

Concealed Criticism: The Uses of History in Anglo-Norman Literature, 1130-1210

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Abstract

The twelfth century in western Europe was marked by tensions and negotiations between Church, aristocracy, and monarchies, each of which vied with the others for power and influence. At the same time, a developing literary culture discovered new ways to provide social commentary, including commentary on the power-negotiations among the ruling elite. This thesis examines the the functions of history in four works by authors writing in England and Normandy during the twelfth century to argue that historians used their work as commentary on the policies of Kings Stephen, Henry II, and John between 1130 and 1210.

The four works, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Master Wace's *Roman de Brut*, John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, and Gerald of Wales' *Expugnatio Hibernica*, each use descriptions of the past to criticize the monarchy by implying that the reigning king is not as good as rulers from history. Three of these works, the *Historia*, the *Roman*, and the *Expugnatio*, take the form of narrative histories of a variety of subjects both imaginary and within the author's living memory, while the fourth, the *Policraticus*, is a guidebook for princes that uses historical examples to prove the truth of its points. By examining the way that the authors, despite the differences between their works, all use the past to condemn royal policies by implication, this thesis will argue that Anglo-Norman writers in the twelfth century found history-writing a means to criticize reigning kings without facing royal retribution.

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INTRODUCTION

England in the twelfth century was dominated by three powerful and interconnected institutions: the aristocracy, the monarchy, and the church, each of which vied with the others for positions of authority and power. The period was also marked by the ‘renaissance of the twelfth century,’ a growing interest in art, literature, and philosophy. This thesis will examine the functions of history in twelfth-century English texts that criticize royal policy. In order to understand criticisms of royal policy, it is important to understand both the policies being criticized and the academic climate in which the texts were produced. This thesis sits at the intersection of two bodies of scholarship: studies of Anglo-Norman royal policy and works on the production of history in the twelfth century.¹ Given that much of our understanding of events in England during the twelfth century comes from works by historians writing during the period, there is some overlap between the bodies of scholarship.

Henry I was king of England between 1100 and 1135. The son of William the Conqueror, and therefore only one generation removed from the Norman Conquest, Henry I came to power during a period of social and political development as the monarch and nobility negotiated the division of power in the kingdom following the Norman Conquest. Historians of his reign have tended to describe Henry’s reign as peaceful and effective, and one that created a new royal bureaucracy. When the writer of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle recorded Henry’s death in 1135, for

¹ The term Anglo-Norman, like all terms for social and ethnic groups in the Middle Ages, is at best an approximation of our understanding of the aristocracy in twelfth-century Britain. This thesis uses the terms Norman and Anglo-Norman to refer to the group of French-speaking aristocrats that held lands in Normandy and England following the Norman invasion of England in 1066. The terms also describe governmental institutions and social practices that the Normans used. Although the concepts of England and the English rose to greater prominence during the 13th and 14th centuries, this thesis will use them to refer to the geographical area covered by modern England and to the institutions that governed the Anglo-Norman realms.

The term history is similarly complex. This thesis will use the term to refer both to the body of events that happened or were thought to have happened in the past and to written descriptions of those events, also called histories and historical writing.

example, he wrote that “[Henry] was a good man, and people were in great awe of him. No one dared injure another in his time. He made peace for man and beast.”² Hollister and Frost have continued this tradition in modern times, emphasizing Henry’s peaceful reign and attempts to found a unified system of government for England and Normandy, focusing particularly the creation of an itinerant judiciary, the streamlining of the kingdom’s finances under the exchequer, and increased oversight of the kingdom’s operations through a court bureaucracy, all recorded to an unprecedented degree in administrative documents.³ Overall, Henry I’s reign has been narrated as a period in which power and authority were centralized within a growing Anglo-Norman royal bureaucracy.

When Henry I died, his nephew, Stephen of Blois, returned to England from the continent and had himself crowned king. He ruled until 1154. Historians of his reign have narrated the years between 1135 and 1154 as a period of relaxed royal control, effectively undoing Henry I’s centralization. This narrative began in Stephen’s own time. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recalls that the barons, realizing that Stephen was a mild man, seized power and fought wars among themselves and characterizes Stephen’s reign as a period of complete lawlessness and devastation.⁴ William of Malmesbury adds to this picture, writing that in 1138 “England was shaken by internal strife. There were many, impelled to wrongdoing by high birth or lofty spirit... who did not hesitate to ask the king for estates or castles or in fact anything that had once taken their fancy.”⁵ William writes that when the king refused, the nobles “were at once moved to wrath, fortified castles against him, and carried off immense plunder from his lands,”

² *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. Dorothy Whitelock (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), 198.

³ C. Warren Hollister, *Henry I*, ed. and completed by Amanda Clark Frost (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 349-369.

⁴ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, 199-200.

⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Historia Novella*, trans. K.R. Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 41.

and recounts that Stephen ineffectively attempted to stop the fighting by dispensing lands and titles.⁶ In addition to barons eager for autonomy, Stephen contended after 1139 with a rebellion led by Matilda, the daughter of Henry I. These factors served to limit royal control over the regions outside of the southeast of England. These accounts are likely overstated, but have contributed to historians terming the period “the Anarchy of Stephen.”

Modern studies of the period have questioned the extent and duration of lawlessness or ‘anarchy.’ Although Appleby writes that “it would be incorrect to say that the central government ceased to function in the areas that remained under Stephen’s control... the general relaxing of the central administration afforded lawless men an opportunity to indulge in such conduct as is recorded” in the chronicles.⁷ Hollister, however, has nuanced the image of loose governance, writing that the aristocracy did enjoy increased freedoms, but not because they overpowered a kindly king. Rather, “Stephen decentralized the realm not out of choice but in order to win badly needed support and military assistance” with which to oppose Matilda’s rebellion.⁸ Faced with a military crisis, Stephen granted new lordships and rights in exchange for aid.⁹ More recent literature has focused on the ways in which Stephen’s government was effective. White has argued that, while the geographic extent of Stephen’s control was limited after military defeats in 1141, the king maintained the financial and legal practices of Henry I and began re-exerting influence throughout the country before his death in 1154.¹⁰ Still, histories of King Stephen’s

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ John T. Appleby, *The Troubled Reign of King Stephen* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), 206.

⁸ C. Warren Hollister, “The Aristocracy” in King ed. *The Anarchy of King Stephen’s Reign* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

¹⁰ Graeme White “Continuity in Government” in King ed. *The Anarchy of King Stephen’s Reign* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 142.

reign, both medieval and modern, have agreed that it was a period in which royal authority in the Anglo-Norman territories faltered.

The Treaty of Winchester in 1153 ended Matilda's rebellion without a clear victory for either side. Lacking an heir, Stephen agreed to recognize Henry Plantagenet, the son of Matilda and the late count Geoffrey of Anjou, as his successor. In return, Matilda and Henry promised to cease hostilities and accept Stephen as king until his death. Stephen died in 1154, and Henry II took the throne in December of that year. Henry was already Duke of Normandy and Count of Anjou and his wife Eleanor was Duchess of Aquitaine. With the addition of England, these lands constituted the 'Angevin Empire,' a diverse group of territories now united under Henry's royal bureaucracy.

Historians of Henry II's reign have emphasized the King's efforts re-assert royal dominance over the nobility, undoing the losses of Stephen's reign and building on the bureaucratic developments of Henry I. When he took the throne, Henry's stated policy was reverting the landholdings in the kingdom to the state that they had been on the day of Henry I's death.¹¹ Henry's attempts to dominate the nobility were a drastic departure from Stephen's program of controlled decentralization, but Warren notes that "the widespread desire for an end to disorder enabled Henry II to take bold decisions for the restoration of royal authority... which at any other time would have been unsupportable."¹² Henry's assertions of supremacy over the barons, which frequently involved violently seizing castles and estates, were made possible because of the nobility's desire for peace.

¹¹ Charity Urbanski, *Writing History for the King* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 56.

¹² W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 57.

One of Henry's first actions was expelling groups of Flemish mercenaries that had been hired by Stephen during the period of civil war. Although these troops had formed a significant part of the royal army during the Anarchy, both Warren and Amt note that the Anglo-Normans disliked having foreign troops in England and that Henry probably lacked the funds to maintain a standing force of mercenaries.¹³ Amt further notes that a body of unpaid foreign soldiers allowed to remain in England would seem attractive to 'unruly' barons attempting to resist Henry's changes.¹⁴ Henry also demanded that barons demolish fortifications built during the anarchy; Warren argues that Henry accomplished the latter by "exploiting the rivalries of the barons, and... the anxiety of many of them- particularly among Stephen's adherents- to stand well with their new king."¹⁵ Amt largely agrees with Warren's interpretation, pointing to thirty-some castles that Henry confiscated during the 1150s as well as several baronies created by Stephen that Henry refused to fill after the deaths of their holders.¹⁶ All of these measures served to concentrate power within the royal administration – the confiscation of castles in particular weakened the aristocracy's ability to defy royal orders through military action.

More recently, White has argued that Henry's seizure of castles should not necessarily be interpreted as an attempt to secure absolute monarchical primacy, as Henry encouraged royal courts to settle disputes only after lower, aristocratic courts had failed.¹⁷ Additionally, King and White have noted that Henry's 'reclamation' in reality continued work begun near the end of

¹³ Warren, *Henry II*, 59; Emilie Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England: Royal Government Restored* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993), 91

¹⁴ Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England*, 91.

¹⁵ Warren, *Henry II*, 60.

¹⁶ Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England*, 24-25.

¹⁷ Graeme White, *Restoration and Reform: 1153-1165* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 162.

Stephen's reign and so was not an entirely new phenomenon.¹⁸ On the whole, however, Henry has been interpreted as a king attempting to ensure power within his domains.

To some extent, Henry also attempted to assert royal authority over the English Church. The Church was among the most powerful institutions in twelfth-century Europe, with a hierarchical bureaucracy that claimed religious authority over all Christians. In addition to religious authority, the Church, and especially the monastic orders, became wealthy owners of large estates. Two major struggles marked the relationship between the Church and secular rulers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In the first, referred to as the Investiture Controversy by modern scholars, Henry IV of Germany and Pope Gregory VII fought over the right to choose or 'invest' bishops. Henry argued that the king, deriving power from God, should have the right to invest God's representatives within his territory. Gregory contended that bishops, as part of the church hierarchy, should be appointed by the Church. Ultimately their respective successors, Henry V and Pope Calixtus II, resolved that the Pope would invest bishops in the emperor's presence and the emperor would decide in undecided cases.¹⁹ The second great event was the First Crusade. Called by Pope Urban in 1095, the crusade was intended to recapture Jerusalem. Kaeuper, however, argues that the crusade was also an attempt on the part of the Church to reign in violence among the European aristocracy and direct it towards an outside foe.²⁰ Both the Crusades and the Investiture Conflict can be seen as attempts to negotiate the division of powers between Church, monarchies, and aristocracy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

¹⁸ White, *Continuity in Government*, 135-137; Edmund King, "The Accession of Henry II" in Harper-Bill and Vincent eds. *Henry II: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 39.

¹⁹ "The Agreement of Worms" in Maureen Miller *Power and the Holy in the Age of the Investiture Conflict* (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 2005), 121.

²⁰ Richard Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 75.

Traditional interpretations of interactions between church and monarchy in England in the mid-twelfth century have focused on Henry's attempts to control the English church. Powicke, for example, argues that "The Norman and Angevin kings set definite limits on the extent to which popes could directly intervene in the affairs of their subjects, lay and ecclesiastical... the king's consent was required at every step of the exercise of papal authority."²¹ Warren cites the Council of Clarendon in 1164 as a crucial moment in examining Henry's relationship with the church: Henry, concerned about violent crimes committed by members of the clergy going unpunished by ecclesiastical courts that claimed authority over all churchmen, demanded that Archbishop Thomas Becket and other churchmen recognize the supremacy of royal authority in England.²² Thomas Becket had been one of Henry's close friends and advisors prior to 1162, when Henry installed him as Archbishop of Canterbury in the hope that Becket would use his new ecclesiastical authority to support Henry in securing the succession of his sons. After becoming archbishop, however, Becket became a staunch defender of the church's right to independence from monarchical control and refused to help Henry. In 1170, four of Henry's knights murdered Becket in front of the altar at Canterbury Cathedral, an act for which clerical writers condemned the King heavily. Warren notes that the debate over secular or clerical supremacy dated to early in Henry's reign, but that many of our surviving sources were written by Becket's supporters after the Archbishop's murder in 1170 and likely make the King seem more aggressive than he actually was.²³ Duggan largely agrees with Warren's interpretation, stating that Henry valued royal supremacy to so great an extent that he clung to his doctrine even after the backlash over Becket's

²¹ Michael Powicke, *The Community of the Realm* (New York: Knopf, 1973), 105.

²² Warren, 97.

²³ *Ibid*, 434.

death.²⁴ Historians of Henry II have defined his reign as one marked by struggles between the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the church.

The twelfth century in particular saw a flourishing of arts, literature, and science in what Haskins has termed ‘the renaissance of the twelfth century.’ He identifies an increased interest in the classical liberal arts and the rediscovery of Latin and Greek texts during the crusades as leading to a period of innovation in history, poetry, philosophy, and law.²⁵ A great deal of scholarship has built on Haskins’ work, identifying features of ‘renaissance’ across a wide variety of disciplines. One key facet of the ‘renaissance’ was the cultivation of aesthetic tastes in art and literature, an appreciation of the two for their own sake.²⁶ This phenomenon contributed to the rise in popularity of vernacular romance literature and to history-writing in both Latin and vernacular languages.²⁷

Another important body of literature for this thesis is that on historical writing in the Middle Ages. Two central problems have emerged in historiographies of the Middle Ages. The first is understanding how medieval writers would have seen the past and its relation to the present. The second is understanding the differences between genres in the Middle Ages: was ‘history’ as a genre different from literature or fiction? Both of these questions are important for understanding the functions of history in texts from the twelfth century.

Medieval writers’ view of the past was founded in Christian doctrine. Breisach argues that the medieval view of history was fundamentally based on Christian teleology, and that writers

²⁴ Anne Duggan, “Henry II, the English Church and the Papacy, 1154-76” in Harper-Bill and Vincent eds. *Henry II: New Interpretations* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 181.

²⁵ C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 6-7.

²⁶ Marcia Colish, *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 177.

²⁷ Peter Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth Century Renaissance* (Martlesham: Boydell and Brewer, 1999).

sought to fit historical events onto a timeline stretching from Creation to Last Judgement and to determine how the events fit God's plan for humanity.²⁸ At the same time, however, he notes the influence of Greco-Roman ideas of cyclical history, particularly in the cycles of "sin (or apostasy) - judgement - retribution - restoration" that appear in medieval texts.²⁹ The mix of teleological and cyclical history allowed medieval writers to see events of the past as a record of God's plan, but one in which people could learn from repeating elements.

In addition to understanding medieval scholars' conception of the past, it is important to establish how history-writing was understood as a genre. In our contemporary thought, the divide between 'history' and 'literature' falls roughly along the line between 'truth' and 'fiction.' The project of the historian is to uncover and interpret the truth of what happened in the past as accurately as possible. This was not the case in the Middle Ages. While medieval readers had a conception of differing truth-claims between 'fictional' and 'true' accounts, Otter states, literary genres were fluid – history could easily contain untrue elements if the author believed that they improved the work.³⁰ Fleischman agrees with Otter's, defining medieval history as "what was held to be true."³¹ History in the Middle Ages was independent of fact, but not of plausibility. As long as something seemed true, it could be.

The historical genre in the twelfth century included works that can be considered political histories, those whose authors used events from the past to reflect political events of the present. Urbanski gives two examples of political histories: Master Wace's *Roman de Rou* and Benoît de

²⁸ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 77.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Monica Otter, "Functions of Fiction in Historical Writing," in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (New York: Hodder Arnold, 200), 122.

³¹ Suzanne Fleischman, "On the Representation of History and Fiction in the Middle Ages," *History and Theory* 22, no. 3 (1983), 305.

Sainte-Maure's *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*, both of which were histories of the Norman rulers commissioned by Henry II to secure the good legacy of the Normans and to emphasize his own glory.³² Although Henry originally commissioned Wace to write the work, he shifted his patronage to Benoît after Wace wrote an unflattering portrait of Henry I, a portrait that in Urbanski's analysis implicitly admonished Henry II for his centralizing tendencies.³³ Both Wace and Benoît's histories are political in that they were commissioned to bolster Henry II's reputation, but the *Roman de Rou* is additionally political because Wace used it to criticize Henry.

Urbanski's analysis of Wace and Benoît provided the starting point for this thesis by suggesting that historians in the twelfth century used their work to attack reigning monarchs and that these sometimes suffered repercussions – in Wace's case the loss of a commission – for their criticisms. This thesis will examine other instances of historians criticizing kings in England and Normandy during the twelfth century to argue that historical precedent provided a necessary justification for criticism of the royal policies. Across generic lines, these authors expressed their criticisms of the monarchy through historical narratives and anecdotes, suggesting that the past acted as a neutral setting, allowing writers to condemn royal policies without attacking monarchs directly.

To argue this point, I will examine a body of works written in England between 1130 and 1200. The first two, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*, present narrative accounts of British kings from classical antiquity to the coming of the Saxons. When writing the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey invented stories of historical British kings and in doing so suggested that Stephen's kingship was illegitimate. Wace translated

³² Urbanski, *Writing History for the King*, 2.

³³ *Ibid*, 138.

and expanded on Geoffrey's *Historia* for his *Roman*, offering advice to Henry II through his history of King Arthur. The third work, John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, is a treatise on political philosophy and theology presented to Thomas Becket, Henry II's closest advisor in the 1150s and 1160s. The *Policraticus* advises Henry on good kingship, but always affirms that advice through historical examples. The final work, Gerald of Wales' *Expugnatio Hibernica*, was presented to King John in the early thirteenth century. It is a history of the Norman Conquest of Ireland that contrasts praise of Anglo-Norman barons and Henry II with King John's failures in ruling Ireland, ultimately presenting John with a model for more effective rulership.

These works come from diverse authors, genres, and locations, but they share a common interest in history and its uses for criticizing royal administrations. By examining them as a body, I will uncover a pattern in which twelfth-century Anglo-Norman writers grounded their criticisms of reigning kings in examples from the past. In doing so, I will argue, they hoped to protect themselves from retribution from the kings that they criticized.

SECTION ONE: GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH AND MEDIEVAL HISTORY

The first of these critical works, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, was written near the beginning of Stephen's reign and provides implicit criticism of the royal administration in the first years of the Anarchy. In order to understand the form and function of its criticism, it is important to understand how medieval writers viewed the study of history and its purpose. The *Historia* is a genealogical account of the kings of Britain, from supposed origins with survivors of the Trojan War to the conquest of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons. The longest

and most detailed section of the *Historia* is Geoffrey's account of King Arthur, who temporarily defeats the Saxons, restores the kingdom to order, and conquers much of western Europe.

We know little about Geoffrey's life. He was born around the turn of the 12th century in Monmouth, along the English border with Wales, likely the son of Breton settlers who entered the area after the Norman Conquest. By the 1120s he lived in Oxford, where he participated in the town's growing academic culture.³⁴ Geoffrey completed his *Historia* between 1136 and 1138, shortly after King Stephen's accession and dedicated it to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, a supporter of Empress Matilda.

The *Historia*'s popularity in the Middle Ages is attested by the fact that over two-hundred manuscript copies survive. Despite the text's popularity, several scholars criticized it shortly after its completion, with William of Newburgh calling Geoffrey's stories about the British "fantastic lies" and Gerald of Wales famously telling a story of a man plagued by demons whose affliction would lessen if he were given a bible, but worsen if he was given a copy of Geoffrey's book. Still, Ingledeu notes that these criticisms are an exception to the norm.³⁵ The *Historia* was widely accepted as historical writing in its time.

However, when examining the functions of the past in Geoffrey of Monmouth's work, it is important to understand the medieval conception of history and history writing. As well-regarded historical texts such as Geoffrey's *Historia* contain fantastic and invented elements, many modern scholars have attempted to determine how medieval thinkers differentiated between history and fiction. Otter argues that "medieval historians and literary

³⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Michael Faletra, (Buffalo, New York: Broadview, 2008), 13.

³⁵ Francis Ingledeu, "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*." (*Speculum* 64, no. 3, 1994), 701, n. 188.

theorists frequently defined *historia* as ‘true’ narrative, in opposition to the ‘fabulae’ of poets,” but that a third category, the *argumentum*, consists of invented history that “‘resembles truth’ and ‘could have been true.’”³⁶ Faletra places Geoffrey’s *Historia* into this third category, labeling the work as “history as Geoffrey believes it should have been: vast in scope, high in drama, grand in vision- history, as we might put it today, as literature.”³⁷ Still, Geoffrey’s *Historia* displays many of the characteristics expected of histories in the Middle Ages, including attempts to build *auctoritas*, or authority. Otter defines *auctoritas* as “the prestige and cultural acceptance of major texts,” and gives Bede as an example of an author with supreme *auctoritas*: facts and interpretations in his texts went unquestioned throughout the Middle Ages.³⁸ Only by establishing authority could authors claim ‘truth’ for their narratives. Authors such as Geoffrey built their *auctoritas* through a variety of strategies, including adhering to the proper historical form, basing their works on authoritative sources, and following stylistic conventions. Although vernacular histories such as Wace’s began to appear shortly after Geoffrey wrote, Latin was the most authoritative language for history writing in the twelfth century.³⁹

Historical writing in the Middle Ages typically followed one of a few forms. Annals, or lists describing key events in a given year, were similar to chronicles, which gave expanded, prose narratives of events in given years. Foot labels these as “works that were arranged chronologically” and works that “reshaped events with rhetorical skill to convey given meanings” respectively, although simultaneously noting that both types provide narrative

³⁶ Otter, “Functions of Fiction,” 112.

³⁷ Geoffrey of Monmouth, Faletra’s Introduction, 30.

³⁸ Otter, ‘Functions of Fiction,’ 110.

³⁹ Damian-Grint, *The New Historians*, 1.

structures.⁴⁰ She then further differentiates annals and chronicles from *historia*, or “texts that sought to offer more expansive or moralizing interpretations of the past.”⁴¹ In both name and substance, Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* follows Foot’s model for a *historia*: it presents a cohesive narrative of the past that offers moral lessons to its readers.

In addition to following narrative conventions, Geoffrey’s *Historia* follows the rhetorical conventions of medieval histories. As Partner notes, the work of “serious and skillful” medieval writers “had to arrest the attention and divert the imagination with scenes of great triumphs and failures, inside information about princes... scandalous gossip, tales of exotic places, and, of course, accounts of exemplary lives and evidence of God’s continuing interest in human affairs,” all written in an entertaining and beautiful style.⁴² The need for entertainment in history allowed some room for authorial invention. Long speeches by generals before battles and kings that clearly followed biblical models would not decrease the ‘truth’ of a work of history- instead, displaying a mastery of the inventive historical style contributed to a writer’s authority.⁴³ Geoffrey employed these rhetorical conventions in the *Historia*, writing extended speeches for Arthur and other kings. Geoffrey’s stylistic choices in the *Historia* conformed to what was expected of a work of history.

Finally, an authoritative history needed to follow sources. In the opening lines of the *Historia*, Geoffrey claimed to have translated the material for the work from “a certain very ancient book in the British language” presented to him by Walter, the Archdeacon of Oxford.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Sarah Foot, “Finding the Meaning of Form: Narrative in Annals and Chronicles,” in *Writing Medieval History*, ed. Nancy Partner (New York: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 89-102.

⁴¹ Foot, ‘Finding the Meaning of Form,’ 89.

⁴² Nancy Partner,, *Serious Entertainments* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2-3.

⁴³ Otter, ‘Functions of Fiction,’ 110.

⁴⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, 41.

No trace of Walter of Oxford's book has been found by modern historians, and most have treated it as an invention by Geoffrey to lend credibility to his story.⁴⁵ Rather than translating the *Historia* from a unified source or inventing its stories outright, Geoffrey drew inspiration from a wide range of histories available during the 12th century, including Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, Gildas' *De Excidio Britanniae*, Welsh annals, and early-medieval legends of Alexander the Great.⁴⁶ Claiming his work as a translation of an older, unknown source gave Geoffrey the ability to invent while covering his tale in a veneer of authority and reliability.

In addition to entertainment, edification was a main goal of history-writing in the Middle Ages. Historical writing was valuable not only for recording the past, but also for providing examples for readers' moral instruction. Although Geoffrey's introduction does not comment on his purpose for writing beyond noting that he was unable to find the history of the Britons in widely-available sources, many other medieval historians explicitly mention a desire to edify. Bede, for example, writes that "if history records good things of good men, the thoughtful hearer is encouraged to imitate what is good; if it records evil things of wicked men, the good religious listener or reader is encouraged to avoid all that is sinful and perverse..."⁴⁷ For Bede, it is important that the historian not attempt to tell readers to be good outright. Rather, historians should provide examples of behavior for readers to emulate. Geoffrey's contemporary, Henry of Huntingdon, agrees, writing that the moral philosophy of Crantor and Chrysippus is inferior to history written by Homer, which shows "the prudence of Ulysses, the fortitude of Agamemnon,

⁴⁵ Geoffrey of Monmouth, Faletra Introduction, 15. For one argument favoring the existence of Walter of Oxford's book, see Geoffrey Ashe's "'A Certain Very Ancient Book': Traces of an Arthurian Source in Geoffrey of Monmouth's History" (*Speculum* 56, no. 2, Apr. 1981), 301-323.

⁴⁶ Geoffrey of Monmouth, Faletra Introduction, 14-17; J.S.P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 3-5; Antonio L. Furtado, "From Alexander of Macedonia to Arthur of Britain." *Arthuriana* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 70.

⁴⁷ Quoted Breisach, *Historiography*, 96.

the temperance of Nextor, the Justice of Menelaus, and other the other hand, the imprudence of Ajax... the intemperance of Achilles, [and] the injustice of Paris.”⁴⁸ Histories in the Middle Ages were didactic, and readers approaching Geoffrey’s *Historia* would have expected it to entertain and to instruct its readers in how to live.

Many modern scholars writing about the *Historia Regum Britanniae* have attempted to discover which stories presented in the work could be commentary on the events of the day or edificatory examples. One branch of scholarship has attempted to read the *Historia* in the context of the Anarchy of Stephen. Tatlock’s early argument that the four successful queens in the work should be read alongside Geoffrey’s dedication to Robert of Gloucester as a statement of support for Matilda’s claims to the throne has been echoed through a feminist lens by Tolhurst, who sees “female figures at the emotional center of the book’s climax through their roles as wives, mothers, and victims of violence” and “at its political center through their roles as ruling queens.”⁴⁹ Given that the *Historia* is full of themes about good and bad rulership, it is possible that Geoffrey used the work both to advance Matilda’s claims and to criticize Stephen as an ineffective ruler.

By the time that Geoffrey wrote the *Historia*, the Anglo-Norman kingdom was in the midst of a civil war. Stephen had ruled a relatively peaceful kingdom from his accession in 1135 to 1138. In the summer of that year, Robert, the Earl of Gloucester and the bastard son of Henry I, renounced his support for Stephen’s cause, supporting instead his half-sister Matilda’s claim to the throne. Robert’s domains included large swaths of southern and western England.

⁴⁸ Quoted in DR Howlett “The Literary Context of Geoffrey of Monmouth: An Essay on the Fabrication of Sources,” (*Arthuriana* 5, no. 3 1995): 25-69, 32.

⁴⁹ Tatlock, *Legendary History* 426; Tolhurst, Fiona, “The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s British Epic and Reflections of Empress Matilda.” (*Arthuriana* 8, no. 4, 1998): 69-87, 78.

Coordinating his efforts with other barons including Ranulf, earl of Chester, Robert was able to best Stephen militarily throughout much of the 1140s and give Matilda a foothold in England from which to attempt to gain the throne. Geoffrey of Monmouth dedicated his work to Robert, praising him for military prowess and wisdom and requesting his patronage. Geoffrey's dedication of a work that focuses on the kings and queens of Britain to Matilda's most powerful supporter can be interpreted as a sign of affiliation for her cause, although Faletra warns against seeing it as a declaration of loyalty.⁵⁰

Throughout his work, Geoffrey creates a pattern wherein tyrants and rulers who usurp the British throne die quickly and in grisly manners. King Coel, for example, "slew [the rightful king Asclepiodotus] and took the crown of the kingdom for himself."⁵¹ After failing to defend the Britons against the Romans, Coel "succumbed to a grave illness and was snatched away by death within eight days."⁵² Geoffrey writes that King Mordivus was cruel, and enjoyed slaying men captured in battle one at a time. Immediately after describing Morvidus' cruelty, Geoffrey writes that "a misfortune struck him that put an end to his evil. There emerged out of the Irish Sea a beast of unheard-of ferocity... [Morvidus] approached the beast and fought with it. But when he had spent all of his spears on the creature, the monster rushed at the king, opened its gaping jaws, and gobbled him up..."⁵³

Geoffrey's most developed description of a bad king is that of Vortigern, who arranges for the Picts to murder King Constantine and then seizes the throne.⁵⁴ Vortigern invites the pagan Saxons into the kingdom as mercenaries, marries the daughter of their king, and allows them to

⁵⁰ Geoffrey of Monmouth, Faletra's introduction, 13-14.

⁵¹ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, 102.

⁵² *Ibid*, 102.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 80.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 109.

gain so much influence that they are able to murder the majority of the British nobility.⁵⁵ Only after Vortigern is burned alive in his tower can Aurelius Ambrosius, son of the murdered Constantius, rebuild Britain's churches and cities and "set his realm in order, reviving neglected laws and restoring men to their ancestral possessions."⁵⁶ In these three examples and others, Geoffrey presents a picture of bad kingship: usurpers who seize the throne by treachery or force ruin the kingdom and die horrible deaths.

Within his discussion of usurpation, Geoffrey focuses on family members, and particularly nephews, who steal the throne. The most prominent example comes after the death of King Lear and the accession of his daughter Cordelia. Geoffrey writes that Cordelia's nephews, Margan and Cunedag, rebelled against the queen. "Outraged that Britain was now subject to a woman," the two defeat the queen in battle and seize the throne.⁵⁷ Faletra notes the similarities between this incident and the beginning of the Anarchy of Stephen: after Henry's death, Matilda's nephew took the English throne.⁵⁸

Geoffrey contrasts the bad kings in his narrative with a series of good kings. Notable examples include Cassibelaunus, whose "reputation for generosity and righteousness began to increase so much that his fame was rumored throughout many distant lands,"⁵⁹ and Gorobianus, of whom Geoffrey writes that "there was no one in his day who was more just or a greater lover of the law than he. Nor was there anyone who ruled the common people with a greater sense of duty and compassion."⁶⁰ Geoffrey's most prominent example of a good king is King Arthur,

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 117-127.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 150.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 67.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 68, *n. 1*.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 82.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 80.

whose deeds fill three of the *Historia*'s twelve books. Geoffrey's Arthur is characterized by his "outstanding virtue and largesse."⁶¹ He upholds the rule of law, conquers all of Europe, and gives lavishly to his followers. Just as his descriptions of bad kings provide an example of how not to act, Geoffrey's descriptions of virtuous kings present a model for royal behavior: a king should follow the laws, treat his followers generously, and, in the case of Arthur particularly, be a skilled leader in battle.

In addition, Tolhurst notes that Geoffrey includes many examples of good, independent queens in the *Historia*.⁶² She points to the examples of Guendolena, Cordelia, and Marcia, all of whom Geoffrey portrays as capable of ruling peacefully, noting that "Geoffrey's stories of ruling queens, particularly that of Cordelia, imply that the Britons would have fared better if they had accepted or retained their queens."⁶³ Tolhurst demonstrates that the strong queens in Geoffrey's *Historia* are meant to mirror Matilda's circumstances and argue in favor of her claim to the throne.⁶⁴

In Geoffrey's *Historia*, then, we find condemnations of usurpers, and usurping relatives in particular, contrasted with descriptions of strong kings and independent queens who rule effectively. Read within the context of the Anarchy of Stephen, the *Historia* appears as a condemnation of Stephen's right to rule. The historical precedent, although invented by Geoffrey, allows for effective queens but suggests that kings who usurp their relatives' thrones will die badly. The implication of this created precedent is that Matilda, although a woman, could be a better and more legitimate ruler than the usurping Stephen. The *Historia* attacks

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 163.

⁶² Tolhurst, "The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans," 79-82.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 79.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

Stephen's legitimacy without ever mentioning the events of the 1130s directly, relying on readers to understand the connection between the stories of the past and the events of the present.

Geoffrey's concern for presenting the *Historia* as an authentic, authoritative history may stem in part from the desire to establish a strong precedent for his criticisms of Stephen. If history, as Bede suggests, stands as a body of edificatory examples, stories in an authoritative work become powerful tools for instruction. By ensuring that the *Historia* followed the proper forms and approaches of the historical genre, Geoffrey created credibility for his criticisms of Stephen's rule.

SECTION TWO: WACE AS INVENTOR

The popularity of Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae* inspired many imitators and translators, and in the 1150s Master Wace completed a version of the work titled the *Roman de Brut*, an Old French translation with new passages composed by Wace. What little we know of Wace's life comes from his later *Roman de Rou*. He was born on Jersey around 1110, and by 1130 lived in Caen as a *clerc lisant*, an author or translator who would read works aloud to noble audiences for entertainment and edification.⁶⁵ Wace tells us at the end of the *Roman de Brut* that he completed his translation in 1155, the year after Henry II's coronation. Sometime thereafter, Wace presented his *Brut* to Eleanor of Aquitaine. Many historians have assumed that he did so upon completion in 1155, but our only source for the information, the priest Lawman's early 13th century translation of the *Roman*, merely states that Wace gave the book, and not when he did so. Wace could have presented it sometime after 1155. Because of the uncertainty of the date

⁶⁵ Charity Urbanski, *Writing History for the King: Henry II and the Politics of Vernacular Historiography* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2013), 20.

of presentation, this thesis will examine the *Roman de Brut* in the context of the early years of Henry's reign, rather than 1155 specifically.

Modern scholars have tended to ignore the creative aspects of Wace's *Brut*, analyzing it only in relation to Geoffrey's *Historia* and Henry II's patronage of Wace's later *Roman de Rou. Tatlock*, for example, dismisses the *Roman de Brut* as "in effect nothing but an adaptation to a different audience of Geoffrey's serious and historical-seeming Latin prose."⁶⁶ And Tolhurst, while postulating that Wace might have created parallels between Eleanor and Guinevere, still refers to Henry and Eleanor as Wace's "prospective patrons," in effect reading Wace's motivations backwards from the moment that he received royal support.⁶⁷ Many scholars have focused on the mercenary aspect, Wace's desire for future commissions, at the expense of studying the *Roman de Brut* as an independent work. The *Roman*, however, was a creative work in its own right. In it, Wace built on Geoffrey of Monmouth's didactic ideas to propose an idea of kingship grounded in generosity and cooperation with the nobility.

Wace's choice of Old French is important to understanding his production of the *Roman*. Even if the themes of Geoffrey's *Historia* would have resonated with the Anglo-Norman elite, the Latin would have been inaccessible to all but the most educated aristocratic audiences- the majority of the nobility communicated in French. While Tatlock was wrong to reject the *Roman* as 'merely' a translation, he was correct in suggesting that it adapted Geoffrey's work to a new audience. Damian-Grint has written extensively about the translation of Latin histories into the vernacular in the 12th Century, arguing that the project of translation, referred to by the Old French *translater* and the Latin *translatate*, was conceived of differently than the modern

⁶⁶ Tatlock, *Legendary History*, 463.

⁶⁷ Tolhurst, 'Britons as Hebrews,' 85.

practice of translation. Instead of a purely linguistic transfer, substituting the words and phrases of a texts with the closest matches in another language, medieval translation involved a great degree of authorial interpretation, “a process of adaptation by which a text [was] ‘changed’ or ‘moved’ for the benefit of a particular audience.”⁶⁸ Translation rendered old works into new languages, but also updated their source material to better reflect the values of their audiences.

Damian-Grint also analyzes the relationship between vernacular histories in the 12th century and their Latin counterparts, arguing that vernacular historians attempted to build *auctoritas* and to be received as ‘serious’ histories in the same ways as Latin historians.⁶⁹ Modern scholars have frequently noted Wace’s willingness to admit to gaps in his knowledge and faults in his sources, as when he writes of prophecies that Geoffrey of Monmouth attributes to Merlin that “Merlin made the prophecies which I believe you have heard, of the kings who were to come and who were to hold the land. I do not wish to translate his book, since I do not know how to interpret it; I would not like to say anything, in case what I say does not happen.”⁷⁰ Wace questions the veracity and authority of his source, and Urbanski, studying similar occurrences in the *Roman de Rou*, notes that Wace bolstered his reputation as a careful historian by rejecting the facts in other authors and placing his own facts in a position of preeminence.⁷¹ Wace also built his authority as a historian through other methods available to Latin historians, frequently displaying his knowledge of geography and astronomy, claiming first-hand

⁶⁸ Damian-Grint, *New Historians*, 23.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 85.

⁷⁰ Wace’s *Roman de Brut, a History of the British: Text and Translation*, trans. Judith Weiss (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), 191.

⁷¹ Urbanski, *Writing history for the King*, 129.

knowledge of events, and following other rhetorical conventions, all of which suggest that Wace hoped that readers would understand the work as authoritative, much like a Latin history.⁷²

Wace combined the duties of a translator with those of a historian. Writing in the opening of his *Life of St. Nicholas* between 1150 and 1155, he states that “I want to say in the vernacular a little of what the Latin tells us, so that the lay folk (who cannot understand Latin) can learn of it.”⁷³ Wace’s project was to make both the material and the moral lessons of Latin works available to people outside of the circles of educated, Latin-speaking clerics and scholars. By translating the material of Geoffrey’s text into Old French, Wace adapted the text and didactic themes of the *Historia* to a language that a lay audience could understand.

As Wace made Geoffrey’s material available to unlearned members of the aristocracy, he also added narrative details designed to appeal to a courtly audience such as descriptions of feasts and battles, adapting the *Historia* to the social climate of the Plantagenet court. Much of the literary evidence for Henry’s court suggests that its reputation for manners, entertainment, and ‘courtliness’ extended across Europe.⁷⁴ The terms ‘courteous’ and ‘courtliness’ are difficult to define, and would have varied across both time and space within the Middle Ages.

Unfortunately, as Keen notes, much of our understanding of courtly culture is drawn from romance literature, an idealist genre that may have inspired courtly behavior more than it imitated real life.⁷⁵ Vincent, however, attempts to reconstruct the culture of Henry’s court, a ‘particular ethos’, as he calls it, based on writings from known courtiers. Vincent argues that the court, while a nebulous institution, valued musical and literary entertainment, hunting, lavish

⁷² *Ibid*, 16.

⁷³ Quoted in Damian-Grint, *New Historians*, 17 n. 79.

⁷⁴ Nicholas Vincent, “The Court of Henry II” in *Henry II: New Interpretations*, ed. C. Harper-Bill and N. Vincent. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2007), 321.

⁷⁵ Maurice Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 3.

feasts, and fashionable dress, what he calls “cosmopolitanism and conspicuous consumption.”⁷⁶ Many of Wace’s emendations to the *Historia Regum Britanniae* emphasize these same values in new and, importantly, entertaining ways. This analysis of the ways that history in the *Roman* criticizes Henry II will focus on Wace’s treatment of Geoffrey’s Arthurian material, in part because Wace presented Arthur as an ideal for kingship, writing that “he was a most mighty king, admirable and renowned... for as long as he lived and reigned, he surpassed all other monarchs in courtesy and nobility, generosity and power.”⁷⁷ Because Wace’s description of Arthur and Arthur’s court most closely resembles descriptions of Henry and his court, an analysis of the relationship between Wace and Henry should focus on that section.

A good example of Wace’s entertaining emendations to the *Historia* comes early in the work, when the Trojans first arrive in a Britain inhabited by giants. Wace changes Geoffrey’s descriptions of a wrestling match between the Trojan Corineus and the giant Gogmagog, adding vivid details about the raw physicality of the combatants. Geoffrey writes that “[Corineus] rolled up his sleeves, threw aside his weapons and provoked the giant to wrestle. At first Corineus, then the giant, prevailed as they struggled together, locked in each other’s embrace. The very air vibrated with the groaning of their mighty breaths.”⁷⁸ Wace elaborates greatly on this scene, writing that “Then you could see them breathing hard, wrinkling their noses, with sweaty foreheads, blackening faces, rolling eyes, eyebrows raised and lowered... pushing, pulling, kicking, prodding, raising, lifting, checking, bending, straightening, calculating, kicking, and quickly turning.”⁷⁹ In addition to adding an impressive knowledge of technical detail about

⁷⁶ Vincent, ‘Court of Henry II,’ 333.

⁷⁷ Wace’s *Roman de Brut*, 227.

⁷⁸ Geoffrey, *history of the Kings of Britain* 57.

⁷⁹ Wace’s *Roman de Brut*, 31.

wrestling and combat sports, as Weiss suggests,⁸⁰ Wace adds a vivid physical descriptions to the scene, rendering Geoffrey's original in a more exciting and entertaining form.

Wace added to Geoffrey's descriptions of entertainment at Arthur's court, frequently inserting entire passages of description. Wace writes that "there were many minstrels at court, singers and instrumentalists: many songs could be heard... lays on fiddles, lays on rotes, lays on harps, lays on flutes, lyres, drums, and shawms, bagpipes, psalteries, stringed instruments, tambourines and choruns."⁸¹ Music was an important part of social life at Henry's court: Vincent notes that the occasional evening on which Henry did not fall asleep to the sound of harps and viols was surprising enough to draw a mention from Jordan Fantosme.⁸² As for the interest in gaming among Henry's courtiers, Wace also adds a long passage about the fortunes of dice players reminiscent of the very physical wrestling scene – they borrow, cheat, swear, and in one instance lose their clothes on a bet,⁸³ and long, detailed descriptions of the rich gifts that Arthur gives to foreign dignitaries. Entertaining and full of details about courtly life, Wace's version of Arthur's court would have been enjoyable and accessible to noble listeners.

Unlike the extensive literature about the political messages of Geoffrey of Monmouth, few modern scholars have attempted to uncover didactic motives behind Wace's *Roman de Brut*. Urbanski has studied the *Roman de Rou* as a criticism of Henry I and implicit condemnation of Henry II's policies, but even she regards Wace's presentation of the *Brut* to Eleanor as purely mercenary, "most likely motivated by a desire to generate future royal commissions..."⁸⁴ The *Roman de Brut*, however, was a text uniquely positioned to instruct the higher nobility: presented

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, XX.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 265.

⁸² Vincent, *Court of Henry II*, 321.

⁸³ *Wace's Roman de Brut*, 267.

⁸⁴ Urbanski, *Writing History for the King*, 27.

to the Queen and intended to be read aloud at gatherings in common language of the court, any message contained in the *Brut* would have reached some of the most influential listeners in the Angevin Empire.

Along with changing scenes in the *Historia* to make the work more palatable to noble audiences, Wace added his own inventions to Geoffrey's discussions of royal power. Although these additions appear throughout the work, this analysis will again focus on the Arthurian section as the closest parallel for Henry's court. Wace re-articulates Geoffrey's political ideas in two ways. First, his version of Arthur is even more generous than Geoffrey's, especially when giving gifts and land to the nobility. Second, he emphasizes the affection that the nobility feel for the king.

While Geoffrey's Arthur gives gifts and titles to the barons after successful conquests, Wace emphasizes both Arthur's generosity and his close relationship with the nobility. Many of Wace's additions are small changes, altering Geoffrey's texts on the level of individual words. When Arthur fights the Saxons, for example, Geoffrey writes that Arthur consulted with "his counselors," while Wace writes that Arthur received advice from "his friends."⁸⁵ Later in the scene, Wace writes that "Arthur trusted his barons" when moving his army to London, while Geoffrey states that Arthur listened to his privy council.⁸⁶ These types of small changes occur throughout the work. Although small, the changes are important for setting the tone of the *Roman*. In the place of Geoffrey's official language, full of recommendations from institutions like the privy council, Wace's Arthur has a close, personal relationship with the nobility and

⁸⁵ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain* 164; Wace's *Roman de Brut*, 229. Geoffrey uses the term 'consiliarii,' or counsellors, while Wace uses 'ami,' or friends. Latin text of Geoffrey from *The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, ed. Acton Gricom, trans. Robert Jones (London: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1929), 435.

⁸⁶ Wace's *Roman de Brut*, 231, Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, 164.

listens to their advice on an informal level. The small changes that Wace brings to the *Roman de Rou* imagine Arthur as a king whose closest companions are the nobility.

In addition to changing Geoffrey's material at the level of individual words, Wace alters the Geoffrey's writing at the sentence level, adding material that emphasizes Arthur's generosity. These scenes of generosity are particularly frequent when Arthur is at court and shortly after new conquests. After Arthur's army conquers France, for example, both Geoffrey and Wace write of Arthur rewarding followers. In Geoffrey's text, after summoning all of the clergy and common folk to Paris, Arthur gives lands to Bedivere, his cup-bearer, and Kay, his seneschal, after which Geoffrey writes that "he granted many other provinces to the other noble men in his service."⁸⁷ Wace alters this scene in a fashion that again emphasizes Arthur's generosity and love for the nobility. Instead of a summons, Wace's Arthur "held a great feast in Paris for his friends," where he "compensated his men's losses and rewarded their deserts, repaying each one's service according to what he had done."⁸⁸ After Arthur gives Kay, 'Bedoer,' and four other barons titles, Wace writes that "To many according to their nobility, to several according to their service, he gave what domains were available, and to minor nobles he gave lands," a process which "made all his friends rich."⁸⁹ Wace makes similar changes to Arthur's coronation; the king hands out lands immediately before he gives the foreign emissaries rich gifts. Wace characterizes Arthur as extremely generous to, and friendly with, the nobility.

Finally, Wace added entirely new scenes to the *Historia*, including a description of Arthur's Round Table, which appears for the first time in the *Roman de Brut*. Wace writes that "on account of his noble barons- each of whom felt he was superior... Arthur had the Round

⁸⁷ Geoffrey, 173.

⁸⁸ Wace's *Roman de Brut*, 255.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 257

Table made, about which the British tell many a tale. There sat the vassals, all equal, all leaders; they were placed equally around the table and equally served. None of them could boast he sat higher than his peer; all were seated near the place of honor, none far away.⁹⁰ In Wace's ideal, the king treats all of the nobles, so frequently called 'his friends,' with respect and dignity.

In Wace's *Roman*, the barons are not Arthur's servants, to be ordered around at will; rather, they are companions who he wishes to honor and help. On the surface, Wace's emphasis on Arthur's generosity seems innocuous. It is natural that a good king would be generous. But Wace's focus on the giving and receiving of land is telling: on multiple occasions, Arthur gives away the unowned land in the kingdom to a nobility that he trusts. Arthur's trust in his nobility becomes particularly interesting when read against Henry's attempts to reign in the power of the Norman aristocracy in the early years of his reign. Before he became king and throughout the early years of his reign, Henry spent a great deal of effort curbing the power of the nobility, especially power manifested by new castles constructed during the Anarchy.

In the years immediately following Stephen's death and Henry's accession, the king attempted to dismantle or claim for himself many of the castles that had been built before and during the Anarchy. When William d'Aumale, the earl of York, refused to surrender Scarborough castle in 1155, Henry brought an army and the threat of war to northern England. While d'Aumale surrendered, Henry did go to war against Hugh Mortimer, besieging the castles of Bridgenorth, Wigmore, and Cleobury when Mortimer would not give them up to royal administration.⁹¹ These are only two of many examples of attempts by Henry to reclaim fortifications. Castles were important militarily as invading armies had to capture or surround

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 245.

⁹¹ Amt, *The Accession of Henry II in England*, 25.

them in their path or risk supply lines being cut from the rear. Because a relatively small number of defenders could withstand a protracted siege, a well-fortified castle could allow a baron to defy the king's orders or rebel with some measure of security. Castles were therefore an important symbol of power: in private hands, they could serve as sites of rebellion, while in royal hands they could prevent baronial uprisings.

In addition to wresting castles from the nobility, Henry also reclaimed many lands and titles for the crown. During the preceding decades, Stephen had weakened his own control over the land in the kingdom, breaking up royal holdings in order to give barons new estates and to create new baronies. Henry attempted to reverse this process by refusing to confirm an inheritance after the death of a baron, a process referred to as allowing a holding to 'lapse'. When Roger of Hereford died in 1155, for example, Henry refused to allow Roger's lands to pass on to his son and in doing so returned the lands to royal control.⁹² Control over lands and titles was an important element of royal and aristocratic power in the twelfth century. In an economy based on agricultural production, land was the source of wealth, and distributing land was a way to buy the loyalty and service of the aristocracy. By transferring land to royal control, Henry hoped to increase the crown's revenues and ability to maintain loyal followers.

Seizing lands and castles strengthened Henry's military and economic power at the expense of the barons. Such a move had the potential to be dangerous to the integrity of the kingdom. As Amt notes, "some confiscations were caused by baronial misbehavior, and some baronial misbehavior was caused by the prospect of confiscation."⁹³ Had Henry seized too many

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

castles or too many landholdings, the barons could have seen revolt as the only way to preserve their rights to hold estates and pass inheritances to their children.

Wace attempted to intervene in the tense relationship between aristocracy and king by using the figure of Arthur to suggest that Henry treat the Anglo-Norman aristocracy leniently. Arthur, the *Roman's* ideal king, does not feel threatened by the dissemination of land titles. Instead, he trusts his barons and treats them as close friends. If Henry wished to be as good of a king as Arthur, the changes imply, he would give land generously, rather than taking it away.

Wace's *Roman de Brut* is, in part, a criticism Henry II's attempts to construct a strong royal administration at the expense of close relationships with many of the barons. Wace accomplishes this criticism by writing a history that subtly criticizes the current king's actions and offers an alternate model for behavior. Creating a platform by translating Geoffrey's popular *Historia* and emphasizing the legitimacy of vernacular history-writing, he re-imagines the relationship between aristocracy and monarchy as one of close friendship, where the king and nobility trust each other and work to advance their mutual interests. Wace mainly criticizes through implication in the Arthurian section of the work. Nowhere does he say that Henry's policies are dangerous or wrong. Instead, he suggests that Arthur's policies make him a great king and allows the Anglo-Normans to decide for themselves if Henry's policies make him as great as Arthur.

Both the *Roman's* historical style and its use of the common language of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy were important parts of its critical project. Old French allowed everyone at court to understand the work when it was read, and history, a genre understood as a storehouse of moral lessons, lent weight to Wace's arguments about royal politics. By

manipulating Geoffrey's version of the past, Wace was able to criticize Henry II from an authoritative intellectual platform.

SECTION THREE: HISTORY IN JOHN OF SALISBURY'S *POLICRATICUS*

Wace was not the only author to present advice to the Angevin court in the years following Henry's coronation. John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* makes a similarly veiled criticism of Henry II's policies, again reinforced by historical examples.

John of Salisbury was born between 1115 and 1120 and educated in Paris in the 1130s. By 1147, he was a cleric working for Theobald, the Archbishop of Canterbury, as a secretary, advisor, and envoy. His bureaucratic duties introduced him to both the Italian Papal courts and the Angevin court of Henry II, the excesses of which are a major theme of the *Policraticus*. John was close with many members of Henry's court including Thomas Becket, Henry's advisor and Chancellor in 1155. John wrote the *Policraticus* between 1156 and 1159. At the beginning of that time, in 1156 and 1157, he was exiled from England and living on the Continent after angering Henry by opposing the king's attempts to influence the English church.

The *Policraticus* is a prose Latin treatise on theological philosophy and political theory. Although different from the *Roman de Brut* in material, the two works share many of the same methods and objectives, both using historical examples to show the value of a moderate monarchy. In the prologue to the *Policraticus*, John states both his general theory of literature and his specific aims for the work. John sees literature as a means to transmit moral truth. He states that "the examples of our ancestors, which are incitements and inducements to virtue, never would have encouraged and been heeded by everyone, unless, through devotion, care and

diligence, writers triumphed over idleness and transmitted these things to posterity.”⁹⁴ Like Wace and Geoffrey, John sees his writing as a way to instruct readers by interpreting the moral lessons of past events.

The specific aim of the *Policraticus*, John states, is to correct the frivolities of courtiers with the wisdom of philosophers.⁹⁵ He claims that his examples should be instructional enough that “when someone recognizes his own foolishness in what is recited or heard, he should bring to mind the lesson that ‘with a change of name, the story may be told about you.’”⁹⁶ Unlike the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Roman de Brut*, both of which imply moral lessons with narrative stories, the *Policraticus* addresses its readers explicitly- they are told to read the work with their own vices in mind and to draw lessons from what they read.

The *Policraticus* was directed at one courtier in particular. In the same paragraph, John addresses the work to “one in whom frivolity could never be demonstrated, that is, to address you who are the most discriminating man of our times, and to describe what seems to deserve censure in those like myself.”⁹⁷ Nederman identifies the addressee as Thomas Becket, who in 1159 was Henry’s closest advisor.⁹⁸ In the closing paragraphs of the book, John addresses Becket again. At that point, Becket was fighting alongside Henry near Toulouse in an attempt to bring the duchy into the Angevin Empire, a campaign that John characterizes as particularly brutal. John writes to Becket that “so it is reported you guide [Henry] with your counsel... In the midst of such tumultuous events, I implore you to defend innocence and see and speak and preach

⁹⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. Cary Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 4.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, xvi.

equity; do not stray from the correct path through either love or hate, hope or fear.”⁹⁹ More than a theoretical, moralizing text, John intended the *Policraticus* to be a work whose wisdom could help Becket guide the King along a virtuous path. While the *Roman de Brut* only implicitly inserts itself into royal politics, the *Policraticus* is directed at Becket and Henry’s policies explicitly.

The *Policraticus* and *Roman de Brut* both rely on historical events as proof for their claims. However, unlike the *Historia* and the *Roman de Brut*, both of which provide a history in which moral instruction is built into the narrative, the *Policraticus* tells its readers what is virtuous and then backs its claims with *exempla*. In attempting to define the term *exemplum*, Von Moos notes that it can refer both to a historical event and to a writer’s use of that event.¹⁰⁰ He argues that John uses *exempla* as miniature *historiae*, short, coherent narratives with moral messages.¹⁰¹ John uses history in the *Policraticus* as illustration for his points, rather than constructing an argument through a longer narrative. Just as historians drew on the *auctoritas* of known and notable texts, John draws on the authority of classical philosophers as well as biblical and classical history to confirm the truth of his arguments. In von Moos’ analysis, John’s *exempla* serve to confirm the political and social theories of the *Policraticus*, while at the same time helping John create his theories.¹⁰² If the ultimate aim of the *Policraticus* was to impart moral messages, historical examples were the means of confirming that that message was true.

John notes in the introduction to the *Policraticus* that the wisdom contained in *exempla* is independent from the truth of their stories. He states that “I shall expose my arrogance fully... I

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 230.

¹⁰⁰ Peter von Moos, “The use of *exempla* in the *Policraticus* of John of Salisbury” in Michael Wilks ed. *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 211.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 215.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 217 & 259.

have seen neither Alexander nor Caesar, I have heard neither Socrates nor Zeno, Plato nor Aristotle disputing, yet from these and others just as unknown much is preserved for the utility of readers,” and that “I am not promising that all which has been written here is true, but that, whether it is true or false, it will serve the reader as useful.”¹⁰³ Compare John’s statement with Geoffrey’s claim that his “book, which deals so truthfully with the honor of the native princes, I have endeavored to translate into Latin as accurately as I possibly could” and Wace’s claim that “Master Wace has translated it and tells it truthfully.”¹⁰⁴ All of these statements can be seen as authorial disclaimers: in each case, the author has promised a true translation, and whether or not the source material is accurate is beyond his control. On another level, however, John’s statement about utility to readers agrees with Geoffrey’s invention of history in order to instruct. An author does not need to ensure that facts are exactly true as long as the moral message is correct.

John of Salisbury shared many approaches with Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace, but the material covered in the *Policraticus* differs from that of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Roman de Brut*. John occasionally touches on the same subjects as Wace, especially in discussing the lives of courtiers, although John criticises where Wace idealizes. For most of the work, however, John engages with royal politics in a different field, focusing on the division of power between church and monarch.

Among the main concerns of the *Policraticus* is determining the proper relationship between the secular and sacred political structures of twelfth-century Europe. His study of whether monarchs should control the church or the church control the monarchs followed a key

¹⁰³ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*, 217; Wace, *Roman de Brut*, 3.

strain of European political thought in the 1100s. Although the Investiture Controversy in the Holy Roman Empire was formally resolved at the Council of Worms in 1122, conflicts over the domains of royal and papal power continued throughout the 1100s.¹⁰⁵ One such conflict extended throughout England in the early years of Henry II's reign: in the 1150s, Henry attempted to limit ecclesiastical courts' ability to appeal to the papacy and attempted to intervene in the decisions of church courts.¹⁰⁶ Both Duggan and Warren point to the Battle Abbey case as a key example of such intervention. William I had founded Battle Abbey on royal land as penance for the violence of the Norman Conquest. Because the Abbey was founded by a king on crown-owned lands, the kings of England maintained a strong influence in the Monastery's affairs. In 1157, however, bishop Hilary of Chichester attempted to assert Chichester's authority over Battle Abbey; when the Abbot Walter de Luci refused to comply with his orders, Hilary excommunicated the abbot. Abbot Walter brought the case to Henry II, who accused Hilary of attacking the King's rights and dignity with his attempt to interfere at Battle Abbey.¹⁰⁷ Despite Hilary's appeal that authority over religious matters within the bishopric had been given to him by the Pope, Henry and his attendant bishops and barons convinced the bishop to relent and revoke any claims to supremacy over the Abbey. In cases such as this one, Henry and his court officials maintained that the King had the right to intervene in ecclesiastical affairs within England.

John's master, Theobald of Canterbury, attempted to appease Henry when the king intervened in ecclesiastical affairs. John, however, was critical of the king's attempts to dominate the church, a stance that led to his exile in 1156. John, however, claims that the charges were

¹⁰⁵ Maureen Miller, *Power and the Holy in the Age of the Investiture Conflict* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2005), 22.

¹⁰⁶ Duggan, "Henry II, the English Church and the Papacy," 161-162.

¹⁰⁷ Warren, *Henry II*, 431.

overstated. In a letter written to a friend during that year, John laments that “I alone in all the realm am accused of diminishing the royal dignity... If the English Church ventures to claim even the shadow of liberty in making elections or in the trial of ecclesiastical causes, it is imputed to me, as if I were the only person to instruct the lord of Canterbury and the other bishops what they ought to do.”¹⁰⁸ Regardless of his innocence or guilt, John was banished between 1156 and 1157. As John believed that he had been persecuted for criticizing the monarch, it was important that the *Policraticus* not overtly condemn Henry’s policies if John intended the work to instruct the king. An overt condemnation would have risked Henry ignoring the work and persecuting John further.

Throughout the *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury takes a pro-Church stance on political relations. While a ruler is given the freedom to decide whether or not to follow the Church’s teachings, John is clear that a king must follow the church in order to be considered virtuous. Modern historians have disagreed as to the extent to which John intended to attack Henry with his work. Clearly the work intends to instruct the King, but does it intend to criticize? On one end of the spectrum is Wilkes, who writes that “in *Policraticus* [books] V and VI John assumes that Henry has already become a tyrant... and is counselling true philosophers to follow his own example of flight from such a court.”¹⁰⁹ At the other end is Nederman, whose analysis glosses over any commentary that John might have been making about Henry, instead arguing that the *Policraticus* is fundamentally a philosophical text about public affairs and the importance of philosophy in political life.¹¹⁰ Perhaps Luscombe and Evans strike a good balance between the

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Duggan, “Henry II, the English Church and the Papacy,” 158.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Wilks, “John of Salisbury and the Tyranny of Nonsense” in Michael Wilks ed. *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 310.

¹¹⁰ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, xxxvi.

two, writing that the *Policraticus* is foremost a work of political theology, but one in which “reasons of prudence may have caused [John] to concentrate his attacks on typical, not specific targets and to veil his strictures on contemporary *curiales*... John hoped, in sending the work to Thomas Becket, that Becket might be an influence for good in the royal court.”¹¹¹ The idea of ‘typical, not specific’ targets is important for understanding the use of history in the *Policraticus*. By criticizing figures drawn from history, John is able to comment on the events of his day without attacking the king directly and risking further displeasure.

Much of the *Policraticus*, particularly books IV and V, is devoted to a philosophical exploration of the relationship between church and monarchy and of the overall constitution of kingdoms. In Book IV, John establishes, in a very basic way, what constitutes a ‘good’ prince, arguing that the ideal prince “is obedient to the law, and rules his people by a will that places itself at their service, and administers rewards and burdens within the republic under the guidance of law.”¹¹² John sees both princely power and responsibility as divinely given. “Whatever the prince can do, therefore, is from God, so that power does not depart from God, but is used as a substitute for his hand.”¹¹³ For John, princes wield God-given power, but only insofar as they rule in accordance with God’s law.

John develops further the idea that rulers derive power from God by examining the metaphor of the two swords, a popular analogy by which medieval scholars explained the differences between secular and sacred power. Luscombe and Evans trace the metaphor to an eleventh-century interpretation of Luke 22:38 and John 18:11, in which the disciples offer to

¹¹¹ Luscombe and Evans, “The twelfth-century renaissance,” 326-327.

¹¹² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 28.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

defend Christ with a sword and he tells them to sheathe it.¹¹⁴ By commanding Peter to sheathe the sword and not to strike with it, scholars argued, Christ reserved a spiritual sword for the clergy but gave the worldly sword to princes, the two swords representing rule over religious and secular life. Luscombe and Evans note that the metaphor was very popular in the mid-twelfth century, and that writers mainly disagreed on whether secular rulers received the temporal sword, their worldly power, from the church or directly from God.¹¹⁵

Although John recognizes that God is the ultimate source for princely power, he writes that “this sword is therefore accepted by the prince from the hand of the church, although it still does not itself possess the bloody sword entirely. For while it has this sword, yet it is used by the hand of the prince, upon whom is conferred the power of bodily coercion, reserving spiritual authority for the papacy.”¹¹⁶ In his stance on the two-swords argument, John supports the supremacy of the Church over kings.

John draws on numerous examples from history to support his claims about the division of power. He invokes Constantine, “the most faithful emperor of the Romans,” who subjected himself to the verdicts of the priests after the Council of Nicea, the “great emperor Theodosius,” who allowed priests to judge him guilty of homicide, and Samuel, a priest of Israel who deposed Saul and made a new king.¹¹⁷ When making his large, theoretical claims about the division of power, John is careful to back his statements with reputable examples from history. Each of John’s *exempla* draws on a well-regarded figure from the Christian tradition to argue in a positive sense that kings should defer to religious authorities, an argument against Henry’s

¹¹⁴ D.E. Luscombe and G.R. Evans, “The twelfth-century renaissance” in J.H. Burns ed. *Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 318.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 319.

¹¹⁶ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 32.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 32-33.

attempts to control the church in England. While John never states explicitly that Henry should follow the orders of the Church, he implies that if Henry follows the Church, he too can be a king as good as Constantine. Like Wace and Geoffrey of Monmouth, John uses well-known historical figures to comment on contemporary politics without attacking or even mentioning the reigning monarch. Historical examples allow John to comment on Henry's dealings with the English church while avoiding any direct criticism.

As Nederman and Campbell note, however, the *Policraticus* does not argue for an entirely hierocratic world.¹¹⁸ While John did advocate for kingly submission to clerical authority, he recognized that such submission was voluntary and would come naturally if a king had good moral character.¹¹⁹ This argument can best be illustrated by John's extended metaphor linking the political order with the human body.

In John's metaphor, the king is the head of the body, the Church is the soul. The senate is the heart, the judges and governors the eyes, ears, and mouth. Soldiers and officials are the hands, treasurers and record-keepers the bowels, and peasants the feet.¹²⁰ Just as each role is necessary for a kingdom's functioning, each part is vital to the body's survival. As Struve argues, this 'organographical' view of the state suggests that "John regarded the State as an image of the harmony of the cosmos, which is reflected in the structure of the human body," but also that the state could only function if each part followed a law that stemmed from the divine order.¹²¹ In

¹¹⁸ Cary Nederman and Catherine Campbell, "Priests, Kings, and Tyrants: Spiritual and Temporal Power in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*" in *Speculum* 66, no. 3 (1991), 572-590, 575.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 575-577.

¹²⁰ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 67.

¹²¹ Tilman Struve, "The Importance of the Organism in the Political Theory of John of Salisbury" in Michael Wilks ed. *The World of John of Salisbury* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 310.

this description, the mind is not bound to follow the soul, but the organism is healthiest if the mind follows the soul's dictates.

As in his treatments of the two swords, John backs his body-kingdom metaphor with a variety of historical justifications and explanations. He presents the entire metaphor as a translation of a pamphlet entitled *The Instruction of Trajan*, written and presented to Trajan by Plutarch. Rather than a word-for-word translation, John claims to “reproduce the outlines of its meaning.”¹²² Modern scholars have challenged the authenticity of this book. Struve notes that “the source is only mentioned in the *Policraticus*,” as no copies of the work have survived and no texts reference it before John's.¹²³ Nederman argues that the book “was actually a convenient fiction fashioned by John as a cloak for that intellectual novelty so despised by the medieval cast of mind.”¹²⁴ *The Instruction of Trajan*, then, likely functions like Geoffrey's ‘ancient book,’ allowing the authors to invent while still preserving their *auctoritas* by claiming to work within an intellectual tradition. In an academic climate that often vetted sources based on age and name-recognition, old, imaginary texts could validate new ideas. The *Policraticus*, then, joins the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Roman de Brut* in appealing to authoritative ‘historical’ sources for their arguments. Like Geoffrey of Monmouth, John's fictional source allows him to veil his argument about the ideal makeup of the kingdom behind a reputable, distant source. For a cleric already facing Henry's displeasure, ‘reproducing’ a text from an author recognized as wise provided an opportunity to argue while minimizing his own risk.

The *Policraticus* is more explicitly instructional than either the *Historia* or the *Roman de Brut*, making specific claims about good kingship and then appealing to history to prove the

¹²² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 66.

¹²³ Struve, “The Importance of the Organism,” 305.

¹²⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, xxi.

claims. John, however, shared Geoffrey and Wace's historical program. As in the works of Geoffrey and Wace, history helps to reinforce the *Policraticus*' claims about good rule and the duties of the king. John's case illustrates the reason for veiling criticism behind historical events. Because John had already been exiled for critical views of Henry in 1156, John had to find a way to avoid further repercussions if he wanted to continue his criticisms. In this case, history provided something of a safeguard. By examining historical parallels of Henry's policies towards the English Church, John could address the king without ever attacking him directly. Appeals to history in the *Policraticus* allowed John of Salisbury to advocate for reform without offending.

SECTION FOUR: GERALD OF WALES AND THE CONQUEST OF IRELAND

Both Wace and John of Salisbury used history in their texts to advocate for reform during the reign of Henry II. Writing near the end of Henry's tenure and into the reigns of his sons Richard and John, Gerald of Wales used history for a similar purpose. In his *Expugnatio Hibernica*, Gerald criticized what he saw as John's failure to manage recently acquired Norman domains in Ireland by writing a history of the Norman invasion of Ireland. Like Wace and John, Gerald followed his criticism with advice on how the king could correct his wrongdoings.

The process of Norman domination over Ireland began in 1167 when the deposed king of Leinster, Dermot MacMurrough, appealed to Henry II for help with reclaiming his crown from the king of Connacht, Rory O' Connor.¹²⁵ Although Henry refused to lend Dermot direct military

¹²⁵ I have used Anglicized versions of the Gaelic names Diarmait MacMurchada and Ruaidhri Ó Conchobhair. Provided in Katherine Simms, "The Norman Invasion and Gaelic Recovery" in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland*, ed. Foster (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), 50-52. As with the term *Anglo-Norman*, the terms *Ireland* and *Irish* are modern constructions. This thesis uses the terms to refer to the five kingdoms that occupied modern Ireland and Northern Ireland during the twelfth century, and to the people who lived there. This section also employs the terms *Cambro-Norman* and *Hiberno-Norman*, which are used to refer to Norman aristocrats with lands

support, he granted the Irishman a letter addressed to the Anglo-Norman lords that stated “know by these letters that we have received Dermot prince of the men of Leinster into our grace and favor; wherefore whosoever within our frontiers shall be willing to aid him as our vassal and liegeman in recovering his dominion, let him be assured of our favor and permission for it.”¹²⁶ This letter gave any of Henry’s subjects willing to help Dermot permission to do so.

Dermot found his willing helpers among the Cambro-Norman marcher lords of Wales, many of whom had been losing land, castles, and power to native Welsh princes since Henry abandoned his invasion of Wales in 1165. Members of three related families, the FitzStephens, FitzGerald, and FitzGilberts, agreed to help Dermot reconquer Leinster in exchange for grants of land. They landed in Ireland in the spring of 1169, and once there won numerous battles against native Irish armies, reinstated Dermot, and conquered portions of the kingdoms surrounding Leinster.

When Dermot died in 1171, the leader of the Cambro-Norman force, Richard FitzGilbert de Clare, proclaimed himself king of Leinster. Simms writes that Henry II, afraid of an independent Norman kingdom across the Irish sea, brought an army over from England in that same year to ensure his dominion over the new Hiberno-Norman territories.¹²⁷ The Norman barons quickly submitted and swore fealty to the king for their Irish domains, making Henry effective King over Ireland.

There is evidence to suggest that Henry planned from early in his reign to invade Ireland at some point. The chronicler Robert of Torigni writes that Henry “deliberated with his barons

in Wales and Ireland respectively. The term *Wales* will refer to the geographical area now called by the same name, and *Welsh* will be used for both the Celtic inhabitants of Wales and for the Cambro-Norman lords who lived there.

¹²⁶ Quoted in Warren, *Henry II*, 198-199.

¹²⁷ Simms, “The Norman Invasion and Gaelic Recovery,” 59.

about the conquest of Ireland and the grant of it to his brother William” at a council at Winchester in 1155, but ultimately decided to postpone action at the recommendation of his mother.¹²⁸ In addition, the twelfth-century historians Gerald of Wales and Ralph Diceto reproduce the text of a papal bull from the 1150s granting Henry dominion over the Irish.¹²⁹ While Warren accepts their reproductions as accurate and notes that John of Salisbury claims credit for encouraging Pope Adrian IV to issue the bull, Duggan writes dismissively that Gerald’s version of the text of the bull is “so dubious that little reliance can be placed upon it.”¹³⁰ While the text given by Gerald may not be entirely accurate, both Adrian’s bull and the council at Winchester suggest that Henry had at least considered an invasion of Ireland before Dermot MacMurrough approached him in 1167.

Henry received Richard FitzGilbert’s submission and the overlordship of Ireland in 1171. In 1177, the King named his son, John ‘Lackland,’ as Lord of Ireland in his place. John, born in 1167, was Henry and Eleanor’s youngest surviving son. Although Henry gave John’s brothers lands and titles in the late 1160s – Young Henry was to be King of England and Duke of Normandy and Anjou alongside his father, Richard was named Duke of Aquitaine, and Geoffrey was married off to the Countess of Brittany- the King’s plan left the infant John without a dominion.¹³¹ Ireland became John’s portion of the Anglo-Norman realm after 1177, and Henry ultimately wished to proclaim John as King of Ireland.¹³² Although Henry sent John on an expedition to Ireland to meet his future subjects in 1185, the eighteen-year-old prince alienated many potential Norman and Irish supporters with his mockery of Irish manners and attempts to

¹²⁸ Quoted in Warren, *Henry II*, 195.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, 196.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*; Duggan “Henry II, the English Church, and the Papacy, 1154-76,” 158.

¹³¹ Ralph Turner, *King John* (London: Longman, 1994), 28-29.

¹³² Thomas Bartlett, *Ireland, a History* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), 38.

restrict the expansion of Norman territories.¹³³ John's attempts to curb the power of the Hiberno-Norman barons continued after his accession to the throne in 1199. He experimented with different structures of government, cultivating the feudal hierarchy in 1200 but attempting direct royal control over the country after 1205.¹³⁴ In 1210, John traveled to Ireland for the first time since the 1180s, bringing an army to enforce royal authority and administrators to create courts and an exchequer modeled on that of England.¹³⁵

Almost all historians of early Norman Ireland employ two sources, both written by Gerald of Wales: the *Topographia Hiberniae* and the *Expugnatio Hibernica*.¹³⁶ Gerald, born Gerald de Barri in 1146, was well-placed to record the Norman invasion of Ireland. He was a member of the FitzGerald family and many of his relatives joined with Dermot MacMurrough in the initial 1169 expedition. Gerald first visited Ireland with his brother, the Hiberno-Norman lord Philip de Barri, in 1183.¹³⁷ In addition to his relations with early invaders, Gerald worked for the court of Henry II from 1186 to the mid-1190s as a clerk and diplomatic intermediary between the crown and the Welsh princes.¹³⁸ At Henry's request he also accompanied Prince John on his tour in 1185, serving as a mentor and sending reports on Ireland back to the King. Drawing upon these journeys and relationships, he completed the *Topographia* and *Expugnatio* in 1187 and 1189 respectively.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ Turner, *King John*, 144.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, trans. John O'Meara (London: Penguin, 1982); Geraldus Cambrensis, *The Conquest of Ireland*, trans. Thomas Forester, revised Thomas Wright (Cambridge, Ontario, In Parentheses Publications, 2001).

¹³⁷ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 20.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 58; Brynley F. Roberts, *Gerald of Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1982), 24.

Gerald dedicated the *Topographia* to Henry II in flattering terms, writing in its introduction that “it pleased your excellency, invincible king of the English, duke of Normandy, count of Anjou and Aquitaine, to send me from your court, with your beloved son John, to Ireland” and concluding the work by praising Henry’s clemency, moderation, and conquests.¹³⁹ The work is divided into three parts. The first gives a physical description of Ireland, focusing particularly on the animals that live there and drawing comparisons between their behavior and human morality.¹⁴⁰ The second part gives example of wonders and miraculous happenings in Ireland, ranging from a cross in Dublin that could speak to a man and a woman who were turned into wolves, although Gerald protests “solemnly that I have put down nothing in this book the truth of which I have not found out either by the testimony of my own eyes, or that of reliable men found worthy of credence and coming from the districts in which the events took place.”¹⁴¹ The third section gives a history of Ireland stretching from Noah’s flood to the Norman invasions. This history is similar in style to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* and frequently draws upon it. Just as Geoffrey’s *Historia* provides a history that legitimizes the Norman conquest of Britain, Gerald’s provides a historical justification for the conquest of Ireland.¹⁴²

Gerald closes the *Topography* with an offer to Henry: “If you bid me, I shall attempt to describe the manner in which the Irish world has been added to your titles and triumphs.”¹⁴³ Bartlett notes that this offer to continue work on a history of Norman Ireland should be seen as a request for patronage, but that Gerald never received rewards from the royal family for his

¹³⁹ Gerald of Wales, *The History and Topography of Ireland*, 31, 124-125.

¹⁴⁰ See *Ibid*, 45 for the example of swans, who “teach us that the trouble of death should not grieve us.”

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 57.

¹⁴² Gerald of Wales, *History and Topography of Ireland*, 99.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, 124.

literary works.¹⁴⁴ Still, Gerald's *Expugnatio Hibernica* seems to be the continuation of the *Topographia* that he offered to Henry II.

The *Expugnatio*, completed between 1187 and 1189, gives a detailed account of the Norman invasion of Ireland from Dermot's flight to England in 1167 to Prince John's expedition in 1185.¹⁴⁵ Gerald initially dedicated the text to Prince Richard before Henry's death, and then again to King John sometime after Richard's death in 1199. Modern historians have suggested many factors that might have motivated Gerald to compose the work. Bartlett, for example, argues that the work was intended to praise Gerald's Cambro-Norman relations.¹⁴⁶ Putter suggests that Gerald reworked Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlin prophecies in an attempt to become a 'prophet' for Henry II and a champion of Angevin control in Ireland, while Cleaver argues that Gerald simultaneously acknowledges the 'power and status' of the Angevin kings and records their faults for posterity.¹⁴⁷

Cleaver's argument that Gerald wrote to expose the flaws of the Angevins is perhaps the most important for this thesis. In the final chapter of the first book of the *Expugnatio*, Gerald recognizes the dangers of criticizing kings. When describing Henry II, he writes that "the language of truth makes enemies; so that it is a dangerous matter to say anything against one who has the power of revenging himself; and it is still more perilous, and more arduous than profitable, to describe freely and in many words a prince who, by a single word, can consign you

¹⁴⁴ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 58-61.

¹⁴⁵ Wright gives the date as 1187 (Geraldus Cambrensis, *The Conquest of Ireland*, 4 n. 3), while Bartlett gives the date as 1189 (Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 240). In the dedication of the work to Richard, Gerald addresses him as "right noble count of Poitiers, the future duke of Normandy and king of England," suggesting that the work was completed before Henry II's death in July of 1189.

¹⁴⁶ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 20.

¹⁴⁷ Ad Putter, "Gerald of Wales and the Prophet Merlin" in Lewis ed. *Anglo-Norman Studies 31: Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2008* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2009), 90-103; 97; Laura Cleaver, "Kings Behaving Badly: Images of Rulers in Gerald of Wales' works on Ireland (c.1200)," *Ikon* 5 (2012), 151-160, 158.

to ruin.”¹⁴⁸ Despite his claimed caution, Gerald goes on to write a realistic portrait of Henry II, commenting on his wrath and failures as a father at the same time that he describes his successes and generosity. Gerald recognizes the danger inherent in insulting kings, but continues to write a text critical of Henry’s behavior. Of more interest for this thesis, however, is the way that Gerald uses the *Expugnatio* to comment on John’s rule in Ireland. Gerald dedicates the *Expugnatio* to John and concludes by advising the King on the best way to rule Ireland, but the remainder of the narrative does not mention John. Still, the form of the narrative and its focus on the glory won by the Cambro-Norman lords during the invasion can be seen as an implied criticism of John’s failure to bring peace and firm rule to the island.

Unlike the dedication of the *Topographia* to Henry and the earlier dedication of the *Expugnatio* to Richard, both of which take great care to flatter the kings, Gerald’s dedication of the *Expugnatio* to John criticizes the king for being unmindful of his dominions in Ireland, unable to follow through on his father’s promises to raise funds for the church, and unwilling to recognize the right of the Norman barons who conquered Ireland to keep their lands and enjoy the spoils of their conquest. Gerald begins the dedication with a standard listing of John’s titles, similar to the catalogue of Henry’s titles at the beginning of the *Topographia*: “To his most revered lord, and beloved in Christ, John, the noble and illustrious king of England, lord of Ireland, duke of Normandy and Aquitaine, and count of Anjou: Geraldus dedicates his work...”

¹⁴⁹ The second paragraph praises John’s “excellent and noble father, king Henry,” who gained honor from subduing Ireland.¹⁵⁰ After praising Henry, however, Gerald turns on John, writing that “through neglect or rather your many occupations, the recollection of that land [Ireland], not

¹⁴⁸ Geraldus Cambrensis, *The Conquest of Ireland*, 45.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

the least among the islands of the West, which you visited long since, seems to have faded from your mind.”¹⁵¹

Throughout the introduction, Gerald continually compares John’s achievements with Henry’s as a way of suggesting that John pay greater attention to his Irish possessions, his Norman subjects, and the church. By doing so, Gerald argues, John can improve his reputation and secure Ireland as a kingdom for one of his own sons.¹⁵² Gerald focuses particularly on the idea of glory. “Here then,” he writes, “as in a bright mirror... and certainly by the light of historical truth, it may be ascertained, seen, and reflected to whom the greatest share of glory of this conquest ought justly to be attributed.”¹⁵³ He suggests that the glory might go to the ‘first adventurers’ including his kinsmen, to the second wave of Anglo-Norman invaders, or to Henry II and the army that completed the conquest of the island. Gerald fails to mention John in his partition of honor, and in doing so reinforces his claim that John’s mismanagement deprived him of a share of the glory. The dedication to the *Expugnatio* invites comparison between the successes of the Norman invaders and John’s failures, ultimately suggesting that John has failed as a king because he has not shared in the glory for the Irish expedition.

Following the introduction, the remainder of the *Expugnatio* is a narrative history of the conquest. Following accepted historical conventions of the day, Gerald includes many vivid and entertaining descriptions of the campaigns, including ethnographic details about the Irish, physical and moral descriptions of the commanders on both sides, and invented speeches before battles. It emphasizes, as Bartlett notes, the good deeds of Gerald’s Welsh relatives, as well as the inability of the Irish to resist Norman knights in open battle and the ultimate successes of

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

Henry's army.¹⁵⁴ Gerald's portrayals of the Cambro-Norman barons are particularly flattering. When describing Robert FitzStephen, for example, Gerald calls him "O excellent man, the true patron of singular courage, and unparalleled enterprise."¹⁵⁵ Of Raymond FitzGerald, Gerald writes that "to sum up his excellencies in a few words, he was a liberal, kind, and circumspect man; and although a daring soldier and consummate general, even in military affairs prudence was his highest quality."¹⁵⁶ Gerald praises the Cambro-Normans heavily and gives lengthy descriptions of their successes in battle against the Irish.

Gerald's characterization of Henry II is less certainly flattering, but still praises the king. In the second half of the work, Gerald frequently laments that Henry refused to go on crusade in 1185, accusing the king of preferring earthly over heavenly glory.¹⁵⁷ While the *Expugnatio*'s description of Henry presents a realistically nuanced image of a king who could often be angry and vengeful, it praises him for making peace, giving alms, and being loyal to his friends and supporters.¹⁵⁸ Ultimately, Gerald concludes that Henry could have been "beyond comparison, the noblest of all the princes of the earth in his times" if he had only adhered more closely to God's teachings.¹⁵⁹ The *Expugnatio* praises the Cambro-Norman barons heavily and Henry for his involvement in Ireland, if not for his dealings with the Church.

This praise stands in contrast with the *Expugnatio*'s treatment of John. Beyond the dedication, John does not appear until the very end of the work, when Gerald describes the Prince's trip to Ireland in 1185. Like the dedication, the chapters on John's expedition criticize

¹⁵⁴ Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales*, 20.

¹⁵⁵ Geraldus Cambrensis, *The Conquest of Ireland*, 33.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 53.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 75.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 45-46.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 46.

the Prince, characterizing him as young, uncouth, and inexperienced. When John landed, for example, his party was met by “a great many of the Irish of the better class in those parts,” loyal Irish lords who wished to pay homage to the prince.¹⁶⁰ The Normans, however, “not only treated them with contempt and derision, but even rudely pulled them by their beards, which the Irishmen wore full and long, according to the custom of their country.”¹⁶¹ Gerald relates that the Irishmen thought John ‘a mere boy’ who would never heed council and that they resolved to resist English rule.¹⁶²

Although these and subsequent passages portray John in a critical light, Gerald consistently hedges his criticisms, writing that “the many outrages and disorders which have been the fruits of the new government of Ireland, are not to be imputed so much to the tender years of the king’s son [John], as to evil counsels, although both had a large share in them.”¹⁶³ The troubles in Ireland during and since the Prince’s visit seem more the fault of John’s inexperience and counselors than a failing on his own part. In addition, when Gerald makes his most pointed criticisms of John’s government, he slips into the first person plural, writing that “I must add to my account of the mischiefs done by the new government, one that is the greatest of all. Not only do *we* neglect to make any offering to the church of Christ... but *we* even rob the church of its lands and possessions and strive to abridge or annul its ancient rights and privileges.”¹⁶⁴ Finally, Gerald stops his narrative before reaching the majority of the events of John’s trip to Ireland in 1185 and later rule over Ireland. He leaves “it to future historians, of

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 78.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*.

¹⁶² *Ibid*.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 80.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, emphasis mine.

sufficient talent, to describe subsequent events in a style fitting their importance.”¹⁶⁵ Gerald alludes to mismanagement in Ireland during John’s reign but stops short of actually describing that mismanagement and accusing John directly, preferring to share blame communally. As he writes earlier in the *Expugnatio*, it is dangerous to criticize the king.

Gerald’s main criticism of John, then, does not appear in his descriptions of John’s visit to Ireland. Instead, it comes from the contrast between the praise for Henry and the Cambro-Normans and the lack of praise for John. Gerald spends the majority of the text praising other lords for the qualities which he claims that John lacks, particularly effective management of Ireland and desire for glory. Without focusing on John’s life or works, the *Expugnatio Hibernica* manages to portray John as a king who has failed to do his duty.

At the end of the work, Gerald offers suggestions as to how John could improve his rule in Ireland. He writes of the importance of castles and lightly-armored, mobile troops, and suggests that the king appoint governors who can be firm and fair with the Irish people but harsh with those who revolt.¹⁶⁶ The *Expugnatio*’s criticism is not mere spite; rather, Gerald’s implied accusations of mismanagement lend force to his suggestions for ways to rule Ireland more effectively. Like the other histories studied in this thesis, the *Expugnatio* uses history as a means to criticize and instruct the current monarch.

This work is unique among those studied in this thesis for two reasons. First, it draws on very recent history. Where the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Roman de Brut* describe fictional events and give them weight by claiming reliable sources, and where the *Policraticus* both draws on highly respected sources and fabricates its own, the *Expugnatio* claims authority based on

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 83.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 82.

Gerald's own experiences and eyewitness accounts drawn from interviews. The second reason that the *Expugnatio* is unique is its blend of historical narrative and explicit instruction. The criticism contained in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Roman de Brut* is entirely implicit, buried within tales about kings. The criticism in the *Policraticus* is explicit, but reinforced with examples drawn from history. In the *Expugnatio Hibernica*, however, Gerald narrates the Norman Conquest of Ireland and criticizes John implicitly, but then provides direct and concrete steps that John could take to improve his rule over Ireland.

Despite these differences in form, the three works share a critical use for history. In each of these cases, the past serves as a body of evidence that authors can criticize safely, without the risk of attacking 'a prince who, by a single word, can consign you to ruin.' By writing a history of Norman Ireland that flatters the first conquerors but stops short of telling John's story, Gerald can suggest that John has not done enough in Ireland without criticizing his policies directly. History provides Gerald, like the other writers, a safe vantage point from which to criticize the events of the present.

CONCLUSION

Geoffrey, Wace, John, and Gerald all used the past for the same purpose in their work. Each had a unique political agenda that led him to criticize the reigning king: Geoffrey believed that Matilda had a more legitimate claim to the throne than Stephen, Wace wanted Henry to be lenient with the nobility in order to avoid a baronial uprising and the possibility of renewed Civil War, John saw Henry's attempts to dominate the English Church as a form of tyranny, and Gerald likely hoped that King John would allow the FitzGeralds and Gerald's other Welsh

relatives to keep the revenues from the Irish lands that they had conquered without interference from other barons. In advocating for these changes to royal policy, however, each of these authors hid their commentary behind the historical events in his book, whether in the form of narrative or *exemplum*. The authors did not attack the king's policy directly. Instead, they wrote histories about kings who did the opposite of the current king and praised the historical kings for their goodness, nobility, and justice. The histories are critical because they contrast the goodness of historical kings with the failures of the present king. This criticism is implicit – it relies on the reader to understand that the author is drawing a connection between the past and present – but it is criticism nonetheless. These authors share the use of history as a tool to criticize the monarchy.

The four works discussed in this thesis are interesting for this similarity, their shared use of implicit criticism, but they are also interesting for their differences. The works were produced across a span of eighty years between 1130 and 1210, and in locations distributed throughout England and Normandy rather than in one particular center. In addition, the four authors employed a variety of compositional styles when arguing their points. The *Historia Regum Britanniae* and the *Roman de Brut* are both narrative epics that rely on an invented history, but Geoffrey writes for an academic, Latin-literate audience, advocating for a new queen, while Wace writes in popular French in an attempt to convince the king to treat the Anglo-Norman barons with respect. The *Policraticus* is a work of moral philosophy, and John uses history as support for his advice to Henry to uphold the rights of the church, rather than as a narrative itself. Gerald's *Expugnatio Hibernica* is a Latin narrative like Geoffrey's, but tells a story that occurred in living memory, based on eyewitness testimony, that offers advice to King John on how to subject the Irish kingdoms to his rule. These four works are marked by varying dates of

composition and places of origin, distinct styles, wide-ranging arguments about contemporary politics.

Because these works share the same critical purpose despite their many differences, it may be useful to see implicit criticism as a convention of Anglo-Norman historical writing in the twelfth century, a common means for authors to express their grievances against the monarch. The lives of Wace, John, and Gerald suggest that Anglo-Norman authors needed a way to veil commentary about royal politics, as each one suffered some form of retribution for his criticism of the king. Of the three authors, John suffered the most spectacular retribution when he was forced to flee England in 1156 to avoid Henry's anger. Wace lost the king's favor in a less spectacular but still devastating fashion: angry over the characterization of the early Anglo-Norman kings in the *Roman de Rou*, Henry II withdrew patronage from Wace and commissioned a rewriting of Norman history from Benoît de Sainte-Maure. Gerald of Wales spent much of his life asking the Anglo-Norman kings for commissions, lamenting in the introduction to the *Expugnatio Hibernica* that "it is true, indeed, that the best years, and the prime of my life, have been spent without any remuneration or advancement arising out of my literary labors, and I am now growing old, and standing... on the threshold of death."¹⁶⁷ While Gerald was never banished from England for his opinions, he also never secured royal patronage and the economic stability that it brought. For an author seeking to make a living by writing, angering a wealthy and influential patron such as the king could stall a career or end it in rejection and exile.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

Still, these authors found a way to criticize the king without risking exile or ruin, relying on the authority of the historical genre to confirm their arguments about the present day. They chose historical writing as a critical tool because the genre of history was understood to present moral truths. Writing histories that showed old kings to be better than the current ruler, authors could claim that they were merely presenting the truth about the past that they had found written in their sources. Following the conventions of history writing even as they invented new material allowed authors to claim that their criticism rested on historical truth rather than personal spite. By engaging history as a critical tool, these authors found a flexible means to question the actions of those in positions of authority without risking their anger. Drawing on the recognized authority of the historical genre to confirm their criticisms of royal policy suggests a great deal of creativity among these authors. For writers who could not afford to lose patronage or be exiled for their opinions, history offered a means by which to criticize kings without risking their careers.

It would be interesting to expand this research beyond England and Normandy to include writers from other parts of Europe. The twelfth-century interest in literature and history-writing was not confined to England, nor were debates about the relationship between monarchy, aristocracy, and church. An examination of works of history from the territories that comprise modern France, Germany, and Italy would likely yield many more examples of historians writing implicit criticism into their works.

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