing a lowly identity upon his enemies is part of projecting an indisputably strong version of himself.

In his speech over Colgrim, Arthur displays a concern with identities, honor, dominance, and kinship. Each of those motivations fits into larger patterns of violence in the rest of the poem, and the significance of their confluence in Arthur's speech is clearer when placed in the context of the *Brut*'s larger worldview. In all his acts, Arthur behaves according to the logic of the poem as a whole, and the rest of his story develops that logic and demonstrates its shortcomings. While the narrator never directly criticizes the British people in general, his story does lay bare the inadequacy of their worldview. Nowhere is



this rhetorical effect clearer than during Arthur's rule, in which the best of the British kings operates according to all the rules established by the text up to that point, yet still fails to bring about lasting peace. If we recognize the possibility of the text's critique, we can understand why Arthur may have a dark side, even while he can also legitimately be the best king the Britons can possibly produce.

### *Peace with the Picts*

Mercy and generosity are counter-productive in Arthur's war against the Saxons, but when he marches into Scotland because the Scots fought for Colgrim, he can show mercy without repercussions for his people. The difference between the contexts of those two resolutions shows that Arthur has learned not to negotiate between harshness and mercy, but to recognize the difference between a conquered foe's false or total subjection. Once he has established his dominance over the Pictish army, the non-combatants come to Arthur to beg him for peace. First, the clergy come to him and "desired Arthur's peace and his protection" (10911).<sup>5</sup> Befriending the Church at the beginning of his rule, Arthur establishes a pattern that will hold true for the rest of his reign. Even when he goes conquering unprovoked later, he instructs his soldiers to "keep the Church-peace" (11138), which Allen takes to mean "respect church property" (*Lawman's Brut*, 11138). In this way, he provides a counterpoint to Vortiger's clear apathy toward Christianity. Unlike the cautionary tale of Vortiger, the poem suggests, Arthur makes all the right alliances, correctly refusing to treat the Church as an enemy or as a conquered entity.

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<sup>5</sup> *admeden*—lit., *oath-covenant* or *oath of goodwill*. I have chosen *protection* because of the power differential at work.

Cnut of Denmark and William of Normandy constructed identities in ways similar to Uther, and they acted similarly to Arthur in their relations with the Church. Generosity toward the Church was a means to legitimacy for Cnut and William, as Dennis claims that it “helped to associate [their] reign[s] with that tradition of Christian kingship to which [their] Anglo-Saxon predecessors belonged” (34-35). Kaeuper traces the very real tension between knights and the Church, concluding that, despite their constant ambivalence toward knighthood, the clergy did have recourse to ideas of godly violence when knights behaved beneficently toward them (88). Allen speculates that *Lazamon* may have suffered personally during anti-clerical legislation from King John and that that experience may have affected his view of the proper relationship between king and church (“Eorles and Beornes,” 15). Thus, Arthur’s interactions with the Church parallel those of kings who negotiated the Church-state relationship smoothly as well as *Lazamon*’s probable concerns as a priest.

After the Pictish clergy, women come to plead with Arthur, and the words and the spectacle they use to ask for peace enacts the processes by which the *Brut*’s peoples consistently make peace, this time in deference to a rising British emperor. This scene clearly harkens back to Tonuene’s appeal to Brennes, and it recapitulates the ways in which conquered and conqueror can make peace. The women are “almost...naked” (*Lazamon* 10919), they carry their children in their arms (10913), they cut their hair in front of Arthur (10916), and they take “fingernails to their faces so that they bled” (10918). These women have no primal connection to Arthur and are not even Britons, but their disheveled state and the presence of their children emphasizes their vulnerability. They appeal to the desire for dominance that Arthur expressed when he accepted

Childric's first suit for peace. Unarmored, hardly clothed, and intentionally making themselves less beautiful, the women put themselves at Arthur's disposal; they decorate their bodies in ways opposite to the beautiful manipulator Rouwenne, and Arthur has the opportunity to treat them as he wishes. Furthermore, they emphasize the military dominance Arthur has won over their people, saying, "You have slain our people in this land" (10924), but in particular, Arthur has "made our children fatherless" (10927). The women first state that Arthur has brought them to utter passivity; any men who might present military threats have died, so Arthur has effectively conquered the Picts. With their husbands gone, the women are yet more vulnerable, and their children even more so. Disfiguring their own faces and cutting their hair also enhances their vulnerability, as it decreases their chances of finding new husbands to provide for them. The first rhetorical move the women make, then, is to impress upon Arthur their total vulnerability and, thereby, his increased dominance and honor.

The women then give Arthur a reason to trust the Picts. Not only are most of their men dead, but they are also Christians, like the Britons (10928). At this point, the women introduce the closest bond they have with Arthur, one which seems to change the narrator's evaluation of what he previously portrayed as an evil race and allow for reconciliation. Although they are not kin, the Picts are of the Britons' religious tribe. "Saxon men," on the other hand, "are heathen hounds" (10929) and enacted the same cruel conquering in Scotland that they did in England: "They came to this land and killed this people" (10930), they "did us great woe" (10933), and they "hate us" (10934). The women's narration of the evils inflicted upon them forms a kind of bond with Arthur by giving them a common enemy, using the same verbal formula as Genuis and Hengest had

to appeal to their kings' sympathies. The Picts can no longer fight with Arthur against the Saxons, but they can at least explain how the Saxons put them in the same position as the position in which they tried to put Arthur. Thus, while still subservient, the Picts have a commonality with the Britons along the lines of the commonalities that hold societies together.

The women also, however, mention the harms that Arthur has done to them. "They did us woe," they say, but "you do the same" (10933); similarly, "the heathens hate us," and "the Christians make us sorrowful" (10934). The women's desired rhetorical effect here is not to blame Arthur for excessive cruelty, as it might sound at first, but to emphasize their abjectness once more. They have been twice conquered, twice crushed. Arthur's conquest has intensified their vulnerability even above that of a conquered people. The women's final appeal reiterates this idea: "You have taken all this land and overcome all this people. / We are under foot, and you are the only remedy" (10940-1). This last line emphasizes once more the Picts' absolute passivity and Arthur's absolute freedom to decide their fate. Perhaps, as Parry has it, this move activates Arthur's "capacity to feel grief and anxiety" ("Narrators, Messengers, and Lawman's *Brut*," 49), but the women's extreme passivity allows Arthur to feel empathy without threatening his kingdom's peace. Arthur has the choice, in that moment, to crush them without resistance or to remove his metaphorical boot from their necks.

The Pictish women thus sue for peace with Arthur in many of the ways the poem has already established. Bryan remarks that, as women, they alter the peacemaker trope and "separate it entirely from marriage and reproduction," replacing those functions with "shared Christian belief" ("Lazamon's Four Helens," 66). Interestingly, they also make

peace in ways similar to those in which men make peace in the *Brut*. They subject themselves to Arthur's will, thereby recognizing his dominance and honor; to the same effect, they emphasize their vulnerability; they establish a common enemy with Arthur; and they portray themselves as part of his religious family. Because he has reduced the Picts to absolute passivity and because they are Christians, Arthur can grant mercy to them and even allow the few remaining men to live without maiming them in punishment for siding with the Saxons (Lazamon 10946).<sup>6</sup> He demands oaths and hostages (10951-2), and he establishes peace (10956). Thus, Arthur's victory in Scotland begins his reign as emperor, and his reign is good.

Because vulnerability is at issue in violent encounters, the image of Arthur standing erect before the self-effacing Scottish women can serve as a model for the image to which all other kings must aspire in their self-creations. In contrast to the false peace that he accepts from Colgrim and Childric, Arthur's relation to the women is not a mistake but an ideal. The Saxons leave the siege with some shred of dignity; the Scottish women emphasize their exposure to the elements and to Arthur's will. In this relationship, the women are entirely vulnerable, and Arthur is entirely free to choose how to relate to their vulnerability. This is the image of a king establishing his identity as entirely invulnerable. Since, in the economy of honor and image-making, exploiting another's vulnerability decreases one's own, the women's passivity enhances Arthur's agency. Arthur's interactions with the totally passive Picts creates identity for him, and it is the precise identity necessary for a king who wishes to deter invasion and rebellion. Arthur has achieved the goal of all the *Brut*'s rulers.

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<sup>6</sup> My understanding of this line comes from Allen's translation.

### *Peacetime*

Arthur rules his new, relatively small empire well. Once he has set Scotland aright, he proceeds to York and begins to institute peace. *Lazamon* relates the particulars of this peace with unusual specificity, and the initiatives Arthur enacts reveal the benefits that the poet sees in peace. The descriptions of periods between wars and the king's strategic use of violence in peacetime illustrate the continuity of concerns between peace and violence. Even in peace, threats of violence enforce the peaceful order, which depends upon everyone's acceptance of their passivity in relation to the active king.

Again in direct contrast to *Vortiger*, Arthur's first act is to instate a priest as archbishop, giving him "very much land" (11030) and commanding him to "build churches and organize services / and protect God's folk and teach them well" (11034-5). After the violence, the first order of business for establishing peace, according to *Lazamon* the priest, is to provide for the Church. Next, Arthur restores proper order to civil society. He orders "all knights to pass right judgments" (11036), all farmers to "take to their craft" (11037), and "each man to greet every other" (11038). The king thus sets rules of conduct for all three estates, each with their necessary function, and declares that all citizens generally should relate to each other cordially.

Of particular interest for a study of violence is the new role of knights. No longer at war, the estate of those who fight now functions as the judicial and executive branches of government, which Girard and Brown reveal to be structurally identical to the vengeful violent patterns they channel. Previous reigns have characterized peaceful order by each of society's segments' acceptance of their identities within the social Totality, their identities in that Totality grounded by the king. As a Totality, founded on and maintained

by one party's actively donating agency and honor to the others, the ideal peaceful social order depends on violence as surely as it maintains itself through the periodic application of violence against wrongdoers.

Lazamon's digressions while describing peacetime lead some scholars to conclude that Lazamon harbors distaste for violence. For example, Lynch sees war and peace "as direct and matching opposites," reinforcing this conclusion by appealing to Lazamon's poesy, in which "war is represented as a hyper-activity of historical strife" and "peace is a calm continuity without desire, whose almost unimaginable 'bliss' is the enjoyment of sheer existence" ("Blisse wes on londe," 57). While Lynch does nuance his view by mentioning the interrelation of peace with war, acknowledging "a systemic problem for peace" because "the military and political power that makes [peace] possible must necessarily also contain the practical and emotional pre-conditions for war" (47), his main goal is to prove that Lazamon values peace in its own right rather than as simply a time between periods of war. He argues that Lazamon "comes closest in the English Arthurian tradition to imagining a peace that *opposes* wars" ("Peace Is Good after War," 133).

For Lynch, Lazamon's highest version of peace "is represented as a heavenly happiness outside the fluctuations of history," even if it "comes into being and ends within history and inevitable earthly mutability." Peace removes the Britons from the progression of history, its "plural and habitual" actions, such as farming and observing religious rites, "pitched somewhere between...history and...eternity." By allowing the Britons to "enact the relation established between military and political power, the establishment of peace, and the benefit of the land," the "plural and habitual" work of the

estates allows peace to become “a timeless condition of general happiness” (“Blisse wes on londe,” 55).

However, the line between peace and war is not so stark in the *Brut*. While peacetime definitionally excludes war, one of the benefits of thematizing violence is that it shows the structural similarities between peace and war. Some of the same patterns and cultural codes govern all acts of violence, regardless of scale. In Das’s words, “violence, even if it appears shocking, shares in the heterogeneity of everyday life” (136). Her fellow anthropologist Girard applies this principle to the justice system, saying that the state is “no [stranger] to the ways of violence,” but “effectively limits [vengeance] to a single act of reprisal enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function” (*Violence and the Sacred*, 23, 15). Brown’s analysis of judicial reforms in Angevin England demonstrate that the justice system around *Lazamon*’s time explicitly legitimated itself by performing public vengeance. Paul R. Hyams sees thirteenth-century peacekeeping, even through common law courts, as an extension of the logic of revenge (265). Finally, Tiller, too, suggests that “*Lazamon* seems...to realize that such utopian visions [as the unity of Arthur’s empire] can be achieved only through violence” (“The Truth,” 38). Thus, the necessity of peacekeeping violence and the threat thereof during peacetime, far from revealing distaste for violence, highlights the centrality of violence in the *Brut*’s social order. Since violence occurs continually as a part of peace, war and peace interpenetrate.

Focusing on violence extrapolates Lynch’s qualifiers that the king’s “swift retribution” leads *Lazamon* to approve “of kingly strength in war” (“Blisse wes on londe,” 49). The violence of maintaining peace relies on the same dynamics as warlike



violence—honor, revenge, and dominance. Even in peace, the king must retain the ability to override his subjects' wills, thus enforcing upon them a modified version of the identity that he enforces upon enemies. Arthur does allow his vassals a measure of agency through living into their places in the hierarchy, managing the land, and bestowing selfhood on their children; nevertheless, this is literally what Levinas calls the "peace of empires," founded on the violence of Totalities and always susceptible to further violence. It is also the peace of the sacrificial system, thus always susceptible to sacrificial crisis.

In "Peace Is Good after War," Lynch gives as evidence for his view Walwain's response to Cador's hawkish speech before the Roman campaign.<sup>7</sup> When the Roman emperor's messengers demand tribute from Arthur, Cador reacts eagerly: "I thank my Lord... / for this day's tidings, / for idleness makes a man lose his worship" (12428-33). Cador presents a low estimation of peace, common both to the Arthurian tradition and to Lazamon's own Arthur. Walwain, however, reproaches Cador for his disregard for peace, saying, "peace and harmony that are held freely are good, / and God himself made them through his divinity" (12455-6). Lynch sees in this exchange Lazamon's reticence to consent to Cador's devaluation of peace. He is "unwilling to leave Cador's sweeping statement unanswered" because he values peace. In fact, Lynch even sees Cador as "self-interested," pursuing his own glory to the possible harm of his nation ("Blisse wes on londe," 133).

Selfish though he may be, Cador's logic pervades the *Brut*. His appeal to honor, which sounds selfish, is only a sign that he has internalized the importance that the

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<sup>7</sup> This passage occurs later in the plot, but its relevance is more obvious in this section.

Britons on the whole put on the demonstration of one's ability to subdue others. Insofar as honor amounts to reputation for dominance and superiority over another's vulnerability, it serves a utilitarian, peacemaking function. Long periods without war can, in fact, invite invasion, thus compromising the peace that Walwain so desires. Opposing war, then, works not just "against [the poet's] partial self-interest" ("Peace Is Good after War," 133), but against the entire project of peacemaking in the *Brut*. If Walwain speaks for Lazamon here, the text would condemn not Cador's misreading of the value of peace but his entire culture's emphasis on the violence that makes peace.

It is a crucial difference, however, that in peacetime a king can rest on the threat of violence, rather than on its enactment. Even in war and even during spectacular executions, kings must stop using violence and rely on its effects upon witnesses. The point at which that goal becomes reality is the initiation of peace. Thus, peace is rightly founded on violence—or at least on the deterrence that comes through the king's proven ability to inflict violence. Only when the king projects an unassailable image that can control witnesses' interpretations can peace commence in earnest, but the potential for violence must always remain. My perspective, then, redefines peace to settle some of the contradictions inherent in trying to draw too hard a line between peace and war.

Arthur's next order of business is to divide his lands among nobles. He declares an amnesty so that anyone who has been dispossessed may now return and reclaim his land (11042-8). Weinberg points out that Brutus, whom she reads as a prototype of Arthur, is figured as "'creator' of the land" when he imputes his name to it ("Recasting the Role?" 51). The parallels are even greater in that Arthur also reenacts Brutus' dividing the land in order to unite his people, thus also reenacting God's dividing the

world among the sons of Noah. The king's declaration attracts three nobles who provide valuable assistance to Arthur in future campaigns. To institute the proper functions of the three estates, a good king must parcel his land out to good nobles. The new emperor next establishes laws. Lazamon specifies that Arthur "established all the laws that stood in his ancestors' days, / all the good laws that stood here before" (11087-8). In his ordering, as in other things, Arthur returns to Britain the good customs of his ancestors. Where the estates were disordered, he reinstates natural order; where the land has been mismanaged, he institutes dominion; and where the laws have been trammelled, he sets them back. Once again, the use of force, which itself relies on the threat of violence, serves the purpose of law and order.

Finally, Arthur uses peacetime to marry. He meets and falls in love with Wenhaver, marries her, and stays in one place longer than usual because he wants to stay with her (11101-12)—Lazamon's own addition to his sources, Fries notes (25). This action, in particular, gestures toward the fecund peace that Lynch sees in Lazamon. Peace is a time for nurturing new life, a time in which violence is necessary only to keep the natural cycle of growth safe. Of course, this marriage, which should be of the same type as Locrin's marriage to Guendoleine, eventually results in Wenhaver's betrayal of the king and to civil war. The intimate relationship, which should have resulted in profound peace and in security for the future, brings betrayal and civil war into the heart of Arthur's rule and into the heart of peacemaking endeavors.

### *Unprovoked Conquest*

Arthur only enjoys his newly established peace for the space of two seasons, however. When summer comes again, "Arthur wondered what he might do / so that his

good folk would not lie there idle” (11104-5). The word I have translated *idle* is *aswundan*, and it seems related to both OE *æswind*, *idle*, and OE *aswindan*, *to become weak*. Thus, lying idle also results in becoming weak. This word points to the constant possibility of invaders losing respect for Britain’s knights. The king’s solution is to go conquering in Ireland, where Gillomar reigns. He quickly organizes an invasion, stating that he will “lay waste [Gillomar’s] land,” afflict him “with fire and steel,” and “slay that people” (11111-4) unless he would “ask for Arthur’s peace” (11111). The Britons embark on an explicitly dominance-focused campaign, designed to harry the Irish, to Gillomar’s shame, until the opposing king submits to Arthur’s dominance. By engaging in further combat, the British knights will retain their reputation.

Their first sharpening endeavor goes splendidly, and the conditions under which Arthur accepts the Irish suit for peace demonstrate that the *Brut*’s earlier conditions for the cessation of hostilities holds true for imperial conquests, as well. The Britons find the Irish easy to overcome because of technological disparity. The Britons are well armored, while the Irish soldiers are “nearly naked” (11147). As a result, the Britons defeat the Irish without engaging in melee—their arrows devastate their primitive adversaries before any charge can take effect (11149-53). When the British victory is obvious, Gillomar at once adopts the manner of a conquered king. Gillomar’s first words upon deciding to surrender to Arthur are, “Lord Arthur, your peace” (11165), indicating his submission to Arthur’s hegemony by importing the language of peacemaking. He next offers to “become your man” (11166), once again indicating submission and framing the rest of Gillomar’s offers, including hostages and yearly tribute, as signs of that submission. Arthur responds in mercy, demanding less than Gillomar has promised, but

retaining the stipulation that Gillomar become his vassal (11196). This scene is atypical in the conqueror's lenience, but it is a good example of the pattern by which conquests generally end: the defeated king agrees to a new place in the hierarchy, accepting the conqueror's hegemony and requesting his *grið*, or peace. As the goal of every conquest, creating new hierarchies illustrates the identity-making function of conquest and, by extension, the identity-making concerns inherent in contests of dominance.

Because of Arthur's concern that his knights not lie idle, I agree with Allen that "Lazamon's Britain could not have functioned except by expansionism, and, like the Angevin empire, was bound to fail when family feuds and rival powers undermined it" ("Eorles and Beornes," 14). Allen here discusses the Britain in which the poet Lazamon actually lived, but her article's purpose is to contextualize the poem's concerns. However, she supports this claim with a single paragraph comparing Modred to King John and putting all the blame for Arthur's tragedy on Modred. I claim, by contrast, that all the patterns of expansionism and the failure thereof are anticipated in the rest of the chronicle and make sense not only in historical context but also given the phenomenological experience of violence. The power of violence to create and impose identity and to control interpretations, combined with the Britons' insular self-conception, demand that the best British king be aggressive and foreshadow the collapse of a system predicated on identity-creating violence.

Girard would see in unprovoked conquest a result of the sacrificial crisis. According to Girard's theory, the sacrificial system is always unstable and, thus, periodically needs to find new scapegoats. Rituals lose their power, rivalries within the community grow, and another sacrificial victim becomes necessary (*Violence and the*

*Sacred*, 49). When this happens, of course, further conquest is needed to give all the factions within the community an enemy to oppose unanimously. Girard would thus speculate that lying idle not only presents the possibility of invasion, but also allows internal factions to divide the Britons so that mimetic violence can seep into their ranks. Not only invasion, then, but also rebellion is at stake in continued conquest, and Arthur shows himself a master of both the logic of deterrence and the logic of sacrifice.

Dominance-motivated violence is intrinsically a matter of identity because a king's identity must be that of total dominance. To project strength and a warlike identity, a king may turn to conquest. Parry reads Arthur as a model king precisely because his conquests garner him a reputation for "brutality," and "[r]eputation is power" ("Arthur and Possibility," 64-65). Pinker also finds that the evolutionary advantage of revenge is to construct a reputation, thus "preventing a nice guy from being exploited" (534-37). Since he represents his people, Arthur enhances the Britons' glory, as well, increasing Arthur's reputation and the Britons'. Conquest has changed British identity from the insular people who refuse to learn others' languages to a nation that lords over other nations, forcing foreign peoples to integrate into their structures and learn their language. In her translation of the *Brut*, Allen includes the marginal title to this section, "International Reputation" (l. 11104). The issue of identity in conquest flows from the British understanding of the nation as a family, as well. Since position in the political hierarchy gives identity in ways similar to position in a family, with the king-as-father on top, restructuring international hierarchy restructures basic identities. Arthur, in effect, becomes the king-as-father of the kings whom he conquers. By appropriating such an identity over and against other kings, Arthur also lays claim to agency, to which he forces

the other kings to react when they accept their places in the new hierarchy. Thus, Arthur continues to operate on the understanding that his place as king and emperor is to aggrandize himself and his own agency so that he can be the source of agency for his vassals. He treats his conquered enemies like the Scottish women, demanding total submission, because he has learned the rules of armed conflict from his earlier mistake with the Saxons. Only after real submission can he exert his power to choose mercy.

As previous kings including Arthur's own father, Uther, have demonstrated, a king's reputation has a significant effect on the king's people. A strong king wards off any potential invasion and discourages rebellion among his people. Conquest accomplishes this strategic identity formation by placing the conqueror on top of the international hierarchy, demonstrating that he has the power to overcome others' wills. Thus, conquest participates in exactly the logic of peacemaking violence that precedes Arthur's career. One might wonder whether the knights actually would become weaker without continual warfare, but in one sense that question does not matter: whether the knights will become weaker or not, other ambitious leaders might perceive a lack of aggression as a sign of weakness, resulting in misery for the king's people. Indeed, such a perception is precisely the problem that results in Modred's betrayal later. Arthur's initiative, then, follows the logic internal to the *Brut's* processes of ordering society.

#### *More Peacetime*

Having established himself as a respectable emperor, Arthur rules in peace for twelve years (11338). Lazamon describes this period of peace in less specific, more idyllic terms than the previous period. Now, the realm possesses "peace" and "security" (11339): "[n]o man fought with [Arthur], and he started no conflicts" (11340), and there

were more joys in Britain than anyone could possibly imagine elsewhere (11341-2). Not only the absence of war defines peace for *Lazamon*, but also the presence of joys. The narrator does not specify what kinds of joys exist in Britain, but one can reasonably assume they equate to the generative, natural joys that abounded in the previous period of peace.

In the midst of this peace, however, *Lazamon* relates a bloody story that helpfully demonstrates the role of violence during peacetime and the difficulties of maintaining a cohesive empire. After a celebratory feast veers into a brawl because of his knights' pride and honor, Arthur decrees that the knight who began the hostilities be drowned in a bog, that his closest kin be beheaded, and that his female relations have their noses cut off so that they lose their beauty—"and so I will destroy all his kin" (11400). The severity of this punishment provides not only deterrence against any similar fights in the future, but also, with the same reasoning that governed Arthur's speech over *Colgrim's* body, certainty that the guilty knight's family will not try to avenge his execution. This episode illustrates a way to cut off potential blood feuds, but by counterpoint, it illustrates the very real possibility of such feuds. Even when a legitimate king carries out legitimate peacekeeping violence, the recipient's family may interpret that violence as an obligation to avenge the death of their kin. Much as *Octaves's* wholesale slaughter of Romans ensured peace from a blood feud, so Arthur's wholesale destruction of this knight's family restrains the possibility of vengeance.

Absolute violence is even more appropriate in this case because Arthur cannot physically separate the knights from each other. The entire dispute, says the carpenter who eventually offers to make the Round Table, is over who can "be within" (11432),



closest to Arthur and therefore in the position of greatest honor. The knights, therefore, have not accepted their respective places in the hierarchy that Arthur grounds. Their struggle for advancement might imply a degree of disrespect for their emperor, whose prerogative it is to deal out honor.

The spectacle of this instance of violence is one of several whose brutality challenge the empathetic imagination of twenty-first century readers, but a long view of the patterns of violence in the *Brut* can restore some of the rationality. Tiller believes that Arthur's punishment would be considered "excessive" even by Lazamon's contemporaries. Perhaps so, but the logic of the text supports the action. In fact, Tiller speculates that the anonymous carpenter's offer to make the Round Table may be a sign that Arthur's reputation as a king unable to control his own knights has spread beyond England and "compromise[d] his status as an effective leader" ("The Truth," 39). As Parry remarks, "Reputation is power" ("Arthur and Possibility," 65), and a king's power deters violence from within and without. Since, as Buczynski says, "a good king is one that can meet the challenges posed by the circumstances of his reign" (143-44), and since Arthur's challenges are frequently violent, the king's violence in this case is justified. Certainly, the Round Table is a better solution than constant genocide, but the utility of the initial violence is difficult to deny in the poem's own terms.

While the punishment seems to have been effective, the problem sees a solution only when a carpenter builds the Round Table. In this way, the poem provides room for peace not instituted through violence. When the knights learn to see each other as equals, they gain the capacity to live in peace. However, even this gesture toward peaceful resolution does not obviate the need for violence during peacetime—the knights must still





Keeping knights in shape provides for the people at large and ensures peace and prosperity. Later, during the Roman campaign, when Arthur summons all his knights to advance against Luces, the narrator finds it significant and positive that every knight is “thoroughly proven in [the use of] weapons” (12696). Having kept in practice during peacetime thus works to the Britons’ advantage in both peace and war. The joys of peacetime depend upon competence in violence.

### *Roman Campaign*

#### *Initial Challenge*

Arthur’s crowning campaign begins with a challenge from the Roman emperor. As the grandest campaign in the entire *Brut*, this section dramatizes many of the patterns of violence developed in the previous 11,000 lines. The campaign is a response to a Roman challenge, which is itself a response to Arthur’s aggression against France. Conquering France, of course, is but an extension of the same impulse that led Arthur to conquer Ireland and Scandinavia. Thus, the logic of projecting power that begins Arthur’s conquests also embroils him in a final, destructive war with Rome that follows predictable patterns established long before.

Honor always and strongly motivates the characters involved in the Roman campaign, and access to goods in the form of tribute acts as the primary symbol of honor. We have already noted that honor inherently concerns identity and dominance. In the midst of the campaign, characters sometimes appeal explicitly to honor, and sometimes they acknowledge that revenge motivates them. In his fight with the giant of Mont Saint-Michel, Arthur experiences the emotional escalation that Julius Caesar manifested as a

result of frustrated will to dominance, and although this episode is minor, it does lay bare the emotional pattern that escalates into the Romano-British war.

After his twelve years of peace, not sated with his rule over Scandinavia, Arthur proceeds to attack France, currently ruled by the Roman Frolle, who pays tribute every year to Rome. In this war, Frolle resists partly because of his right to rule the country, but also partly out of loyalty to Rome (11692-4). The siege of Paris ends in the *Brut*'s first battle decided by single combat, with Arthur defeating Frolle. Arthur then conquers the rest of France and returns to Britain to celebrate the peak of his power. Suddenly remembering that Britain exists and shamed by Arthur's conquest of France, the Roman Emperor Lucus sends messengers to demand that the Britons "acknowledge that he is king over you" (12379) and "make amends to the emperor for Frolle the king" (12381). Arthur must "become [Lucus'] vassal and acknowledge him as lord" (12380) because, the Romans claim, Arthur "hold[s] all [Frolle's] lands unjustly" (12383). Furthermore, by neither paying tribute nor acknowledging Lucus as emperor, Arthur "deprive[s] [the Romans] of [their] rights" (12376). One symptom of the rebellion in which the messengers claim Arthur holds his kingdom is tribute; another is that he "dare[s] to pass judgments" (12369) in land rightfully belonging to Lucus.

Honor and dominance clearly motivate Lucus' challenge. He resents Arthur's claiming lordship over lands the Roman Empire heretofore controlled, and he resents Arthur's considering himself equal to the emperor. Lucus cannot satisfy himself with the thought of Arthur's equality, and he thus reveals that dominance and its attendant honor form the core of his challenge. One way in which Arthur's disregard for Lucus as overlord manifests itself is in Arthur's wielding judgments in France. The British

conqueror has imposed his own laws there, signifying his hegemony over the land, a move similar to refusing to pay tribute. In these ways, Arthur shows that he considers Luces of, at most, as much consequence as himself. Luces' will does not matter to Arthur in the lands the Britons now control, and that disregard is what galls the Roman.

To make his case even stronger, Luces uses the language of rights: Arthur unrightfully rules Britain, slew Froile, and rules in France. By assuming hegemony in Britain and France, Arthur denies the rights of Luces and the Romans. Honor is a zero-sum game in international conquest: one conqueror's dominance implies another emperor's dishonor. Furthermore, withholding rights from the Romans dishonors their race; the messengers state that Arthur "lift[s] up [his] eyes to [their] ancestors" (12367). Lifting up his eyes implies that Arthur aspires to equality with the Romans' ancestors, claiming that he is as great as they were. Dishonoring previous generations of Romans thus further dishonors current Romans by casting aspersion on the source of their identities, their blood relations.

A final ploy the Roman messengers use is to appeal to historical precedent: "Julius... / ...won [Britain] with fight" (12375-6), they remind Arthur. The upstart British monarch has dared to defy the precedent of one of history's greatest conquerors, Julius Caesar, whose cool use of violence to attain his own ends provides an example for future conquerors and kings in the *Brut*. Of course, one purpose of including this part of the messengers' speech is to heighten the dramatic magnificence of Arthur's reign precisely by comparing him to Julius Caesar, but the characters employ the appeal to history as a legal argument that reveals their concern with generational honor.

Not surprisingly, Arthur disagrees with the Roman arguments. He appeals to his own ancestors, starting with Belin and Brennes and moving through Constantin to Maximien. Britons and Arthur's ancestors performed all three conquests of Rome, so Arthur argues that he has just as much historical and blood-relation claim to Rome as Luces has to Britain. He also brings up tribute, reversing Luces' demand and boasting that he will require tribute of Rome (12520-1). Yet, as much as honor motivates both sides in this great conflict, Arthur's summation of his response to Rome's challenge reveals that the will to power, encapsulating dominance and access to goods for their intrinsic worth, also strongly motivates him: "He wills [to have] all, and I will [to have] all" (12531). Both emperors want to do all their will in the lands in question, and Arthur here explicitly acknowledges those stakes.

Both the plot leading up to the Roman campaign and the contest of legal language follow the Morality Gap and mimetic desire patterns. Arthur's admission to willing to have all reveals that, at bottom, his contest with Luces is about control of goods. However, Luces, though he claims to be acting in the interest of his rights, showed no interest in British tribute until Arthur conquered France. Thus, Luces' imperial ambition imitates Arthur's, which activated it. Just as in mimetic rivalry, the model for the Roman's ambition becomes an intolerable obstacle once the ambition has awoken. For his part, despite his reaction to being dishonored, Arthur has said before the Roman messengers arrive, "I will...break Rome's walls / And remind them how King Belin led the Britons in there / and won all the lands that Rome owned" (11989-90). Arthur makes this prediction just after his conquest of France, even before he returns to England. Arthur, then, desires what other kings own because of the honor involved in gaining those

possessions. Ultimately, his attitude amounts to mimetic desire, which motivates him more because someone else owns something than because of its intrinsic properties. Lucus, similarly, cares nothing for the intrinsic worth of the tribute he claims until Arthur's conquests remind him of Britain's existence.

The legal claims that each ruler puts forth, since mimetic desire motivates the conflict, takes on the characteristics of Pinker's Morality Gap. Lucus emphasizes Arthur's unprovoked invasion of France, considering that action unjustified and his own challenge a proportionate response. Arthur, on the other hand, points out that Lucus is the one to demand tribute—while Arthur has had hegemony over Rome on his mind all along, he has not yet demanded submission of the Roman emperor. In this way, Arthur positions himself as the wronged party. In their appeals to their ancestors, too, the two emperors exhibit the Morality Gap pattern. Each wants to delegitimize the actions of the other's ancestors while maximizing the legitimating implications of his own. They each position themselves as simply claiming their God-given rights, while they paint the other as greedy and possessive. Thus, as in Pinker's paradigm, they each accuse the other of unprovoked aggression while insisting that their own aggression is more legitimate. The pattern of the Morality Gap continues as the emperors escalate their conflict into a disastrous war, just as it had escalated the conflict between Cassibelaunus and Androgeus into the first use of foreign forces to settle a conflict between Britons.

The legal contest is ripe for Tiller's analysis of the *Brut*'s historiography. Lazamon's insight into historiography is that a unified narrative must suppress rival narratives and "subsequently [work] to conceal traces of this manipulation" ("The Truth," 30). In other words, suppressions must claim legitimacy and constancy. Not only does



this discourse cover up its own violence, as Tiller asserts, but it also enables future violence, as Girard says.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the preceding chapters have demonstrated that peace depends upon suppressing rival narratives. Kings must project a very specific image of themselves to their subordinates and to other kings, often using violence to control witnesses' perceptions. Controlling the historical narrative is an extended version of this same suppression.

Given not only the patterns just discussed but also the unity of honor with violence, only violence can resolve the conflict once the rival emperors have issued their challenges. If either Arthur or Luces retreats or ignores the other, he will lose honor, and any compromise will constitute similar shame. Following the pattern of his ancestors, in which projecting an aura of unassailable power provides the greatest protection from rebellion and invasion, Arthur has attracted the ire of Luces. Both emperors perceive threats to their honor and, therefore, can only act violently. Arthur's use of violence to protect peace, therefore, leads only to more violence.

Rome's initial challenge to the expanding British empire introduces many of the patterns of violence established earlier in the chronicle: the Morality Gap, the zero-sum nature of honor, the need for violent revenge to effectively reclaim honor, the implications of material tribute to dominance and honor, the activity and passivity at stake in attempts to control historical narratives, and the ability of scapegoating to inspire future violence. The interchange also establishes that each emperor's image as an unopposable will has been challenged. With all the motivations for violence at stake—

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<sup>10</sup> Girard makes the case for the self-perpetuating nature of sacrificial systems most compellingly in *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*. In that work, he differentiates the Bible from myths, which cannot critique themselves because they “cannot question themselves about collective expulsion as such” (113). The victim mechanism “must conceal it[self] so it can continue to control human culture” (142).

honor, dominance, revenge, possessions—the *Brut*'s logic of kingship demands that each emperor attempt to overcome the other. Arthur cannot back down because doing so would compromise his image and, thereby, his ability to control his people and deter invasion. He has learned his lesson, after all, from the brawl that led to the creation of the Round Table.

### *Campaign*

*Giant of Mont Saint-Michel.* Arthur's first use of violence in the Roman campaign addresses an affront not from the Romans but from a giant, and it illustrates the principle Julius Caesar first manifested: a frustrated will to dominance can lead to emotional escalation and non-instrumental violence. When Arthur arrives in Brittany, a knight tells Arthur that a giant has been terrorizing the countryside and has recently abducted Howel's daughter. The conflict between Arthur and the giant entails dominance and honor; the giant's ravaging mirrors the tactical ravaging used often by armies in the Middle Ages, and after failing to subdue the giant by force, the inhabitants of Brittany finally have decided to "leave him alone / to fare as he will, according to his will" (12827-8). The giant has used violence to subject the people and to do all his will upon them. He has, therefore, appropriated rule of Brittany, establishing his dominance in order to enjoy possession of the land and its resources. Thus, he threatens Howel's and Arthur's dominance over the land and people, thereby threatening their identities as rulers.

Most immediately egregious, the giant has abducted and, the narrator later reveals, raped Howel's daughter. Howel is Arthur's relative (10201), so his daughter is

also related to the king. In addition to threatening Arthur's hegemony, therefore, the giant has also dishonored his kin. Although all threats to the wellbeing of Arthur's subjects dishonor the king, this particular crime compounds the shame by involving one of Arthur's direct relatives. The giant, then, parodies Arthur's hegemony and threatens his family, the most primal responsibility of a king. Park's is the fullest development of this reading. He argues that the giant mimics Arthur by defeating the king's knights, controlling the women in Arthur's territory, tearing down a castle, and marking the land by burying Eleine (8-14). In the process, the giant "mimic[s] Arthur's order-keeping methods to devastating effect and thus exposes the shortcomings of the Arthurian order and the fragility of the powerful conquerors in the entire *Brut*" (7). The giant acts much like a ravaging and conquering king, and as a result, he exposes the king's legitimacy to question. From the perspective of a focus on violence, however, the giant both dramatizes emotional escalation and illustrates the centrality of violence to peace.

Both phenomenologically and narratively, the giant episode demonstrates the centrality of violence. As Falke has argued, viewing individuals as representatives denies the possibility of empathy and motivates violence ("Framing Embodiment," 74). In the giant episode, the Britons see the giant as a representative of chaos or other threats to their hegemony. More chilling, Arthur and his subjects see Eleine as a representative. Seeing the victim as a symbol of British hegemony arises from the conviction that the nation is an extended family and that the king is the most active part of that family. Arthur's outrage stems from the implications of the giant's violence to his own identity and sovereignty. His reaction, sensing the implications for his own identity, results from the conviction that he has, in some ways, created his own identity. Seeing victims as

symbols makes the violence done to them integral to the story: the violence and victimization must occur because without it, Arthur cannot overcome the threat and fulfill the glory of being a model king. Therefore, Bryan argues that the text “*require[s]* a rape” and narrates Eleine’s caretaker’s rape three times because it needs “female sacrifice to motivate and glorify the male king” (“Lazamon’s Four Helens,” 64-70).

Bryan’s observation of the necessity of the giant’s violence can be extrapolated to the entirety of the *Brut* and its wars. According to Bryan’s narratology, the *Brut*’s kings need the sacrifice of their peasants at the beginning of conflicts and their knights in battle to assert their identities. This insight amounts to a recognition that, although kings cannot always impose their wills violently, they must prove their ability to do so. Without the proven ability to overcome others’ wills, Arthur could never accrue his reputation as an unopposable king; thus, his rule and its glory need violence. Further, any peace that results from his rule needs the violence necessary to construct such a stern image. Violence, then, is necessary for the narrative to demonstrate Arthur’s glory, which the narrative further justifies as necessary for peace. Peace needs violence.

Arthur immediately makes plans to kill the giant and takes Beduer and Kæi up the mountain to confront the monster. When they reach the giant, Arthur prepares to fight the giant by himself, commanding his knights not to interfere, on pain of life and limb (12983-4), “unless they saw that it was needful” (12985). Arthur approaches the sleeping giant, and while “Arthur could have hacked the giant apart right there, / slain the devil where he lay and slept,” the king chooses instead to wake the giant up before fighting, “lest he be reproached some other day” (12991-4). With this chivalric impulse, Arthur wakes up the giant. Although the giant shatters Arthur’s shield with a single stroke of his

club (13001-2), Arthur runs around a tree three times, the giant chasing him, until he runs fast enough to catch up to the giant and strike him from behind (13005-12). The giant falls, begins to request Arthur's peace, and asks to know the name of the knight who defeated him because he had thought that only King Arthur would be able to do so (13014-7). For his part, Arthur demands to know about the giant's "kin," "father and mother," "which land" he comes from, and why he has "killed my relative" (13021-4). Park argues that Arthur's motive is information: he wants to know where the giant comes from so that he can fully narrate the giant's history and fully control meaning (17). Pinker agrees, in general, that contests of dominance trade in information, including honor and position in the hierarchy (515-16). Tiller, too, believes that Arthur desires to control the giant's narrative ("The Truth," 41), bringing back into play how violence integrates people into a Totality that imparts meaning.

However, the giant refuses to answer the question without Arthur's pledge to let him live and to heal his limbs (Lazamon 13026-7). Instead of negotiating, Arthur orders Beduer to behead the enemy (13030). Allen finds this command inconsistent with the rest of Arthur's ethos in the confrontation (*Lawman's Brut*, l. 12993 n.). However, Arthur's wrath follows the pattern enacted earlier by Julius Caesar, and the giant repeats the half-submission that was so dangerous in Colgrim: the giant kindles the king's wrath by agreeing to Arthur's demand for information only after putting conditions on agreeing to the demand. When he asks for assurance of his safety before he submits to Arthur's will, the giant sets himself in a relationship of equality with Arthur—he has information Arthur wants, and Arthur has the upper hand in their mortal combat. Trying to bargain with Arthur indicates that the giant does not see himself as totally bested but as able to

manipulate Arthur into promising him life. Thus, he denies Arthur the essence of dominance, the ability to do all his will. As a result, “the Giant becomes a rebel who may be silenced but not succumbed” (Park 17). As surely as they must be able to control wills, some wills kings may have to overcome.

Frustrated with the giant’s refusal to acknowledge his superiority, and perhaps seeing flashbacks to his peace treaty with Colgrim and Childric, Arthur’s inflamed will to dominate now demands that he enact his dominance over the giant. This is not a tactical, dispassionate decision, at least not entirely; it is an instinctive decision not governed by the brain’s Seeking system (Pinker 511). In fact, Arthur willingly ignores the giant’s control over the information he does, in fact, want. The instantaneous reaction against his frustrated dominance leads him to see only the contest of wills and to forget about any other benefit he might accrue. The violence of dominance, in short, occludes his ability to calculate the costs and benefits of his actions. Finally, even if he had performed such a calculation, the giant is not a Christian, not fully human, and thus not trustworthy. Like the Saxon before him, he fails to submit fully and does not have the same kind of common being or religious kinship to tie him to Arthur as the Scottish women had.

The emotional escalation that results from a frustrated will to dominate also inflects the responses of Arthur and Luces to each other. Their feud concerns dominance and, thereby, honor and identity. With such values at stake, each ruler must interpret the other’s refusal to submit as a frustration of his own rightful place in the hierarchy. Very much like the Moralization Gap, the violent response to frustrated will to dominance in this case escalates the conflict until it erupts into a monumental war. Centering our focus on violence reveals the narrative necessity of the giant’s rape, thus revealing the necessity

of violence for the entire poem and highlighting the stakes of the imperial contest: agency. The war is a struggle for one emperor's agency over another and for agency over their people's history, thus over their own identities. From the moment of contact, then, they are locked in a Totality, in which each emperor must henceforth be defined by his relative position in the hierarchy involving the other.

*Walwain's Disrespect.* Fittingly for vassals of kings in conflict, knights also feel that only violence can restore their honor. Before the first battle of the Roman war, Arthur sends Walwain and some other knights to speak to Lucus and demand that he relinquish claims to Britain and to France. The episode demonstrates the concern with honor that everyone involved shares. The kings have already locked themselves into a contest of honor, and the knights who go with Walwain feel the same stakes: they ask Walwain to anger the Romans so that they can "with fight prove ourselves" (13122).<sup>11</sup> They desire to fight not only for personal honor, but also for their national honor: "Now it is great shame to our people... / unless there be some fighting before we accord" (13125-6). The threats and boasts the Romans have issued have dishonored the Britons, and only violence will undo the shame. The knights receive their identities from their places in the national hierarchy, so the threat to their king's honor threatens to reduce their honor, as well.

When the envoy arrives at Lucus' tents, they intentionally insult the emperor. They ignore the Romans who ask them about their mission as they ride into the camp, they do not wait to be announced, and they enter the emperor's own tent unbidden and

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<sup>11</sup> The word I have translated *prove* is *fondien*, a version of *fonden*, explained in the above footnote on line 12312. The note is in the section "More Peacetime."

armed (13142-7). All these aggressions signal disrespect, and so does the message that Walwain gives. He observes that Luces does not react to the three knights' first message, so he bursts out a summary of Arthur's message, emphasizing the disregard in which Arthur holds Luces: "He sent you his message without greeting" (13160), he states, and threatens that the British king will "become your bane" (13170). The lack of greeting signals Arthur's refusal to see Luces as a person of consequence, and threatening to kill the emperor signals Arthur's intention to claim his honor through violence. Tensions in the tent escalate until Walwain kills a Roman soldier in front of the emperor. Specifically, the fact that the Roman insulted British "worship" (13201) precipitates the killing. Arthur interpreted his knights' brawl in his presence as disrespect to his authority, and killing one of Luces' subjects in his sight surely implies the same manner of disrespect. Thus, honor continues to provide the greatest incentive in all this violence, and the honor involved is both the kings' and their knights'. The entire system of government feels itself implicated in the forces drawing them into war.

This episode is a rare glimpse into the values of knights distanced from their king, and it reinforces this project's finding that identity is at stake in international conflicts. Walwain and his companions recognize that Luces' demand to Arthur implies dishonor on all the Britons. Their actions reveal, then, that they receive their identities from their king. As the occupant of the top position in their extended family's hierarchy, Arthur is the figurative father and origin of identity. Luces' treatment of Arthur as a vassal ripples out to Arthur's knights, as well, so that they have just as much incentive to enact violent revenge as their king. The Britons' conception of themselves as an extended family and of violence as the means for constructing identity and honor explain the knights' actions



in this scene. Walwain and his companions flee, and their provocation begins a war that lasts approximately 760 lines, ending with Luces' death and Arthur's announcement that he will soon enter Rome.

*Body as Message: Controlling and Resisting.* Once Arthur has won the war, he disposes of Luces' body in a way that participates in the identity-imposing use of spectacle. He makes elaborately rich coffins for Luces and some of the Roman nobles, then sends their bodies back to Rome with the message that he "sent them tribute from his land / and would send them more of the same greetings / if they desired Arthur's gold" (13915-7). He promises to ride into Rome and "tell them tidings of Britain's king" (13920) before erecting the city's fallen walls and ruling the "mad Rome-people" (13921-2).

The issue of tribute is again encoded as a matter of honor, dominance, and access to goods, and by virtue of honor and dominance, it is also part of royal and national identity. Having, by killing the emperor, proven his and the Britons' identities as more powerful than Luces and the Romans, Arthur uses Luces' body to reiterate the meaning he wants to invest in the war. The spectacle he creates with the coffins focuses the Romans' gaze upon the emperor's dead body and gives Arthur the last word on its meaning. Before the medium of the emperor's will, that body now conveys Arthur's message: the Britons are a sovereign people, and Arthur is above the Roman emperor in the international hierarchy. In this narration of the events, Luces is a grasping tyrant, despicable in his attempt to rise above his natural station; Luces, of course, is incapable of enforcing any other interpretation of the end of his life, and the Romans are in no position to do so, either. Thus, Arthur gets the last word on the meaning of Luces' body.

In summarizing Levinas, Falke expresses the logic here, saying, “Through the violent act itself, some message is conveyed although no message can ever exhaust what is lost in the destruction of another, vulnerable person” (“Framing Embodiment,” 80). Through Falke, Levinas accounts both for the impulse to control another’s meaning and the impossibility of doing so. Violence creates identity through the medium of the witness, whom the perpetrators mean to interpret the spectacle.

In all the cases we have considered, spectacle used to impose identity takes the form of a violent action combined with words used to interpret those actions. These elements are present in Maurus’ having Rodric pulled apart and then erecting a monument to tell the story; Aldolf’s reenactment of the Agag story; Uther’s killing and commenting on Octa; Arthur’s killing and then taunting Colgrim; and Arthur’s killing and then making a spectacle of Luces. In all these instances, both the violence and the words are necessary for characters to construct their intended identities. If one of those elements were missing, others could narrate those identities differently. In the Roman campaign, Arthur demonstrates his mastery of the dynamics of imposing identities. To do so, he makes spectacles of his enemies’ bodies, commenting on them as he does so in order to secure the meaning he wants the bodies to bear. Dead and silent, the corpses bear the meaning Arthur intends, proclaiming for him his unstoppable will and ability to override the wills of any challengers. In this way, the witnesses left behind the slain enemies come to accept Arthur’s identity as unquestioned sovereign. Gaining that identity, in turn, is the surest way to protect from rebellion and invasion.

The purpose of spectacular violence combined with speeches is to control the concepts that witnesses will apply to the relevant events and people. If kings succeed in

this attempt, the witnesses and, ideally, future generations will never deny the king's interpretation. Violence and the struggle for agency account for the *Brut's* kings' attempts to settle what they and other people can mean. However, Arthur will find that he cannot hold together an empire founded on violently imposed and delimited meanings.

### *Civil War*

#### *Premonition and Preparation*

While poised to take Rome and accede to the glorious heritage of Belin, Brennes, and Constantin, Arthur receives a messenger from home. After staying up late talking to the messenger, Arthur has a nightmare that almost causes him to faint as soon as he rises from his bed the next morning. Asked about his strange loss of strength, the king relates his dream.

Me imette þat mon me hof uppen are halle	I dreamed that a man lifted me onto the top of a hall
þa halle ich gon bi-striden swulc ich wolde riden	I began to sit upon that hall as if riding a horse
Alle þa lond þa ich ah alle ich þer ouer sah	I looked out over all the land that I own
And Walwain sat biuoren me mi sweord he bar an honde	And Walwain sat in front of me, bearing my sword in his hand
þa com Moddred faren þere mid unimete uolke	Then Modred came with innumerable people
He bar an his honde ane wiax stronge He bigon to hewene hardliche swiðe	He bore in his hand a strong battle-ax He began to chop very strongly
And þa postes for-heou alle þa heolden up þa halle	And chopped down all the pillars that held up the hall
þer ich iseh Wenheuer eke wimmonnen leofuest me	I also saw Wenhaver there, the dearest of all women to me,
Al þere muche halle rof mid hire honden heo to-droh	She pulled apart the whole of the great roof of that hall with her hands
þa halle gon to hælden and ich hæld to grunden	The hall began to fall, and I fell to the ground,
þat mi riht ærm to-brac þa seide Modred Haue þat	So that my right arm broke. Then Modred said, "Take that!"

Adun ueol þa halle and Walwain gon to ualle	The hall fell down, and Walwain began to fall,
And feol a þere eorðe his ærmes brekeen beine	And fell to the earth. Both his arms broke.
And ich igrap mi sweord leofe mid mire leoft honde	And I grabbed my dear sword with my left hand
And smæt of Modred is hafd þat hit wond a þene ueld	And smote off Modred's head so that it fell to the ground
And þa quene ich al to-snaðde mid deore mine sweorede	And the queen I cut to pieces with my dear sword.
And seoððen ich heo adun sette in ane swarte putte	And then I put her down into a dark pit
And al mi uolc riche sette to fleme þat nuste ich under Criste whar heo bicumen weoren.	And put all my noble people to flight, So that, by Christ, I did not know where they went. (13984-14003)

The dream is clearly prophetic and clearly adds to the dramatic irony springing from the difference between the audience, who knows what is about to happen to Arthur, and the king, who does not. It also expresses the operative elements of Modred's betrayal and Arthur's downfall.

One element of Arthur's tragedy is that the betrayal undermines the metaphors that the Britons use to define themselves. The king starts out atop a hall, a symbol for the seat of his political power, as Sheppard remarks ("Of This Is a King's Body Made," 52). Walwain, to whom Arthur later says that he will leave Rome, holds Arthur's sword, symbolizing his status as right-hand man. He is the loyal vassal and nephew, a model of British cohesion. Modred, on the other hand, also Arthur's nephew and also entrusted with part of Arthur's empire, opposes Walwain's example. Far from holding a sword on his lord's behalf, Modred wields an axe, a hacking weapon symbolizing not regal authority but simple destruction. Further, Modred appears at the head of an army, having tempted the Britons away from their rightful ruler. The recapitulation of Brutus and his illustrious conquering ancestors, Arthur has established himself as head of a British

empire filled with innumerable people, and he values his kinship connections, in which he trusts implicitly. Modred's chopping at the pillars, then, symbolizes his undermining of the nation as family, that old basis for British cooperation. Wenhaver, an equal conspirator with Modred, has her own heinous role to play. While Modred undermines the foundations of the hall, she tears apart its roof. She is responsible, then, for the dismemberment of the empire that Arthur has built. At the end of this first part of the dream, all of Arthur's subjects disperse.

The way that Arthur responds to his dream attackers reinforces the metaphors at stake. He appropriately beheads Modred, who has usurped Arthur's place as head of the empire. By setting himself up as king, Modred aspires to the place in the political hierarchy that rightfully belongs to Arthur, and the way in which he meets his death in the dream emphasizes that relative positions in the hierarchy, which amounts to a Totality, are at stake. Arthur also divides Wenhaver's body into many pieces, mirroring her division of the roof. In previous episodes, the queen's body has represented the king's ability to keep the land in his hand, to continue his lineage, and to provide for the future cohesion of his empire. In order for her body to be "link[ed]...to a perceived right order in the realm," Parson points out that a medieval queen "properly reveals herself to, or shares herself with, only the ruler whom she counsels and whose children she bears" (252). According to this metonymic way of conceiving the queen's body, Wenhaver's dismemberment of the empire results from exposing her body to the wrong man. For the effect of poetic justice, then, Arthur imposes the punishment on the central mass of Wenhaver's body, and he chops it into pieces as punishment for the loss of imperial integrity.

Another old pattern that recurs in the dream is the destabilizing effect of romantic love. Arthur, who in the past has delayed military campaigns for the sake of spending time with Wenhaver, refers to his queen as “dearest.” Once the hall falls, however, the adjective *dear* switches to describe Arthur’s sword. It refers to the sword twice, each time just before Arthur punishes one of the traitors (13998, 14000). His affective attachment to his wife shown to be misplaced, Arthur now sees value in his hegemony, the sole rational basis of royal marriage for Lazamon. The danger of romantic love, as Locrin, Vortiger, and Arthur’s own father Uther find, is that it compromises the king’s agency, and the traitors’ seizure of power rejects Arthur’s agency. To reclaim it, he must take hold once more of his sword, the means of reclaiming lost honor through violent revenge.

Arthur’s anxiety about his lost agency continues to shape the rest of the dream. In fact, Tiller sees even the first half of the dream as communicating a “loss of agency” and a sense of “helplessness,” undermining the triumphant pictures of Arthur earlier suggested by Merlin’s prophecies (“Prophecy and the Body of the King,” 26-27). Yet, Arthur’s passivity is even more pronounced in the second half.

Ða com an guldene leo liðen ouer  
 dune  
 Deoren swiðe hende þa ure Drihten  
 made  
 Ða leo me orn foren to and iueng me  
 bi þan midle  
 And forð hire gun 3eongen and to  
 þere sæ wende  
 And ich isæh þæ vðen i þere sæ  
 driuen  
 And þe leo i þan ulode iwende wið  
 me seolue  
 Ða wit i sæ comen þa vðen me hire  
 binomen

Then a golden lion came faring over a  
 hill,  
 A very handsome animal that our  
 Lord made.  
 The lion ran up to me and seized me  
 by the middle.  
 And she began to go forth and went to  
 the sea,  
 And I saw the waves surging in the  
 sea,  
 And the lion entered that flood with  
 me.  
 When we came into the sea, the  
 waves took me from her.

Com þer an fisc liðe and fereden me  
to londe  
Þa wes ich al wet and weri of sorþen  
and seoc  
Þa gon ich iwakien swiðe ich gon to  
quakien  
Þa gon ich to biuien swulc ich al fur  
burne.

A fish came up to me and carried me  
to the land.  
Then I was all wet and weary from  
sorrows and sickness.  
When I woke up I began to shake  
very intensely.  
Then I began to tremble as if I had a  
fever. (14007-17)

Arthur's violence may have regained his agency and his honor at the expense of Modred and Wenhaver, but there are forces that resist his supremacy. In this second part of the dream, the king is entirely passive. The lion seizes him, and he cannot control his direction at all; he has been denied control even over his own body. At most, he can observe what goes on around him—the lion and its beauty, the chaotic motion of the waves, the fish, and his own reaction. The “flood” into which the lion plunges him may harken back to Noah's Flood in the very beginning of the poem, and it certainly draws on the inscrutability of the sea, traditionally the element of chaos. The ordeal leaves him wet and weak, “qualities,” says Fries, “ascribed to women in the Middle Ages” (24). His bodily strength has also been compromised, not only in the breaking of his arm but in the sapping of his strength through sickness and fever. Even after his violent reclamation of his agency, he cannot regain purposeful action because of the confounding effects of the forces that sweep him away.

Agency and family loyalty are also on the mind of the knight who finally finds the courage to tell Arthur what has happened at home. Still apprehensive, though, the knight begins his response to Arthur's dream with plausible deniability. “Men should never attribute sorrows to dreams,” he says (14023), and the reason he gives for the supreme implausibility of Modred's and Wenhaver's treachery is that “you are the noblest man that rules in the world, / and the wisest of all that dwell under the sky” (14024-5). In this

first part of his message, the knight sounds as though he denies the dream's prescience, stating the conventional but clearly only wishful line of thinking that holds it impossible for a strong king to be betrayed. The comfort that the knight seeks to use in order to soften the blow of his message relies on the implicit understanding that Arthur has mastered the rules of violence and order so well that he has not left room for his actions to be interpreted incorrectly. His rule is clearly greater than any Briton's since Constantin's, and his strength should have left no room for rebellion such as befell Uther.

Nevertheless, of course, the betrayal has occurred, and the knight must admit it eventually. He begins the bad news, "If it should happen—may God never will it!— / that Modred, your sister's son, had taken your queen / and set all your kingly land in his own hand..." (14026-8). The knight realizes that the betrayal is worse because of Modred's familial link with Arthur. This betrayal has one of the same results as others in the *Brut*, when lower-ranking nobles have rebelled against foreign rule, in that Modred set the land into his hand. However, his blood relation to Arthur makes the betrayal more egregious. When he responds, Arthur also mentions the blood tie that he shares with Modred, calling the traitor "my nephew," (14037), and the knight repeats "your sister's son" when he reassures the king that he tells the truth (14051). As Le Saux ("Relations familiales") and Wickham-Crowley ("Cannibal Cultures") would say, founding the imagination of one's nation on the family makes any compromise in blood loyalty extremely dangerous.

The knight also recognizes that agency is at stake, for he recommends a course of action that will reclaim Arthur's honor. If this inconceivable treachery had happened, he says,



<p>             þe 3et þu mihtest þe awreken wurð-              liche mid wepnen              And æft þi lond halden and walden              þine leoden              And þine feond fallen þe þe ufel              unnen              And slæn heom alle clane þet þer no              bilauen nane.           </p>	<p>             Still you might avenge yourself              honorably with weapons              and hold your land again and lead              your people              and fell your foes that have wished              evil for you              and slay all of them, so that there is              none left. (Lazamon 14031-4)           </p>
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The remedy for this great dishonor is violent reprisal, revenge to reclaim Arthur's agency that has been taken from him in his own homeland. Reducing the traitors and all their followers to utter passivity will console the king because he will have reclaimed the strong, univocal identity he has built for himself. The greatest loss is that of hegemony and honor, not the loss of wife and nephew. The loss of honor follows from the loss of dominance. Modred has usurped Arthur's place as king, as the messenger knight announces: "he is king and she is queen" (14045). The lines quoted above reveal that the goal of any military campaign will be to put the land back into Arthur's hands.

Wenhaver's infidelity puts Arthur in a passive position because it reverses Arthur's agency over her affections, her body, and the land, conferring all those things on Modred, instead.

Wenhaver's betrayal also erases some crucial social distinctions, as Girard might note. Her conspiracy with Modred, which puts the land and people under Modred's control, positions Modred as Arthur's equal. Usurping the throne also ignores the differences between nephew and uncle, liege lord and regent, husband and relative. Finally, as the water imagery in Arthur's premonition hints, it even puts Arthur in a feminine position, blurring gender differences. As sacrificial crises that result from mimetic rivalry always do, this usurpation will result in internecine strife. It will dissolve Arthur's empire, thus fracturing the cohesive hierarchy that he has built. The erasure of

differences results in a mimetic war that will itself result in the chaotic equality between the realms that Arthur has conquered. Chaos, like the sea in Arthur's dream, will wash away the ordering agency Arthur has tried to impose. Wenhaver may not be the sole contributor to the erasure of gender distinctions, however. Fries points out that dismemberment was "apparently always" a punishment meted out to males, while burning at the stake was a punishment reserved for females (29). When Arthur dreams about dismembering her and when Walwain pledges to pull her body apart with horses (Lazamon 14083), they signal that they imagine Wenhaver to have committed a man's crime. On the other hand, Arthur threatens to burn her at the stake (14065), perhaps to reinstitute forcefully the gender roles that the queen has broken. Fries conjectures that the fault may be Arthur's for having, "against precedent, made her a coregent with Modred before leaving on his Roman War." In that case, it is a foregone conclusion that "she has acted the man" (30).

Finally, the knight's message gives the only explanation the text offers of Modred and Wenhaver's motive. He states in a passing but very suggestive pair of lines that Modred and Wenhaver betray Arthur because they "have no expectation of your return" and "think, in truth, that you will never again come from Rome" (Lazamon 14045-6). Consistent with the logic that a strong king need not fear rebellion, these lines reveal that the knight and the other characters consider Arthur's attempts at deterring insurrection to have failed. The traitors have interpreted Arthur's departure as a sign that he will never return, perhaps that he will die, so he has failed to restrict those crucial witnesses' narration of his rule to his own interpretation. They have bought into either Luces' claim

to superiority or the precedent set by other British kings who go to Rome and never come back.

This tantalizing suggestion of the motives for betrayal accords with the logic of Lazamon's text, with literary criticism on the text, and with philosophies that consider the capacity of violence to determine a person's meaning. Levinas and, building on him, Marion both demonstrate the logical impossibility of limiting the meanings a person can give to be interpreted. Levinas says of another person, "Over him I have no *power*. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal" (*Totality and Infinity*, 39). Mensch explains this principle in terms of future action, arguing that it is impossible to possess, grasp, and wholly know another person because of "an irreducible margin of unpredictability in the Other's behavior" (30). In place of either an exhaustible meaning or none at all, Marion proposes that another person's death invites a "hermeneutic without end" (*In Excess*, 123), ongoing interpretation that denies any final, settled meaning. The bottom line resulting from a person's irreducibility is that humans, in Das's words, can always "[transform] passivity into agency" (55).<sup>12</sup>

One critical component in the capacity to re-narrate is time, no less for Levinas, Marion, and Das than for Lazamon. For Levinas, humans' existence within time makes the subject incomprehensible to itself. Because humans understand themselves as products of their past experiences, one's present identity is always deferred into the past. This is so because the past "can not [*sic*] be recuperated by reminiscence not because of its remoteness, but because of its incommensurability with the present" (*Otherwise than Being*, 11). Because one's present identity never coincides exactly with one's present, an

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<sup>12</sup> Jorgensen gives a fascinating reading of a very different literary text in which a similar process occurs.

individual, a king, or a people always has the potential to deny an identity imposed on them. Marion argues that time is one of the dimensions that give rise to new impressions of any object (*In Excess*, 106, 126), so the passage of time guarantees the emergence of new meanings. For Das, too, “Time is an agent that ‘works’ on relationships” and allows people to “escape from the narrative positioning that is assigned to” them (85-86).

Writing an extended history that borrows from the chronicle genre, Lazamon knows that eternal control over a narrative is impossible, and that knowledge is one source of his poem’s social critique. Tiller, for example, calls Arthur an “author” when the king uses the spectacle of dead Saxons to enhance his own glory through narrating history (“The Truth,” 36). Tiller’s historiographical work foregrounds the element of ongoing interpretation in the *Brut*, revealing Lazamon’s possible anxiety about being misinterpreted himself. He even suggests that, in certain moments, “readers and hearers of the *Brut* are inevitably drawn into the process of interpreting” (“Prophecy and the Body of the King,” 35).<sup>13</sup> Possible grounds for that claim include the fact that “Lazamon...saw the messages to be gleaned from history as indeterminate and open to interpretation” and that rulers like Arthur exist “beyond the confines of history as a continual threat to the power of the translator” (Tiller, *Lazamon’s Brut and the Anglo-Norman Vision of History*, 30-31). Lazamon produces the third adaptation of the story he relates, and Wickham-Crowley believes that his revisions “must have caused him to recognize difference and his own adjustments of Welsh material in the history of British

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<sup>13</sup> See also Tiller, “Lazamon’s Leir.”

kings, just as Wace adjusted his sources and text, and to think about the choices he made” (“Cannibal Cultures,” 351).<sup>14</sup>

Especially where Saxons are concerned, the *Brut* admits the radically contingent nature of violent control over meaning. The Saxons, after all, ultimately win out over the Britons for control over Britain, largely, according to Burek, because of their linguistic adaptability. Likewise, Fincke and Shichtman draw on psychoanalysis to argue that “imperialistic forces make claim to the women and land they capture, causing their forced assimilation” and “anxiously eye the situation of their own property should those on the margins attempt an incursion. Their anxiety hardens defenses against incursions while at the same time fueling further imperialistic enthusiasms—there can be no rest until ‘difference’ is obliterated” (72). These authors, too, see that conquest inspires further xenophobia and violence precisely because of the dual fear of insurrection and invasion. Such fears are inescapable for empires, and they motivate further conquest. Yet, they also reveal the inherent possibility of resistance from the conquered peoples, the inherent possibility of the victor’s loss of control over the narrative of conquest. In fact, the *Brut* has depicted the Britons themselves chafing against Roman rule, periodically refusing the shame of paying tribute precisely because of the distance between Britain and Rome, which leads them to question the deterrent identity that successive Roman conquerors have constructed.

The worst and most immediate problem, of course, is still betrayal. Modred and Wenhaver are the traitors-in-chief, but betrayal continues to thwart Arthur’s efforts even

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<sup>14</sup> See also Le Saux, “Narrative Rhythm and Narrative Content” and Park, “Arthur and the Giant.” But, see Parry, “Narrators, Messengers, and *Lazamon’s Brut*,” for an alternative reading of *Lazamon’s* historiography.

as he travels back home to confront them. Lazamon speaks of a “wicked warrior in Arthur’s army”<sup>15</sup> who goes to warn Wenhaver “as soon as he heard the decision,” informing her of “all that [Arthur] planned to do” (14095-103). The treachery does not stop there, either: Arthur’s advance stalls for two weeks on the coast of France as he waits for good sailing weather to get to his home island (14123), and throughout that time, “Modred knew everything that Arthur planned there” because “each day word came to him from this king’s army” (14124-5). Because of this breach in Arthur’s own ranks, Modred has plenty of time to send out a request for allies and to prepare to meet the king’s force as soon as they disembark.

Before he sets off to confront Modred, Arthur leaves Howel, erstwhile lord of Brittany, to oversee his new conquests. Howel receives this honor as “the highest ranking of [Arthur’s] kin” (14068), and Arthur bequeaths him half of the army (14069). Further, he plans to return after quelling the rebellion on the home front and to entrust Rome itself to Walwain (14071-2). Like a responsible conqueror, Arthur divides up his new territory among vassals he can trust. He also divides his army, giving generalship of the other half to the highest-born of his relatives. In these ways, Arthur continues to follow the best practices of conquest since Brutus’ day. He has positioned himself as the culmination of the most illustrious of his ancestors, mastering violence but also correctly navigating his responsibilities as emperor, making his fall even more tragic.

On the other side, Modred makes one disastrous choice after another. To prepare to face his uncle, he sends for help from the Saxon king Childric, who sends 60,000

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<sup>15</sup> In translating *wicked*, I follow Allen and Madden.

troops to aid Modred against Arthur (14104-18).<sup>16</sup> In exchange for support, Modred promises Childric all of Northumbria (14112), repeating Vortiger's mistake. To emphasize how bad this idea is, the narrator repeats descriptions of the army as religiously other. They are "heathen folk," "from every race of men," and Modred's army is a mixture of "heathen and Christian" (14117, 14120, 14122). The name of the Saxon emperor and the religious difference drive home the parallels between this final war and Arthur's first war, in which he wrested Britain from the occupying Saxons. This war will mirror and undo all that Arthur's rule has accomplished, and it will set in motion the ultimate displacement, when the Anglo-Saxons drive all the Britons into Wales at the very end of the *Brut*.

### *Battles*

The first battle in the civil war between Arthur and Modred takes place on the beach as soon as Arthur's ships complete their journey across the English Channel. Soon, Arthur exhibits a pattern of behavior that previous characters have introduced. The first detail the narrator relates of the battle at Romney is that, because he received information from a traitorous soldier, Modred meets Arthur's army before they can fully disembark. The intelligence benefits him so greatly that Arthur's army does not even have the chance to establish ranks: "some fought on the land, some on the beach; / some threw spears from the ships" (14134-5). More decisively, Walwain leads the charge against Modred's forces, kills eleven enemy soldiers, and "slew Childric's son" (14136-8). To this initial success, the narrator juxtaposes the "woe" that comes to Arthur and his soldiers when,

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<sup>16</sup> The original Childric, of course, is dead, but *Lazamon* often reuses names. Allen solves the ambiguity by calling him "Childric the second" in this line.

immediately, “Walwain was slain” (14139-40). Understandably, “Arthur was sorry and sorrowful in his heart” because of Walwain’s death (14142), and his reaction reveals a peculiar psychological state. Immediately upon understanding what has happened to Walwain, Arthur, the “noblest of all Britons,” makes a speech lamenting the loss of his “dear swains,” including “Angel the king” and Walwain (14144-7). As if concluding a syllogism, he shouts in the next line, “Up now, hardily, from the ships, my noble warriors” (14148). There are no additional logical steps between loss and charge—nor is any needed, for the troops immediately respond to Arthur’s call. “Sixty thousand of the most excellent of all soldiers” charge “and br[eak] Modred’s ranks” (14150-1). *Lazamon* and his characters intuitively understand the close connection between bereavement and revenge, so that their affective reaction to grief is to switch almost instantaneously to rage. The king and his battle-hardened troops, then, have undergone saddening as Katie L. Walter describes it, their reactions to battle “habituated” so that they experience the right combination of fear and courage (35). Like the Roman nobles whose hearts harden as a result of seeing their children hanged by Belin and Brennes, Arthur and his soldiers have formed their reactions to the sad sight of their dead comrades so that it sparks aggression in them.

When the charge succeeds, it reduces Modred and his army to passivity and reactivity. The narrator says, “Modred began to flee, and his people followed him. / They flew like fiends, and the fields quaked, too. / The stones crashed together among the streams of blood” (*Lazamon* 14152-4). Because Modred is the first to flee, his followers are left without a guiding principle, and their resistance crumbles. As they flee, natural features of the land drown out even the noise they make, and their blood saturates the



stones. Arthur delivers his land and people from Modred's cowardly tyranny by leading his army through his own little Red Sea. As the enemy's blood leaks from their bodies, so their vigor and capacity for meaningful action leak from their organization. However, Modred's flight, a cowardly parody of the calculating retreats that Julius Caesar uses, keeps open the possibility of his future resistance, so the war has not ended.

Modred flees to London, but its citizens, who have heard that Modred could not defeat Arthur, refuse to admit him (14158-60). Like Vortiger, he has relinquished his claim on the people's loyalty, and his separation from the Britons will only worsen. The inhabitants of Winchester agree to shelter him and his army (14161-2).<sup>17</sup> Arthur approaches, grimly and inexorably, and Modred conceives a plan. He promises all the knights and the people of the city that they will enjoy "free law forever more" if they "help him in the time of his greatest need" in the morning (14168-72). The citizens and knights agree and sally out to face Arthur's intimidating force. Modred, however, has not stopped "thinking about what he could do, / and he did there just as he did elsewhere" (14180-1). Because "he always made strife" (14182), he betrays his newly converted followers. Lazamon emphasizes the betrayal by repeating forms of the word *betray* as well as words describing how close Modred's comrades ought to have been to him. Modred commits "among the worst betrayals": he "betrayed his companions" by "call[ing] his dearest knights... / and all his dearest friends" before "he stole from the fight" and "left all those good people" (14182-7). He flees to a harbor, takes all the ships there (14192), perhaps in a parody of Brutus' calculated plundering of Pandrasus, making his escape to Cornwall.

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<sup>17</sup> Ian Kirby proposes that Lazamon may have more positive associations with London because he associates it with the Angles, whereas he associates Winchester with the Saxons.

Meanwhile, Arthur slaughters all of the people in Winchester for siding with Modred, and the narrator emphasizes how complete the destruction is:

[Arthur] al þat moncun of-sloh þer wes sorþen inoh þa ʒeonge and þa alde alle he aqualde	[Arthur] slew all that race of men (there was sorrow enough), the young and the old: he killed them all.
þa þat folc wes al ded þa burh al for- swelde þa lette he mid alle to-breken þa walles alle.	When all those people were dead, he burned that city completely, and he also had all the walls knocked down. (14196-9)

Modred's cowardice thus heightens the tragic effects of his betrayal, leaving even his most loyal supporters to suffer Arthur's wrath while he flees under their cover. In this way, too, Modred pales in comparison with Arthur. Further, Arthur here re-establishes order on a more terrible scale than he had at the brawl that results in the creation of the Round Table. He uses the mastery that he has developed over violence in the service of order to bring Britain to heel after the severe damage that Modred has done to the land's order.

For her part, Wenhaver hears about Modred's miserable performance, sneaks out of York at night, and disappears by joining a convent (14203-11). The narrator reports that no one knew what had become of the queen (14213-4), but he suggests a plausible end for her. No one knows, says the narrator, "whether she were dead / [or whether] she herself were sunk in the water" (14216). Having teased the possibility of the queen's being dismembered and burned at the stake, the poet now considers another, equally appropriate method of death. Drowning is an appropriate death for Æstrild, whose union with a British king compromised his agency, and for Iudon, whose unnatural hatred for

one of her sons indirectly caused the nation to descend into chaos.<sup>18</sup> In parallel fashion, Wenhaver's husband, Arthur, loves her so much that he delays his military campaigns, perhaps relinquishing some of his agency; she also joins herself with a different man in order to claim agency over the British land and people, reversing gender roles and feminizing Arthur. As Iudon ends her life childless, so Wenhaver never gives birth to a proper heir for Arthur. Finally, Wenhaver does not drown, but Arthur dreams about becoming sodden and weary, associating his downfall with the sea, and the narrator mentions drowning in the sea at the very end of the queen's story. The major point is that Wenhaver disappears, but *Lazamon* mentions her possible demises as if the narrative needs to relive her coming to poetic justice just as it needed to relive Eleine's rape by the giant of Mont Saint-Michel. While she can only physically die once, this narrative technique gives the reader the satisfaction of picturing her death in more than one way, as with Hengest.

Modred makes his final stand in Cornwall, where he once again gathers aid from foreign kings. Specifically, his reinforcements come from Ireland, Saxony, and Scotland (14218-20). The Saxons have been evil throughout the entire *Brut*; Scotland is the realm of the notoriously untrustworthy Picts; and the Irish are related to the Scottish Picts. At the same time, calling for troops from Ireland and Scotland furthers Modred's usurpation of his uncle's empire. These were Arthur's first conquests: driving out the Saxons was his first act as king, which led directly to overcoming the Scots, and Ireland was his first stop

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<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Tiller notices parallels between Arthur's execution of Wenhaver in his dream, Iudon's murder of Poreus, and the Saxons' massacre of the Britons at Ambresbury. The poet uses the same verb to describe all three acts of violence, and "*Lazamon's* use of the term in reference to Arthur is the only instance in the *Brut* where the reader's sympathy lies with the attacker rather than with the victim" ("Prophecy and Body of the King," 30).

in his conquest of Northern Europe. Again, Modred sends for “anyone who wishes to have land / or silver, or gold—either possessions or land” (14221-2). Far from conquering and demanding tribute, Modred gives out Britain’s resources; far from shoring up British cohesion by turning their prowess upon others, he divides the land among foreigners and wages civil war. The narrator comments, “So every wise man does when need comes upon him” (14224). Indeed, the *Brut*’s best examples of leadership have used their financial resources to direct their methods of real power, but Modred’s betrayal makes him, like Vortiger, a parody of these wise rulers.

That Modred’s last stand takes place in Cornwall highlights his role in undoing all that the Britons have accomplished. From Corineus to Cador, Cornwall has been the seat of all the best British nobles. Brutus’ first act of parceling out and settling the island was to give Cornwall to his most loyal captain, unifying the Britons through dividing the land under his aegis, in order to honor Corineus’ division of their mutual enemies. Now, the British king must oppose a literal blood relative and march into the most loyal region of his homeland. On a more personal level, Arthur in his righteousness now reverses the unjust war his father made on the Earl of Cornwall in order to steal a wife. To heighten the stakes, the narrator points out the vastness of the armies involved. Modred leads “a great army of men,” and Arthur gathers “innumerable folk.” Then, in a chiasm, the narrator relates that Arthur advances on Cornwall “with an innumerable army” to meet Modred’s “innumerable folk” (14226-37). Thus, when the poem predicts that “many were fated” to die that day (14237), the dramatic tension has climbed high, indeed.

Arthur, like all the good, strong kings before him, summons his innumerable new recruits on pain of death (14232). Unlike Modred, he summons Britons, sending

“messages all across his kingdom / and commanded to come all those who lived in the land / and were able to fight and to bear weapons” (14229-30). Arthur, then, does not bring his imperial might to bear on Modred this time; he brings British troops against the foreigners amassed under his nephew. Whereas Modred the traitor turns to mercenaries in his need, Arthur the ideal British king turns to his kin. The Otho manuscript heightens the contrast when it adds the detail that Arthur rejected any volunteers who “were traitors and held with Modred; / those he would not admit, thought they wanted to come” (14230a-b). This detail adds to the dynamic already in place in the Caligula manuscript, where Arthur is master of the Britons. Not only does he command their allegiance in his dire need, but he also commands thoroughly enough to prevent any further treason from affecting the battle.

The Battle of Camelford sees the completion of the dissolution of Arthur’s empire, and the description of the action explains everything that is lost. As a climactic moment, it deserves quotation at length.

<p>Uppe þere Tambre heo tuhte to-somne  Heuen here-marken halden to-gadere  Luken sweord longe leiden o þe  helmen  Fur ut sprengen speren brastlien  Sceldes gonnen scanen scaftes to-  breken  Ðer faht al to-somne folc vnimete</p> <p>Tambre wes on flode mid vnimete  blode  Mon i þan fihte non þer ne mihte  ikenne nenne kempe  No wha dude wurse no wha bet swa  þat wiðe wes imenged</p>	<p>Upon the Tambre they came together,  Raised their standards and advanced,  Drew long swords, laid them on the  helmets.  Fire sprang out, spears cracked,  Shields began to shatter, shafts broke,</p> <p>All of the innumerable people fought  there together.  The Tambre was flooded with all the  blood.  No one in that fight could possibly  recognize any of the other warriors,  Nor tell who was losing or who was  winning, that battle was so confused.</p>
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<p>For ælc sloh adun-riht weore he swein weore he cniht þer wes Modred of-slaȝe and idon of lif-daȝe In þan fihte þer weoren of-slaȝe alle þa snelle Arðures hered-men heȝe and lowe</p> <p>And þa Bruttas alle of Arðures borde</p> <p>And alle his fosterlinges of feole kineriches And Arður forwunded mid wal-spere brade Fitene he hafde feondlice wunden Mon mihte i þare laste twa glouen iþraste þa nas þer na-mare i þan fehte to laue Of twa hundred þusend monnen þa þer leien to-hauwen Buten Arþur þe king ane and of his cnihtes tweien.</p> <p>Every one of the innumerable soldiers</p>	<p>For each one slew immediately,<sup>19</sup> both swains and knights. There Modred was slain and deprived of his life-days In that fight. There all the valiant were slain, Arthur's soldiers, highborn and lowborn, And all the Britons of Arthur's Round Table, And all his fosterlings of many kingdoms. And Arthur was mortally wounded with a broad, deadly spear. He had fifteen ghastly wounds. One might thrust two gloves into the smallest of them. No one in that fight was left alive Out of the two hundred thousand men that lay there hewn apart, Except for Arthur the king and two of his knights. (14244-65)</p> <p> fights in this battle, and all of the social</p>
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differences that have upheld the order of Arthur's empire are undone. The streams of blood from Arthur's first victory against Modred become the River Tambre, flooded with blood, multiplying the drama and recapitulating the earlier moment. Whereas the first battle vindicated Arthur's rule, this larger one finishes it. Some of the evaluative differences between Modred and Arthur recur in the battle. Whereas Modred has mercenaries, Arthur has fosterlings. Thus, Arthur's empire has incorporated the families of his "many kingdoms" into his own, and his fosterage accomplishes that incorporation in a way that unifies the tributary kingdoms more strongly than Modred's division of the land and promise of financial reward.

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<sup>19</sup> This line seems to mean that everyone hit so hard that they killed an enemy with each strike. Allen has "each man struck forcefully," and Madden, "each slew downright."

The lines describing the exchanges of blows increase the pace to contain a single thought in each half line, emphasizing the fragmentation of perception and action. Arthur's very bodily integrity is compromised, his body not divided but riddled with huge gashes, approximating the punishment he dreamed about inflicting on Wenhaver for tearing his kingdom apart. To the same effect, the dead soldiers lie "hewn apart" on the ground. The stress on the magnitude of the battle thus increases the awful effect of the widespread destruction that comes out of the conflict, and all the divisions that Modred's betrayal has caused converge on the bodies of the soldiers.

Appropriately for a sacrificial crisis, part of the massive destruction is the erasure of differences. The primary danger of treachery itself is that it compromises the difference between friend and enemy or between kin and outsider. At Camelford, every soldier present fights, the kings leaving no one in reserve. Because of the maelstrom of gore, no one involved is recognizable. Class difference disappears as the swains fight just as hardily as the knights, and as highborn and lowborn all die. The surge of violence covers over even the difference between the armies, as "the battle was so confused" that individuals merge with each other and the victor is impossible to determine. The egalitarian, cooperative Round Table knights, who have emblemized right relationship among each other and with Arthur, pass out of the story in a single line. The Round Table knights are specifically labeled "Britons," again highlighting the nation-family that Arthur, having understood and carried out his proper role, leads. He even overcomes the blood-traitor Modred through relying on the loyalty of the Britons and the fosterlings he keeps in his household. However, even as violence has enabled Arthur to gain and maintain cooperation among his nation, precisely the violent turmoil of the battle erases

all the marks of difference in the hierarchy he has perfected. The blame lies squarely on Modred's treachery, of course, but Arthur's situation calls for violent enforcement of his rule at the same time as that enforcement itself disintegrates his rule.

### *Conclusion*

Britain's greatest king and the force that brings Britain to the pinnacle of its renown, Arthur masters all the forms of violence at work, in different ways, throughout the *Brut*. He secures peace for his people through evicting the Saxons and conquering Scandinavia. He uses the regular means of making peace, and he manages to keep the various peoples under his control in harmony. However, even in peacetime, violence and the threat thereof have a foundational place in British society. Indeed, the very logic that compelled Arthur to conquer in the first place, the necessity of projecting a strong identity, involves him in escalating tensions with Rome. The conflict with Rome accomplishes Arthur's zenith, but it also stretches his forces too thin, exports the crucial infrastructure of loyal nobles, and gives Modred a chance to betray the king. In all these plot points, the various motivations for violence all coincide—desire for access to wealth, desire for honor, desire to avenge kin, desire to dominate, and even desire for peace. In fact, Arthur's actions are both reasonable and self-destructive because of the convergence of all these motivations. He conquers territory to garner a reputation for domineering will; he refuses to pay tribute because of the implications to his honor; he feels that he has to settle the historic dispute between Rome and Britain because of his ancestors; he must use violence to enforce peace because his knights threaten to engage in blood feuds; and he must project an aura of dominance in order to secure peace for his people. Yet, all these actions bring him into conflict with the Roman emperor, who cannot back down for



exactly the same reasons. The Arthur section ultimately demonstrates, then, that even the perfect example of a king cannot guarantee peace precisely because of the means available to him to do so.

The rule of Arthur, finally, exposes the poem's critique of the Britons. The critique is not explicit or unambiguously the position of the poet; rather, it arises from carefully teasing out the contradictions in British self-conception and uses of violence. Arthur plays the game of sovereignty better than any other king, yet his masterful use of violence ultimately pits him against situations from which no positive end can result. Precisely because of the phenomenological experience of violence, which gives the user control over the identity of the victim, Arthur acts appropriately in most situations; however, precisely because of the temporal and linguistic capacity of humans to re-interpret, his efforts must fail. The way that the *Brut* critiques its characters and their self-conception is by drawing their logic to its inevitable conclusion and dramatizing the failure of their greatest king. The Britons' consistency and heroism cannot continue forever, precisely because of the internal contradictions in their consistency and heroism.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

This project has used a variety of conceptual resources, including phenomenology, anthropology, and neuroscience, to understand how violence works in Lazamon's *Brut*. In part, the answer has come from separating different motivations for violence, such as access to goods, dominance, honor, and revenge. Distinguishing among different kinds of violence has enabled a nuanced view of when violence occurs, both in war and in other forms. At the same time, the phenomenology of violence shows that all of the motivations for violence relate to constructions of identity. In the *Brut*, the concept that consistently expresses characters' identities is honor, which inherently involves agency.

One of the benefits of focusing on violence *per se* is the ability to recognize structural similarities between violence and the various ways that the poem's characters make peace. By recognizing that the phenomenological experience of violence involves agency as inherent in honor, this study has shown that relative degrees of agency operate in marriage, hostage-taking, tribute, and vows of fealty. Agency is at stake in British cooperation inside their kin group, where they expect the king-as-father to possess an identity of unsurpassable agency in order to establish peace, yet they also expect the king to honor his nobles by considering their wills and allowing the people to control the resources of the land. Proper order in society allows the Britons to unite as a cohesive family, while that cohesion also often necessitates division of and from other peoples.

Violence can create kinship bonds, and kinship bonds can motivate violence. Conquest and aggression turned against a common enemy put the Britons in the position of kinship with each other, often mirrored in the marriages of which the narrator approves. Conversely, when an enemy dishonors part of the kin group, the Britons feel an obligation to take revenge on the enemy in order to reclaim the lost honor on behalf of their kin. The obligation to reclaim lost honor through violence leads to blood feuds, and the Britons try to head off blood feuds by geographically removing themselves from their enemies when it is possible to do so, and by using genocide to remove from the land all foreigners who might be tempted to take revenge on them. However, the importance of honor to British culture and the supreme agency that the king wields can also motivate strife between royal brothers and mimetic desire that leads to ambitious usurpations from lesser nobility. In these cases, the king needs the ability to carry out violence against the offender, and once his supremacy has been reinstated, he can use mutual conquest to redirect aggressions onto a mutual foe. The scapegoat mechanism thus in play, the Britons can regain cohesion.

There are many ways that a king can fail to manage such internal conflict, however. Most kings fail to project a strong enough image or to wield their power effectively, but some project strength to the point of dishonoring their nobles or even betraying their nation. Between these two extremes lies the virtuous king who masters violence and the threat thereof but who acts consistently on behalf of his people. Once the Britons encounter other people groups, such a king must project an image of his authority and power that will deter invasion and, when the Britons have become an imperial power, rebellion from conquered lands. Frequently, spectacular violence helps British kings to

control the narrative of events so that they can fashion strong identities for themselves. Without sufficiently strong identities and a network of knights and lords to extend his authority, kings leave their peoples vulnerable to violence.

From the perspective of using violence well, Arthur is the best king. The narrator shows him instituting good peace, putting down insurrection, evicting pagan invaders, increasing his reputation and his people's honor by submitting other peoples to his rule, attaining total dominance that does not enable future reprisals from the Saxons, using spectacular violence to control narratives, and showing clear preference for his people. Still, his imperial project, which follows the precedent set by other imperial rulers, leaves Britain vulnerable to Modred and Wenhaver's treachery. Because empire-building has led to anarchy in Britain before, and because of Lazamon's preoccupation with the mutability of sovereignty, of place-names, and of language, several strands of the text imply that the tragedy of Arthur's rule results from conflicts inherent in the Britons' self-conception and methods of attaining peace.

My argument intersects with many open questions in Lazamon scholarship. It answers questions about what makes a good king, pointing out that mastering violence is at the heart of good kingship. However, acknowledging that a king must use violence for the benefit of his people rather than for his own power provides room for other perspectives on what makes a good king, such as Sheppard's emphasis on lordship bonds and Donohue's argument that kings should listen to their nobles' advice. This project engages with discussions of race by proposing that the Britons imagine their nation as a family, that they thereby conceive of themselves and other peoples as Totalities, and that those conceptions result from and enable violence. The theme of unity that this project

has pointed out intersects with the centrality of land ownership as well as race, and the importance of agency provides a thick description of how settling the land, marrying for political purposes, and organizing society under the king can increase honor for the Britons. The language of Totality helps explain what happens when the Britons make or refuse alliances, as well as why those alliances do or do not result in peace. Finally, my research addresses the possibility of peace in the poem's world. Violence is inevitable since it both institutes and maintains peace, and since even peaceweaving actions are structurally similar to violence. However, the narrator clearly approves of periods without war, provided that they do not compromise the Britons' honor, and a long view of the plot suggests that the impossibility of maintaining peace seems tragic to the narrator. In this way, I argue with Daniel Donoghue that *Lazamon* evinces "ambivalence," not only in his attitude toward the Britons' identity but also in his ability to imagine a reliable basis for national peace.

Future research can develop this study in important ways. Most obviously, the perspective can be qualified by moving past the Arthur section. Most of the religiously motivated violence, including violence between the Britons and the newly Christianized Anglo-Saxons, occurs after the death of Arthur and would add valuable developments to the classifications of violence presented here. Further, the conclusions that this study has presented could be used for a more sustained consideration of authorial intent. Extending the conclusions in that way could provide answers to questions such as why the poet may have written in English and what kind of rhetorical effect his work may have had. My hope, however, is that this project will add to the appreciation of how central and nuanced violence is in the *Brut*.

King Arthur's myth continues to pervade twenty-first-century literary consciousness, and so does the myth of individual heroic violence. How constructions of race can contribute to peace or to violence, the role of deterrence in national security, the possibility of international cooperation, how best to control a narrative, and whether violence can be overcome rather than simply redirected—in many ways, these questions of social order that the *Brut* addresses are still pertinent today. For all that Lazamon's text is removed from current mores, I hope that this application of violence theory has shown that the *Brut*'s perspective on violence is not irrational. Rather, sustained focus on a single moment in literary history, a single iteration of a myth that folds a multitude of far-reaching questions into itself, can hold up a mirror of our own questions, even while, because of the temporal remove, it can allow productive objectivity.

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### Partial List of Violent Events

Table A.1. Partial List of Violent Events in the *Brut*.

Description of Event	Line Numbers
Trojans discuss whether to kill Pandrasus and how to avoid further war with the Greeks; they decide to leave to avoid a blood feud	427-509
Brutus and the Trojans hunt deer at Logice	566-567
Brutus and the Trojans raid Mauritanie	652-656
Corineus kills Numbert over hunting rights	717-34
Brutus and the Trojans conquer Armorica and build a castle	819-827
Laws and the threat of corporal punishment make the Britons better people	1040-6
Corineus tries to kill Locrin	1130-60
Guendoleine defeats Locrin, kills Aestrild and Abren	1124-46
Membriz betrays and kills Malin	1271-81
Ebrauc's knights long for war; he sends them conquering to keep them happy	1313-23
Ruhhudibras rules with strong laws and harsh punishments	1403-7
Fereus and Poreus fight, their mother kills the winner, and the people cast her into the sea	1957-2012
Without a monarch, the Britons descend into chaos	2013-8
Belin and Brennes fight over the kingdom	2151-2526
Belin and Brennes conquer France	2560-2606



Description of Event	Line Numbers
Belin and Brennes go conquering on their way to Rome	2608-28
Belin and Brennes conquer Rome	2731-2973
Elidur frightens nobles into accepting Argal as king again	3351-68
Morpidus dies slaying a sea monster	3207-52
Julius Caesar flees battle, leaving his sword	3760
Caesar wins over French nobles with gifts	3842-4
Caesar loses a second invasion and flees again	3891-3987
Æuelin kills Harigal	4061-83
Cassibelaunus fights Androgeus over Æuelin; Androgeus invites Caesar into Britain	4088-4469
Wither beheads any Roman in his realm	4590-2
Claudius invades Britain; Hamun tricks and kills Wither	4593-4652
Arviragus defeats Romans and has Hamun's body pulled apart	4653-76
Claudius invades a second time, then makes peace with Arviragus	4692-4755
Genuis brokers peace between Arviragus and Vespasian	4922-5
Rodric invades, is defeated, is torn apart by horses; Maurus erects a monument to the event	4945-71
1,500 of Rodric's soldiers ask for peace and are granted land; they ask for daughters to marry and are refused	4976-5023
Carris recruits lazy young men, pirates, and young men who want to prove themselves or get rich	5270-4

Description of Event	Line Numbers
Basian defiantly accepts the dilemma Carraais has forced on him	5305-8
Rome sends Livius Gallus and Allec to avenge Basian; they are killed by Asclepidiot and Columban	5319-5404
Asclepidiot summons Britons to resist Allec and Livius Gaius	5337
Maxenz oppresses the Romans; they flee and ask Constantin to conquer Rome from Maxenz; Constantin obliges	5534-60
Octaves wrests Britain from Traher	5584-5677
Aðionard forces women to go to Brittany on pain of torture	5954-5
Melga and Wanis capture and dispose of Briton women	6024-6045
Melga and Wanis conquer Britain but are driven out by Gracien	6046-81
Melga and Wanis conquer Britain but are driven out by Romans	6156-97
Melga and Wanis conquer Britain again	6262-91
Constantin defeats Melga and Wanis	6388-6427
British women kill and dismember Melga and Wanis' followers	6422-7
Vortiger threatens to hang an abott	6570-2
Vortiger tricks Picts	6570-2
Picts kill Constance and his knights	6783-4
Vortiger double-crosses and kills the Picts	6835-45
Picts plague Vortiger's rule	6858-61
Britons give Vortiger an ultimatum	7270-82

Description of Event	Line Numbers
Hengest's Saxons massacre Vortiger's Britons at Ambresbury	7609-51
Aurelius defeats Hengest in two battles; Britons debate over how to kill Hengest	8158-8346
Aurelius defeats Octa	8349-8432
Britons defeat Gillomar's Irish forces and take the Giant's Ring	8634-67
Octa, Ossa and Ebissa attack because they think Uther weak; Uther defeats them	9711-65
Childric invades; Arthur kills Colgrim and Aldulf; Childric flees	10456-705
Cador kills Childric and all the Saxons he can find	10791-5
Arthur conquers Ireland	11136-11209 (justification 11104-18)
Arthur's knights fight; Arthur reinstates peace with threats of violence and has the instigator and the instigator's nearest kin killed	11367-11418
Arthur conquers France	11706-11977
Arthur defeats Frolle in single combat	11783-11969
Cador expresses joy that war has come to the Britons	12426-50
Arthur's Roman campaign	12392-13968
Walwain opposes Cador's hawkishness	12451-8
Arthur and Beduer defeat giant of Mont St. Michel	12804-13033
Arthur makes golden coffins for Luces and nobles, sends taunting message to Rome	13899-922
Vortiporus defeats Saxons so that they are afraid to return while he's alive	14370-7
Malgus rules firmly and in peace; he has personally conquered all the land he rules	14385-7

Description of Event	Line Numbers
Cadwalan defeats Edwine after a protracted war	15060-15614
Edwine forcibly marries Galerne	15213
Galerne helps Brian kill Pelluz, enabling Cadwalan's invasion	15370ff
Cadwalan defeats Edwine and kills all Edwine's kin except Oswald	15586-9
Penda tricks and kills Oswald	15687-8
Penda kills Oswi but is wounded and retreats back east	15838-47
Osric gets along peaceably with, because fostered by, Cadwalan	15848-57

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