

ROMANCE NARRATIVE AND PROBLEMS OF SUCCESSION IN GEOFFREY OF  
MONMOUTH'S *HISTORIA REGUM BRITANNIAE*

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## ABSTRACT:

The *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth is one of the most influential works of Medieval English literature and historiography, and incorporates both genealogical and romance narrative.

In this paper, I will first attempt to provide a general overview of the context of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, including the debate about its historicity. Then I will adapt Laura Barefield's discussion of gender within the work to a textual analysis of two romance episodes featuring two very different rulers: the founding patriarch Brutus and the lustful usurper Vortigern. I argue that the unambiguous establishment of the noble character of the former and the wicked character of the latter early on in their respective narratives are extremely important, as both men are leaders in times when the Britons are in the potentially destabilizing position of living side-by-side with – or being at war with – other civilizations. I will first examine the favorable outcomes of Brutus's marriage with the Greek woman Ignoge and how it represents an ideal case of solving a problem of succession. Then I will discuss Vortigern's depraved character and his ill-fated marriage to the Saxon woman Renwein, and how it sets up the conditions for a crisis of succession.

The *Historia Regum Britanniae* (English title: *The History of the Kings of Britain*) by Geoffrey of Monmouth is one of the most influential works of Medieval British literature, and is best known for being one of the earliest source texts for the King Arthur legend. Completed by 1139 and written in Latin, the *Historia* provides a grand sweep of the accomplishments and failings of the British people via a genealogical narrative that is frequently interrupted by long passages of romance. Though many balk at such a fanciful work being called a “History,” the *Historia* is finely written and filled with intriguing portrayals of leaders, both heroic and wicked. The stories of the lives of the individual kings of Britain form an overarching narrative which lends itself well to literary analysis. The literary scholar Laura Barefield has chosen to examine the *Historia* through the lens of gender, which is a significant element in the genealogical concerns within the book. The ultimate measure of success of any of the rulers in the *Historia* largely depends on whether they secure the preservation of their power through an unproblematic line of succession. Good kings may prove their worthiness to rule by maintaining the line of succession, and especially heroic rulers may earn a place in history by resolving a crisis of succession. Bad kings, often tangled up in their own troubles and unconcerned with the good of the state, are likely to cause or contribute to crises of succession. Women, otherwise absent from the narrative in places where the ruling dynasty and the stability of the kingdom are not in jeopardy, may suddenly become important figures in the narrative when issues of succession arise.

In this paper, I will first attempt to provide a general overview of the context of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, including the debate about its historicity. Then I will adapt Barefield’s discussion of gender to a textual analysis of two romance episodes featuring two very different rulers: the founding patriarch Brutus and the lustful usurper Vortigern. I argue that the

unambiguous establishment of the noble character of the former and the wicked character of the latter early on in their respective narratives are extremely important, as both men are leaders in times when the Britons are in the potentially destabilizing position of living side-by-side with – or being at war with – other civilizations. Both kings enter into agreements which involve the exchange of women with these other peoples. Brutus is able to use the Greek woman Ignoge to end the war with the Greeks and ensure that the new British civilization will be descended from the two noblest races of antiquity – the Greeks and the Trojans. Vortigern, on the other hand, having welcomed a large number of Saxons into Britain to take care of the fallout from his treacherous route to the throne, marries the Saxon woman Renwein to satisfy his sexual appetite. Despite his own *callidus* (“clever, crafty”) nature, he gives no mind to how his Saxon guests might use this to their advantage as they increase their numbers in Britain. When the Saxons finally invade in earnest, threatening to terminate the British line of succession, Vortigern is rendered impotent by both his incompetence as a leader and by his love for Renwein.

J. C. Crick writing for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* reports that scant evidence survives to tell us about the man known as Galfridus Arturus, or Geoffrey of Monmouth, beyond his literary output: the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the *Vita Merlini* and the *Prophetie Merlini*. The most reliable records of him show that he took the office of the see of St. Asaph in North Wales in 1151, and that he probably died in late 1154 or 1155, as records then indicate that his presumed successor took office. Crick says that Geoffrey spent most of his life as a canon of the church of St. George in Oxford, though Crick acknowledges that other historians believe he was a teacher. The title *Magister* that is sometimes associated with him suggests that he was probably educated in France, as an education of a high level would have been unavailable in England at the time.

There is debate over whether Geoffrey of Monmouth was of Welsh origin, despite the common appellation *Monemutensis*. He was called Galfridus Arturus by his contemporaries, but since the Welsh name Arthur does not appear in the genitive form, which would be strong evidence of Welsh paternity, many scholars regard the Arturus “as a nickname reflecting [his] scholarly interests” in the history of the ancient Britons, and that the toponymic *Monemutensis* was self-given (Crick). His demonstrated lack of skill in the Welsh language gives weight to this idea, so he is “best located with the French-speaking elites settled along the Welsh Border since 1066 rather than with any ancient Welsh family.” Furthermore, Monmouth had been under the control of Breton nobles until 1086, which further complicates the question of his identity (Crick).

Questions of identity aside, Geoffrey lived in the aftermath of the Norman Invasion of 1066, the latest in a series of society-changing invasions undertaken by peoples outside of the British Isles: the Romans, the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, and the Vikings. These invasions had been taking place periodically since Julius Caesar arrived in the British Isles in 55 B.C. By Geoffrey’s lifetime, the inhabitants of Wales were the only people left on Great Britain who were by and large descended directly from the ancient Britons whom Geoffrey made the subject of the *Historia*.

Invasion is indeed a central theme in Geoffrey’s work, though it is likely that his writing was more influenced by the internal politics of twelfth-century Norman England than the Norman Invasion or the earlier invasions of the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes<sup>1</sup>. In the *Historia*, the Britons successfully fend off assaults from the Gauls, the Irish, the Scots and other peoples from within the British Isles and from Northern Europe. Conversely, the Romans and the Saxons conquer the Britons within a few hundred years of each other. During periods in which

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<sup>1</sup> See p.4, n.2

the Britons are particularly powerful, they successfully invade the native lands of the Romans and the Gauls. During periods in which other nations conquer Britain, crises of succession, which lead to periods of political upheaval, are more likely. Geoffrey enthusiastically documents the most impressive triumphs of the Britons, yet he is perhaps at his most compelling when explaining why and how other peoples are able to conquer the British. He does not spare criticism of the occasional depravity of the British people, which, in his explanation, is the main reason why less noble peoples are able to defeat the British so many times.

The modern reader doesn't read the *Historia* because of Geoffrey's moralizing, however. With such vivid accounts of battles, intrigue and other exciting events, the *Historia Regum Britanniae* remains the source of Geoffrey's fame in the Middle Ages and beyond. "As a source-book for the imaginative writing of others, [the *Historia Regum Britanniae*] has had few if any equals in the whole history of European literature" (Thorpe 28). Despite his claims to humility concerning his own "little book," Geoffrey's *Historia* and its stories of kings, heroes, conquests, and treachery stand out from earlier medieval writers. Readers continue to read the *Historia* into the present day, even though it has long been discredited as a "history" in the modern sense of the word. The popularity of Geoffrey's writing during medieval times can be evidenced by the existence of "close on two hundred manuscripts [that] testify to his success; even Bede, with a four-hundred-year start, cannot quite muster 150" (Brooke 88). The countless adaptations of Arthurian subject matter in medieval verse romances alone would provide a sufficient defense of the enormous impact of the *Historia*, not to mention Arthurian-themed literature from later eras, or any of the other literature inspired by non-Arthurian characters or episodes found in Geoffrey's work (Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* is an example of an important Arthurian work, and

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is one example of an important non-Arthurian work that drew from Geoffrey).

Genealogical histories of the British kings written in Latin like Geoffrey's *Historia* had been long available by the twelfth century (most notably Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, and Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*). In his introduction to his text, Geoffrey himself acknowledges Gildas and Bede as the most notable of the few available source texts for accounts of many of the important actors within British history:

*Quod infra mentionem quam de eis gildas et beda luculento tractatu fecerant nichil de regibus qui ante incarnationem christi inhabitauerant nichil etiam de arturo ceterisque compluribus qui post incarnationem successerunt repperissem cum & gesta eorum digna aeternitate laudis constarent & a multis populis quasi inscripta iocunde & memoriter predicarentur.* (Griscom 219)

Beyond which mention of them Gildas and Bede made in their excellent handling [on the subject], I have discovered nothing concerning the kings who lived [in Britain] before Christ's incarnation, as well as nothing on Arthur and the rest of those many who lived after the incarnation. [Yet the deeds of these men were such that they deserve to be praised for all time.] Additionally, [these deeds] were passed down joyfully though memory by many people as if they were recorded in written form. (Bracketed sections Thorpe 51, the rest is my translation).

Geoffrey claims that the gift of "a certain ancient book" written in the British language has provided him with new material to contribute to the history previously recounted only within the works of the few historians mentioned above. The *Historia Regum Brianniae*, according to Geoffrey, is a translation of this "ancient book" into straightforward, unadorned Latin. This source book, purportedly from a friend and mentor, Walter, Earl of Oxford, has never been found, and is likely Geoffrey's own invention, probably as a device to distinguish his writings from the earlier British historians (Crick). It is possible that the "ancient book" could be

symbolic of Geoffrey's education in British history from the oral source of Walter himself (Thorpe 15-16).

The modern reader may regard the *Historia* as nationalistic legend, perhaps an example of medieval historiography at its most wishful. It seems far too convenient that no other writers mention Geoffrey's "ancient book," and it is also suspicious that Geoffrey portrays a "golden age" in British monarchy, complete with prophecies of a "pan-Celtic revival"<sup>2</sup> (Brooke 87). Geoffrey drew criticism for the more fanciful elements of his writing as early as the Middle Ages. The historian William of Newburgh wrote not 50 years after the publishing of the *Historia* that "everything this man wrote about Arthur and his successors, or indeed about his predecessors from Vortigern onwards, was made up, partly by himself, and partly by others, either from an inordinate love of lying, or for the sake of pleasing the Britons" (Thorpe 17). The modern historian Antonia Gransden takes issue with Geoffrey because "Geoffrey was a romance writer masquerading as a historian. No historian would object to him if he had avowedly written a historical novel... or a romance epic. But on the contrary, he pretended to be writing history" (Gransden 202-03). Lewis Thorpe, while not overtly critical of Geoffrey, points out that Geoffrey is "a great lover of circumstantial detail," evidenced in his inclusion of the rousing

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<sup>2</sup> If one were to believe that Geoffrey held Welsh sympathies, then it is tempting to speculate that the whole of the *Historia*, including the *Prophetie Merlini*, was meant to serve as some sort of anti-Norman, anti-Anglo propaganda. After all, the conquerors of the British at the end of the book, the Saxons, are described as depraved, cunning Pagans who are able to dominate chiefly because of the moral failings of the Britons. Christopher Brooke is convinced, however, that Geoffrey intended no subversive attitudes against his Norman superiors: "Geoffrey's chief patron was a great [M]archer lord," Brooke reminds his readers. There is a section of the *Prophetie Merlini* which states "Cadwallader shall call upon Conan and take Albania into alliance." Brooke interprets this passage as "representing the hope of a pan-Celtic revival," a call to form alliance with Scotland to "expel the foreigner and set up a native Celtic or British kingdom again." However, Brooke also says "this can equally be read as a glorification of the Norman dynasty, [and] was early read, not unnaturally, as a prophecy of the Angevin empire" (85). Brooke thinks that it is possible that Geoffrey was motivated by political biases, but whatever these motives might have been, they are quite specific to the political situation of England when Geoffrey would have been writing his work during the reign of King Stephen. There is nothing to suggest that Geoffrey was so backwards-looking as to hope for an expulsion of the Normans. The possible political biases found within the *Historia* are outside of the scope of this paper. For a brief discussion of Geoffrey's "historical reconstruction" as a political tool, see Brooke 85-90.

speeches of both Arthur and the Roman commander Lucius Tiberius to their respective armies in direct speech. “One is tempted to say that this is romanticized history with a vengeance,” Thorpe notes about these speeches, “until one remembers that the battle never took place and that it is merely romantic fiction” (18).

Christopher Brooke, on the other hand, suggests that Geoffrey understood history to be a blend of fact and fiction, indistinguishable from historiography. Geoffrey, Brooke argues, was most likely not attempting to deceive anyone about the history of the Britons, and was simply trying to make a cohesive story out of the paucity of materials available to him:

It may matter little for our enquiry whether he was a serious student troubled, like a number of other chroniclers of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, by an incurable incapacity to distinguish truth from fiction; or a deliberate ‘liar’, to use a contemporary phrase intended to distinguish ‘history’ in the sense used by Bede or William of Malmesbury, from the fiction of courtly romance . . . [The *Historia*] is a literary work of remarkable skill: a skill in story-telling above all and in reconstructing the past out of fragmentary materials (Brooke 78, 83).

The structuralist critic Richard Waswo also thinks the debate over the truthfulness of the *Historia* and other works of historiographical literature is far overblown. “Literature,” he argues, “is an integral, functioning part of an entire cultural system.” Consequently, mythic or historiographical writings should not be dismissed as having little historical value simply because these writings appear to be “conscious fiction.” Waswo also argues that even with expectations of empiricism in modern historical documentation, “myths still determine facts” in the present day (Waswo 542).

Laura Barefield argues that while “the reputation of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* has been salvaged by literary scholars” . . . “scholarship from both fields [history and literary criticism] has neglected inquiry into the historiographic [structure and style] of the narrative” (12). Barefield strives to fill part of this gap in the scholarly literature by examining the role of

women in the inherently patriarchal narrative's "strict, chronological listing of the generations of the kings" (13). This strict, chronological listing is frequently interrupted by romance narrative, "which strives to fill the gap when the national narrative breaks down" (16). When the "national narrative" of patriarchal succession proceeds smoothly, there is little mention of women in the text; their essentially reproductive role can be comfortably "submerged." However, when crises of succession arise, threatening the overall stability of Britain, the text transitions into romance narrative. These episodes are likely to include women either complicating or seeking to affirm the standard process of succession.

Barefield argues that the romance narratives featuring women and problems of succession are not present simply to add color to what might otherwise be a dry genealogical listing. Rather, issues of gender, family, and succession are elements of history too basic to be ignored: "The *Historia Regum Britanniae*'s repetitive narrative is not simply the tragedy of civilization, but the alternation between genealogy and romance illustrates how this paradigm is grounded upon tensions in conceptions of gender and family" (Barefield 20). The primary actors within the narrative are the most outstanding examples of masculine bravery, virtue, and leadership ability, yet they cannot preserve or transfer their power to subsequent generations without the involvement of women to provide heirs for a noble bloodline.

Since all the romance episodes involve crises of succession in some way, they are likely to depict Britain at its most shameful. Yet Geoffrey still provides a plenitude of interesting or relevant details in them, no matter how much they complicate his recording of the strict, chronological listing of the kings. Barefield observes that "[r]ather than shutting down or containing critical moments to gain a smoothly proceeding chronology, the text exploits [romance episodes] to narrative advantage, exploring how the gendered aspects of these crises

can both legitimate but also question the operations of the narrative and the patriarchal mythos it masks and re-enacts” (Barefield 14). Furthermore, the pattern of romance and genealogical episodes creates a sort of metanarrative which “probes the tensions surrounding the creation, preservation, and transfer of textual and political power. Through exploring the critical moments between coordinate and subordinate narrative, the *Historia Regum Britanniae* denaturalizes its own genealogical form, confronting both the threat and the possibilities offered by the narration of history” (13). The romance narrative is subordinate to the genealogical narrative’s basic function of providing a chronological listing of the kings. At the same time, though, the romance narrative is more important than the genealogical listing. It is during the romance episodes that something could happen which could permanently alter the main, genealogical narrative. There is also the simple fact that a much larger proportion of the *Historia* is taken up by romance narrative than genealogical narrative.

Barefield’s examination of the politics of gender and succession in the romance episodes in Geoffrey’s work focuses on a few of the more notable stories featuring women that appear early on in the *Historia*. She gives particular consideration to the conditions that facilitated Brutus’s successful marriage to Ignoge. With this marriage, Brutus’s Trojans are able to end their war with the Greeks and wander through other lands, fighting a few enemies along the way, until they decide to settle the island of Albion (later renamed Britannia in honor of Brutus.) However, Barefield’s account of Geoffrey’s female characters omits the women in the chapters about Arthur or his immediate predecessors (including Vortigern), and those in the latter, post-Arthurian chapters of the book. Nevertheless, her conclusions about the function of women within the narrative provide a useful conceptual frame for examining some of these other romance episodes involving women in the *Historia*.

The successful end of the war between the Trojans and Greeks and the establishment of the British people through Brutus' marriage to Ignoge is an impressive founding myth, linking the Britons to both of the heroic lineages of Homeric antiquity. Of more interest to Barefield, however, is how the Brutus episode negotiates the problems of Brutus himself being the product of a crisis of succession. The marriage of Brutus, a Trojan, to the Greek Ignoge resolves this crisis, clearing Brutus's reputation. It also provides a stable foundation for Britain, as Brutus is able to found this new nation without any unsettled quarrels with any of the other nations he has been in contact with during his life. (While it is true that Locrinus's unsanctioned love for the German woman Estrildis will cause problems just one generation after Brutus, it certainly does not nullify any of Brutus's achievements.)

If the Brutus/Ignoge episode displays the benefits of "fixing" a crisis of succession, many of the later romance episodes featuring women demonstrate the undesirable outcomes of doing the opposite – causing a crisis of succession. Restoration of the favorable paradigm of stable succession causes the text to return to a genealogical narrative, at least for a short time. Subverting this paradigm can lead to wars, invasions, and other bad things. What is possibly the most disastrous perversion of the paradigm of stable succession can be found in an episode not mentioned in Barefield: Vortigern's ill-advised marriage to the Saxon woman Renwein. Vortigern's actions do much more than complicate the issue of succession. They nearly lead to an end of the narrative itself. A discussion of the marriage of Brutus and Ignoge, contrasted with the marriage of Vortigern and Renwein, can serve as a way to identify the specific conditions Barefield has recognized as being necessary for a healthy process of succession as well as the disastrous results of ignoring this paradigm.

Geoffrey, like Nennius in the *Historia Britonum*, starts his *Historia* where the *Aeneid* left off. Aeneas has settled in Italy and has married Latinus's daughter Lavinia, thus ensuring a beneficial political alliance with the Latins. Barefield points out that Aeneas's marriage "promises that Latins and Trojans will be united in the future, living in a stable, normalized kingdom, and that they will become a new, united people in an unproblematic kindred" (17). However, just a few generations later, this connection between the two peoples still proves fragile. Some "ethnic tensions" remain, as Aeneas' grandson, Silvius, a Trojan, is involved in a *furtive veneri*, "a secret love affair" with a Latin woman, *cuidam nepti lavinie*, "a certain niece of Lavinia's." Although any children from that union would have an ancestry very similar to that first intermarriage between the Trojan hero Aeneas and the Latin king's daughter, the clandestine circumstances of the affair suggest that relations between those of Trojan blood and those of Latin blood remained far from "unproblematic." When the secret affair ends in a marriage, and Silvius's wife gets pregnant, a soothsayer is brought in to predict the gender of the child. Despite the marriage, the powers-that-be are still worried that this child could pose a threat to the officially sanctioned, multi-ethnic lineage established by Aeneas and Lavinia. The soothsayer also predicts that the child, who would be named Brutus, would cause the deaths of both his mother and father. Indeed, Brutus's mother dies in childbirth, and as a young adult, Brutus accidentally kills his father during a hunt *inopino ictu sagite*, "with an unlucky strike of the arrow": *Nam dum famuli ceruos in occursum eorum ducerent brutus telum in ipsos dirigere affectans genitorem sub pectore percussit*. "Their beaters drove some stags into their path and Brutus, who was under the impression that he was aiming his weapon at these stags, hit his own father below the breast. (Griscom 224, Thorpe 55). This ominous start to Brutus' life is *inopinus*, unexpected even by Brutus himself. Like his mother's death, his father's death was out of

Brutus's control, but he is still punished for it, *expulsus est ab italia indignantibus parentibus ipsum tantum facinus fecisse* "expelled from Italy by his relations, who were angry at him for committing such a crime" (Thorpe 55 Griscom 224). Though neither of his parents' deaths occur through his own volition, Brutus has nevertheless "derail[ed] the genealogical narrative" established by Aeneas and Lavinia. This demonstrates how "easily the structures of family and country can be overthrown through parricide and regicide" (Barefield 17).

Brutus goes to Greece during his exile, where he *invenit progeniem heleni filii priami quae sub potestate pandrasi regis grecorum in servitute tenebatur*. "discovers the descendants of Helenus, Priam's son, who were held in captive power by Pandrasus, king of the Greeks" (Griscom 224, Thorpe 55). A long-standing blood feud and a disrupted line of succession motivate this Greek oppression, even a few generations after the offending acts: *Pirrus etenim filius achillis post eversionem troie predictum helenium compluresque alios secum in vinculis abduxerat. Et ut necem patris sui in ipsos vindicaret in captionem teneri preceperat*. "After the fall of Troy, Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, had dragged [a number of Trojans] off with him in chains . . . and ordered them to be kept in slavery, so that he might take vengeance on them for the death of his father" (Griscom 224, Thorpe 55). This only provides a glimpse of how problems of upsetting the normal progression of rule can be even more volatile when other nations are involved.

Brutus receives swift condemnation for committing *tantum facinus*, "so great a crime" of causing his father's death, however unintentional. Nevertheless, the soothsayer's prophecy had also declared that Brutus *ad summum tandem culmen honoris pervenerit* "would also achieve the highest peak of honor," after *pluribus quoque terris in exilium peragratis* "he had wandered in exile through many lands" (Griscom 223, Thorpe 54). Evidently, this disrupted genealogical

narrative will be far from permanent. Brutus is promised the chance not just to free himself from the shame of parricide, but also the chance to attain the “highest honor” of being the founder of a new people. However, like his ancestor Aeneas, he must bring this new people to a new land. A return of the text to a genealogical progression will indicate Brutus’s ultimate success and fulfillment of his birth-prophecy, a lasting dynasty. To achieve this, Brutus needs to absolve himself gloriously of his own blood crimes first by defeating the Greeks, then by achieving a stable succession of his new people.

Richard Waswo, observing that so much of the mythos of Western Europe is directly influenced by the West’s adoption of Aeneas as a cultural ancestor, argues that this “impose[s] an origin [Troy] that was always already destroyed, and hence required a narrative of displacement, exile and reconstruction” (Waswo 546). In his exile, Brutus has located a displaced group of his Trojan brethren, but they have been literally dragged into Greece as revenge for an old wrong, and they will remain permanent outsiders within Greek society until they are able to determine a new basis for negotiation with the Greeks that is not defined by a crisis of succession. Even if the Trojans do come to some new agreement with the Greeks, the fact remains that trying to establish a new rule and a new people in an already-inhabited land will inevitably lead to continual conflict with the native people. And so Brutus must continue Waswo’s narrative of “displacement,” even though he himself has been already been displaced from his homeland.

Before Geoffrey depicts any specific situation in which Brutus does something great to confirm his birth prophecy, he informs his readers that the exiled Brutus quickly acquires a highly favorable reputation among the enslaved Trojans: *in tantum autem militia & probitate vigere cepit ita ut regibus & principibus pre omni iuventute patrie amaretur* “However, he soon

gained such fame for his military skill and prowess that he was esteemed by the kings and princes more than any young man in the country” (Griscom 224, Thorpe 55). But before Geoffrey goes on to provide concrete examples of his reputed military skill, he affirms Brutus’s heroic Trojan lineage, exalting Brutus’s superlative excellence in the two kingly qualities of wisdom and valiance: *erat enim inter sapientes sapiens inter bellicosos bellicosus*. “Among the wise he [Brutus] was wise, among the valiant the most valiant” (Griscom 224-225). It would not do for Brutus, as the savior of the group of exiles who will become the British people, to be anything less than superlative: wicked (or even simply flawed) rulers will have plenty of time to contribute to – or cause – discord and even crises of succession later on in the narrative.

Now that the reader has been informed of Brutus’s great reputation, Geoffrey goes on to demonstrate his greatness and worthiness to be the founder of Britain by describing Brutus’s actions as leader of the exiled Trojans. Immediately following the *inter sapientes sapiens* description, Geoffrey justifies this high esteem Brutus has already earned among his fellow Trojans even before they go to war with the Greeks: *quicquid auri vel argenti sive ornamentorum adquirebat totum militibus erogabat*. (Griscom 225) “Whatever of gold or silver or equipment he acquired, he paid out the whole to the soldiers.” Now that Geoffrey has provided some reasons for Brutus’s *fama*, it *divulgata itaque per universas nationes* “therefore spread[s] through all the realms” (Griscom 225).

Brutus’s well-deserved quick rise to fame and leadership is similar to that of Arthur later on in the narrative:

*Defuncto igitur utherpendragon convenerunt ex diversis provinciis proceres britonum . . . ad dubricium urbis legionum archiepiscopum suggerentes ut arturum filium regis in regem consecraret . . . Dubricius ergo . . . arturum diademante regni insignuit. Erat autem arturus xv annorum iuvenis inaudite virtutis atque largitatis in quo tantam gratiam innata bonitas prestiterat ut a cunctis fere populis amaretur. Insignibus itaque regiis iniciatus solitum morem*

*servans largitati indulgit . . . Arturus ergo quia in illo probitas largitionem comitabatur statuit saxones inquietare ut eorum opibus que ei famulabatur ditaret familiam. Commonebat etiam id rectitudo cum tocius insule monarchiam debuerat hereditario iure obtinere.* (Griscom 432-433)

After the death of Utherpendragon, the leaders of the Britons assembled from their various provinces . . . and suggested to Dubricius, the Archbishop of the City of Legions, that as their King, he should crown Arthur, the son of Uther. Dubricius [therefore] bestowed the crown of the kingdom upon Arthur. Arthur was a young man only fifteen years old, but he was of such outstanding courage and generosity, and his inborn goodness gave him such grace that he was loved by almost all the people. Once he had been invested with the royal insignia, he observed the normal custom of giving gifts freely to everyone . . . In Arthur courage was closely linked with generosity, and he made up his mind to harry the Saxons, so that with their wealth he might reward the retainers who served his own household. The justness of his cause encouraged him, for he had a claim by rightful inheritance to the kingship of the whole island. (Thorpe 212)

Arthur is granted the kingship because he is the rightful successor to the last king, his father Utherpendragon. However, Arthur already displays the important traits of “courage and generosity” before he is given the crown, and when he becomes king he dutifully gives gifts to his people because of that generosity. His decision to drive the Saxons away from the island is not caused by a desire to prove his military capabilities or to reclaim the power that comes with control over the whole of Britain. In fact, his primary motivation for attacking the Saxons is the prospect of attaining the material goods necessary for him to reward his retainers. If he is victorious over the Saxons, this would bring the secondary benefit of bringing the whole of Britain back under the rule of his dynasty. All the efforts of the previous British rulers from the first Saxon revolt onwards had been aimed towards reclaiming what had been British lands before Vortigern’s reign, but Arthur recognizes the opportunity to regain his realm insofar as it benefits his people.

Brutus is not the *de facto* ruler of the enslaved Trojans in the same way that Arthur is as son of the previous king; Brutus has no right to any claim of succession. However, peer

recognition, Geoffrey's authorial attestations of his preeminence among men, and his own generosity with his riches affirm the kingly qualities of his character. The Trojans, who have been lacking an excellent leader who might provide them any hope of freedom, end up *orantes ut ipso duce a servitute grecorum liberarentur* "begging Brutus that they might be freed from servitude of the Greeks by him as their leader" (Griscom 224).

However, Brutus does not immediately accept the invitation to be the leader of the Trojan revolt. He concludes that the prospect of overthrowing Pandrasus is attainable after he recognizes that Assaracus, the leader of a Greek faction, is sympathetic to him and has three castles at his disposal. Taking into account the ever-growing population of Trojan men, Brutus then agrees to lead the Trojan push for freedom. *Inspiciens ergo brutus & virorum multitudinem & assaraci castella quae sibi patebant securius petitioni illorum adquevit*. "When Brutus saw how many men he now had, and realized the castles of Assaracus were there for him to take, he agreed without misgivings to the requests of the Trojans" (Griscom 225-26, Thorpe 56). If Brutus were more concerned with potential glory to be gained as leader of a people, he likely would not have ensured the certain feasibility of the revolt before attempting it.

Brutus' first attempt to free his Trojan followers from Greek oppression takes the form of a bold request to King Pandrasus: *saltus nemorum quos ut servitutem diffugeret occupavit eam habitare permittas sin autem concede ut ad aliarum terrarum nationes cum diligentia tua abscedant* "give [the Trojans] permission to inhabit the forest-glades which they have occupied in their attempt to escape from slavery. If you [Pandrasus] cannot grant this, then let them, with your approval, go off to join the peoples of other lands" (Thorpe 57). Pandrasus, shocked at such a straightforward demand from an enslaved people, chooses war instead.

The Trojans are up for a tough fight, and the war with the Greeks lasts for several pages. However, upon the capture of Pandrasus, the Greeks are defeated. Yet the Trojans recognize that this victory is precarious, and the freedom that Brutus has attained for the British people is fleeting. This single victory in which the Trojans destroyed a Greek camp and captured their king does not mean that they have conquered the Greeks. The Greeks, still more numerous than the Britons, can still regroup and fight to free Pandrasus.

The Trojans observe that this is the chance to get what they want from Pandrasus. *Nam cum in potestate eorum positus esset per omnia petitioni ipsorum adquiesceret si liber abire sineretur.* “Now that the king was in their power, he would agree without reservation to any demand [the Trojans] might make, provided always that he would be allowed to go free” (Griscom 234, Thorpe 62). Thrilled that they themselves are finally free, the Trojans give Brutus various proposals for the next step they should take to secure their independence: *Pars partem regni ad inhabitandum petere hortatur pars vero licentiam abuendi & ea quae itineri suo utilita forent* “Some begged Brutus to demand a part of Pandrasus’s kingdom, so that they could settle there, others, on the contrary, asked for permission to emigrate and for whatever would be useful on their journey” (Griscom 234, Thorpe 62). These requests are very similar to the original demands Brutus made of Pandrasus, but they seem unsatisfactory in the present context of their temporary dominance over the Greeks. It is not until a man named Membritius speaks that the best and final solution is offered. Though Membritius’s standing in the Trojan ranks is unknown and he is mentioned only once in the *Historia*, Geoffrey makes him one of the few characters in the book to have the distinction of being represented in direct speech:

*Nam si eo pacto vitam concesseritis pandraso ut per eum partem greciae adepti inter danaos manere velitis numquam diuturna pace fruemini dum fratres & filii nepotes eorum quibus aeternam intulistis stragem vobis vel inmixti vel vicini fuerint. Semper enim necis parentum suorum memores aeterno vos*

*habebunt odio. Quibusque etiam nugis incitati vindictam sumere nitentur . . . Laudo igitur ut petatis ab illo filiam suam primogenitam quam innogen vocant ad opus ducis nostri & cum ea aurum & argentum naves & frumentum & quodcumque itineri vestro necessarium erit. Et si id impetrare poterimus licentia sua alias nationes petamus (Griscom 234-235).*

If you grant Pandrasus his life on the condition that he allows you to occupy a part of Greece and remain there among the descendants of Danaus, you will never enjoy lasting peace as long as the brothers, sons, and grandsons of those on whom you have inflicted decisive defeat remain intermingled with you or your neighbors. They will always remember the slaughter of their relatives and they will hate you forever. They will take offence for the merest trifles and they will do all in their power to take vengeance . . . My advice, therefore, is that you ask Pandrasus for the hand of his eldest daughter, whom they call Ignoge, as a comfort to your leader, With her, you should ask for gold and silver, ships and grain, and everything else that will be needed for your journey. If we can arrange all this, we should obtain the king's permission and then sail off to other lands (Thorpe 62).

Membritius' speech proves convincing decisive. Marriage results in kinship bonds more powerful than any agreement made without marriage, but as the anxieties surrounding Brutus' birth have already revealed, these alone cannot bring permanent harmony between two peoples. Lingering hostilities will remain, and as Membritius also noted, the Trojans are not powerful enough to stand up to the Greeks should the Greeks "take vengeance." At the same time, it would not be wise for Brutus to leave Greek land without seeking to establish some lasting connection with this more powerful people. Marrying Ignoge will serve this purpose well: "Both men, in this case, Pandrasus and Brutus, linked by a traded woman, have a stake in maintaining the social order which will give them political and economic power" (Barefield 22). This does not mean that the Greeks and the Trojans can now engage in mutually beneficial trade or other friendly international relations just because they share blood. The maintenance of the social order requires Brutus and the Trojans to take what they need to end hostilities and establish a new civilization, and then leave. The Greeks cannot peacefully withstand a disruption of their normal social order for long, especially if that disruption is caused by the descendants of the murderers

of one of their most beloved heroes, Achilles. On the other hand, the Trojans would not be able to withstand strained relations with a Greek people always mindful of this defeat. So, Brutus has no choice but to marry Ignoge and find a new land in which he can settle his people without upsetting the social order of the civilization already inhabiting that area.

Having acquired the material goods needed to bankroll a new kingdom and the Greek king's daughter as a wife to continue the noble line, Brutus sets Pandrasus free. Both sides appear to have received precisely what they had bargained for, and neither party was trying to acquire any benefit from the agreement beyond what the terms of trade explicitly determined. However, Barefield reminds us that "in order for Brutus' people to claim the privileged genealogy of "Trojanness" for their progeny and become the wandering people who ultimately establish Britain, Ignoge's family ties must be obliterated from the genealogical and historical record" (23). Thus in the *Historia's* first use of concrete imagery of a woman, Geoffrey displays a weeping Ignoge, who is understandably distressed at the prospect of a life in a foreign land with a foreign people:

*At innogen in excelsa puppi stans sepius inter brachia bruti in extasi collabitur. Fusisque cum singulti lacrimis parentes ac patriam deserere conqueritur. Nec oculos a litore avertit dum litora oculis patuerunt. Quam brutus blandiciis mittigans nunc dulces amplexus nun dulcia basia innectit. Nec ceptis suis desistit donec fletu fatigata sopori summittitur.* (Griscom 237)

Ignoge stood on the poop deck and fell from time to time fainting in the arms of Brutus. She wept and sobbed at being forced to leave her relations and her homeland; and as long as the shore lay before her eyes, she would not turn her gaze away from it. Brutus soothed and caressed her, putting his arms round her and kissing her gently. He did not cease his efforts until, worn out with crying, she fell asleep. (Thorpe 64)

Ignoge does not fight against this coerced exile, but only passively gazes back at that home to which she can never return. She will eventually perform her matriarchal duties and produce great children, but for the moment she is too paralyzed by her grief to be of any use to anybody. Her

new husband performs his duty of literally supporting her until she succumbs to silent sleep, a metaphoric acquiescence to her fate.

The next and final reference to Ignoge within in the narrative mentions her pronominally and in an oblique case: *Cognoverat autem brutus ignogen uxorem suam & ex ea genuit tres inclitos filios* (Griscom 253). “Moreover, Brutus, had consummated his marriage to his wife Ignoge and by her, he had three distinguished sons.” This sentence does not appear to do much other than inform the reader that Ignoge fulfilled the wifely duties for which reason Brutus had taken her; the most important implication of the sentence is that Brutus now had great heirs for his kingdom. Furthermore, these sons are the first of a uniquely British bloodline, but they can still claim to be descended from Aeneas in a directly patrilineal line. Thus, by “submerging the blood ties borne by women and privileging the family ties borne by men,” Geoffrey is able to seamlessly assign a heroic Trojan identity to the British people. He sees no need to mention that the very “Trojanness” that Brutus’s sons and other Britons can use to claim a pedigree of greatness is itself a melding of Trojan, Latin, and Greek blood (Barefield 23-24). Finally, it should be noted that this last sentence to mention Ignoge appears at the conclusion of the romance of Brutus, which is several pages after the penultimate mention of Ignoge where she faints in his arms. Ignoge does not need to be present for the intervening pages because does not perform her essential role in the narrative until she bears sons for Brutus. Once Locrinus, Kamber, and Albanactus are mentioned by name, the focus of the narrative switches to these sons and how they continue the dynasty established by Aeneas.

Brutus and Arthur are the greatest rulers within the narrative; Vortigern, ruling several hundred years after Brutus’s reign, is the most depraved. Even so, Vortigern is present within the text for approximately 22 pages in the Penguin edition of Thorpe’s translation (if one doesn’t

count the chapter on the prophecies of Merlin), which is about equal to the length of Brutus's time in the text.<sup>3</sup> This equal allotment of space in the book demonstrates the impact Vortigern will have on the rest of the narrative. Whereas Geoffrey devotes attention to Brutus's noble actions, however, he focuses on Vortigern's thoughts and motivations. What Vortigern does in the earlier parts of his narrative (when he is working towards obtaining the throne) is often different from his real intentions. This only highlights his wicked character. Geoffrey places emphasis on Vortigern's shiftiness, his use of food and drink as a tool for securing power, and his lust for power and women. Vortigern, once propelled to the kingship by these desires, is soon outwitted by the Saxon Hengist. Hengist shares Vortigern's *callidus* "crafty" quality, but is also *prudens* and *astutus* "intelligent" and "astute." After working his way into Vortigern's confidence, he recognizes that Vortigern's greatest weakness is his infatuation with his daughter Renwien. This enables him to more easily initiate a Saxon invasion of Britain.

Renwein, not to slip into obscurity in the narrative as all good queens must do, actively contributes to the conflict between the Britons and Saxons whenever she can. In fact, she appears in the narrative only when she can cause further discord for the Britons. Though she is married to a Briton, she is never assimilated into British society and retains her loyalty to the Saxons throughout the text. When her stepson Vortimer, who appears to have much more in common with Brutus and Arthur than his own father, threatens to take the rule from his father (and by extension her as well), she murders him. She betrays her husband's people without compunction, handing over crucial information to the Saxons. The most dangerous thing about her, however, is

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<sup>3</sup> The first mention of Brutus (though not by name) is on page 54 of Thorpe in the paragraph talking about Brutus's birth prophecy; the last mention of Brutus is on page 75, where he dies and the kingdom is subsequently divided amongst his sons. Vortigern's first appearance in Thorpe is on page 151. The chapter on the *Propheti Merlini* takes up pages 170 to 185. Vortigern is burned in his tower on page 188. Thus, the lengths of Brutus's and Vortigern's "reigns" within the book are about 22 pages each. Unsurprisingly, Arthur's chapter is the longest "reign" in the book, lasting for 50 pages. The Brutus and Vortigern episodes fall into second place.

her influence over Vortigern. Vortigern's lust for Renwein completely replaces his thirst for power. His change in attitude leaves him feeble and apathetic when Saxons threaten to terminate the British succession of Kings and replace it with a Saxon one.

Vortigern enters the narrative as the King of the Gewessi, a minor ruler with obsessive designs on attaining greater power. The first descriptive phrase introducing him says that he is *qui omni nisu in regnum anelabat*<sup>4</sup> "busy making every possible effort to lay his hands on the crown" (Griscom 361, Thorpe 152). These few words establish his character: He is interested in power for power's sake, and is consumed by this single desire. He has no care for other people at all. This contrasts starkly with Brutus's generosity, his genuine concern for his subjects, and his every action being directed towards the good of the kingdom.

Fortunately for Vortigern, the murder of the reigning king, the Breton-born Constantine, creates a power vacuum. Taking advantage of the king's readiness to listen to the concerns of his subjects, one of Constantine's Pictish servants kills him for apparently no reason: *quasi secretum colloquium cum eo habiturus in virgulto quodam semotis eum cum cultro interfecit*. "Pretending that it was necessary for him to have a conversation with the King in a thicket, with everyone else sent away, the Pict stabbed the King with a dagger." (Griscom 360, Thorpe 151).

Constantine has been king for only ten years. His oldest son has been sent to be raised in a monastic order, and the younger two are far too young to be king. The king's unexpected and untimely death immediately causes a great crisis of succession: *Defuncto igitur constantino, fuit dissensio inter procures quis in regnum sublimaretur* (Griscom 360). "Therefore with Constantine dead, there was disagreement amongst the leaders over who should assume the

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<sup>4</sup> *Anelabat* (as spelled in the Cambridge University Library M.S. 1971 as used by Griscom; the word is spelled *anelabat* in the Bern variant of the *Historia* manuscript) literally means "pant" or "breathe heavily." It also has the figurative meaning of "to pant for" or "desire ardently" (Latham).

throne.” However, all the more distinguished men have died in battle *forte*, “by chance” and there is nobody left who can convince the other leaders to agree on anything.

Vortigern sees his opportunity to take advantage of this unusually convenient set of coincidences. Planning how he might manipulate things even more, he convinces the dead king’s oldest son, Constans, to revoke his vows in a religious order and become king. He tells Constans “*Si igitur consilio meo acquiescere volueris possessionemque meam augmentare convertam populam in affectum sublimandi te in regnum.*” “If you will only agree to my plan, and increase my personal fortune, I will persuade the people . . . [to raise] you to the throne” (Griscom 361, Thorpe 152). Constans is very happy to hear this, and agrees. However, Vortigern is not just hoping to gain some new riches for his personal stash. Like the Pict who lured Constantine alone into the thicket under the pretense of having an intimate conversation, Vortigern’s true interest in Constans stems from other reasons.

Unlike Brutus and Arthur, who were asked by the people to become king, Vortigern *vix annuente populo erexit in regem* “made Constans king though hardly with the people’s approval” (Griscom 361). He had told Constans that he would “persuade” the people to accept him as king though he either made no attempt to win the people over or simply ended up unsuccessful. It doesn’t matter however, because there is nobody who wants to stop him. In a supremely sacrilegious act, Vortigern “assumes” the duties of a bishop and “placed [the crown] on [Constans’s] head with his own hands.” (*Nec tamen iccirco postposuit diadema quod ipse vortigirnus vice episcopi functurus minibus suis capiti suo imposuit*) (Thorpe 152, Griscom 361). This being done, the young and weak-willed Constans lets Vortigern take control over the entire government. It is easy for Vortigern to appear to be capable of rule when compared to Constans. *qui rex dicebatur nisi pro umbra principis astabat* “who was called king, [but] stood there as the

mere shadow of a leader.” (Thorpe 152, Griscom 361). Vortigern is able to appear by comparison somebody who may be worthy of rule. *Solusque vortigernus astutus & sapiens magnique consilii videbatur.* (Griscom 362) “Vortigern seemed the only man available who was wise or astute, with advice to offer that was worth anything at all.” (Thorpe 153) Vortigern, however, is not satisfied with exercising all his power behind the scenes. He has coveted the kingship itself for a long time with an almost unnatural fervor and is determined to acquire the power of the crown for himself: *nam [regem] prius super omnia concupiverat*<sup>5</sup>) “For he had long coveted the kingship above everything else” (Griscom 361-362).

While Brutus and the other great rulers earned the respect of rule through their demonstrated kindness and unmatched leadership and military prowess, Vortigern, lacking a noble character and good intentions, must constantly keep up a good appearance to legitimize his increasing power in the royal courts. He plots and schemes and pretends and takes whatever *callidius* (more crafty, sneakier) course of action that may help him achieve his short-term goal of attaining the crown: *[I]gitur omnia comperiens vortigernus meditabatur quo ingenio tectius & callidius constantem monachum deponeret.* “Therefore, considering everything, Vortigern was thinking over the most secure and crafty means with which he might displace the monk Constans” (Griscom 362). And so, *deinde premeditatam prodicionem machinans* “plotting his premeditated treason,” Vortigern advises Constans to keep some Picts within his retinue, so as to keep a closer eye on that rowdy people (Griscom 362).

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<sup>5</sup> *Concupiverat* (a stronger form of *cupio, cupere* “to want”) often has connotations of sexual desire. An ambitious reading of this line might claim that it could be an ironic allusion to Vortigern’s loss of the crown because of his runaway lust for a woman.

Geoffrey again brings to the fore the ruthless, two-faced nature of Vortigern's character.

His real intentions for keeping some Picts close by have nothing to do with preserving

Constans's safety:

*Ecce occulta occulti amici prodicio. Non enim id laudabat ut salus inde proveniret constanti set quia sciebat pictos gentem esse instabilem & ad omne scelus paratam . . . commoveri facile possent adversus regem ut absque cunctamine ipsum interficerent. Unde si id contigisset haberet aditum promovendi sese in regem ut sepius affectaverat. (Griscom 363)*

[Witness] the hidden treachery of a secret enemy. Vortigern was advising this, not in order to ensure the safety of Constans, but because he knew the Picts were a shifty people, ready for any mean trick. . . they could easily be stirred up against the King and so murder him out of hand. If this were to happen, then Vortigern would have the opportunity to make himself king, as he had so often planned to do (Thorpe 154).

Vortigern, familiar himself with the power of food and drink, immediately gets the new Pictish residents drunk and flatters them with bribes. The Picts, completely won over by him, start saying that he should be the king instead of Constans. Seeing his opportunity, Vortigern *finxit* "pretend[s]" that he will have to leave Britain soon, and leaves the Picts *quasi tristis* "as though greatly saddened" because of this (Griscom 364). The drunken Picts, worried that the departure of Vortigern would mean the end to their steady stream of riches and bribes, kill Constans in his chamber. They have done exactly what Vortigern has set them up to do. Vortigern, however, needing to keep up an appearance of good character lest other leaders in the kingdom decide he is not a satisfactory stand-in for a ruler after all, *quasi contristatus in fletum erupit nec unquam prius maiori gaudio fluctuaverat* "bursts into tears [upon seeing the king's head] as if the sight had saddened him, although he had really never been so happy in his life before" (Griscom 365, Thorpe 155). Amidst the rumors of regicide, Vortigern takes it upon himself to place the crown upon his own head and officially make himself the supreme authority over all the other princes. (*imposuit capiti suo diadema regni & conprincipes suos supergressus*

*est.*) (Griscom 365). At no time during his rise to the throne has he ever been recommended into any position of power, unless one counts Constans's agreement with everything he says.

The Picts, meanwhile, are unhappy that they were used as Vortigern's pawns and launch attacks on British towns. Vortigern, grieved by this serious threat to his power, and also paranoid with fear about the impending adulthood of Constans's brothers, is relieved to accept Saxon ambassadors, led by the brothers Hengist and Horsa. The Saxons announce that they have arrived to "offer their services" to the ruling prince of the country, having been sent away from their homeland by custom. Vortigern, for all the cunning he displayed earlier, does not show any concern that the Saxons may have an interest in Britain beyond simply offering to be mercenary soliders for him. He is slightly disappointed that the Saxons are pagan, but he chooses to interpret their arrival as a gift from God – the means by which his country will be saved. He invites the Saxons to reside within the palace, just as the Pictish servants who had killed Constans had done. He is very pleased to see the Saxons fight so "manfully" against the Picts, and provides them with many gifts as reward for their good service. He grows very fond of them and their obedience to him.

Vortigern is unwise to choose the defeat of the Picts as the time to stop worrying about threats to his power, because Hengist now sees that he can start requesting things of Vortigern without much opposition, just as Vortigern was able to do with Constans. *Hengistus vero cum esset vir doctus atque astutus comperta amicitia quam rex ad erga illum gerebat.* "Hengist, an intelligent and astute man, understood the nature of the friendship which the king bore towards him" (Griscom 368). He makes a request of for more men and for possession of a city. Vortigern, aware that the *procurers* of the kingdom suspect him in Constans's death and are watching his every move, cannot risk committing the faux pas of letting the Saxons possess a city. And so

tells Hengist “*prohibitum sum huius modi donaria vobis dare*” “I am not allowed to give you such kind of gift” (Griscom 369). Hengist, changing strategies, reiterates his fidelity to Vortigern, and asks for simply a small section of land. *Motus itaque rex verbis*: Vortigern “is very moved by these words” and gives Hengist what he had asked for without any further thought. (Griscom 369). Hengist then chooses a piece of land *maxima cautela* “with the greatest possible cunning” and invites more Saxons to join him in Britain (Thorpe 159).

After the additional Germans arrive, Vortigern meets Hengist’s daughter Renwein at a royal banquet. His priorities immediately shift from maintaining control over Britain to sleeping with the extremely seductive Renwein: *Egressa est puella de thalamo aureum ciphum plenum vino ferens . . . At ille visa facie puelle admiratus est tantum eius decorum & incaluit*. “the girl Renwein came out of an inner room carrying a golden goblet full of wine . . . When he saw the girl’s face, Vortigern was greatly struck by her beauty and was filled with desire for her” (Griscom 370 , Thorpe 159). This first image of Renwein, which includes the beautiful girl herself, the golden cup she is holding, and the wine inside that cup present her as a triple-threat of pleasures of the flesh – absolutely irresistible to the indulgent, lustful Vortigern. Already under the influence of alcohol, Vortigern becomes even more entranced by this foreign woman. After asking what the proper response to her greeting him in her language, *respondens deinde drinc heil iussit puellam potare cepitque ciphum de manu ipsius & osculatus est eam et potuit*. “Vortigern immediately said the words ‘*drinc hail*’ and ordered Renwein to drink. Then he took the goblet from her hand, kissed her, and drank his turn” (Griscom 370, Thorpe 159). Geoffrey characterizes Vortigern’s instant infatuation with Renwein in the most forbidding terms possible: *Intraverat inquam sathanas in corde suo quia christianus cum esset cum pagana coire desiderabat*. “Satan entered his heart, so that he fell in love with Renwein and asked her father to

give her to him. I say that Satan entered his heart, because, despite the fact that he was a Christian, he was determined to make love to a pagan woman” (Griscom 371, Thorpe 160).

This is the moment where Vortigern’s ongoing friendship with the Saxons, an already short-sighted relationship built on gifts and flattery, goes too far. Geoffrey dramatically points out the sin of a Christian making love to a foreign woman, but in the context of genealogical concerns, that is not the most offensive sin of this affair. None of the good rulers in the *Historia* ever put themselves in an incriminating position where they get so inebriated that they make a bad decision which could impact the rest of the kingdom. Every action they take is reasonable given the context they are in. Vortigern is the opposite of a good king, and his drunkenness and infatuation in this scene introducing Renwein seem a natural consequence of his indulgent, obsessive personality. Hardly concerned with the future of Britain while sober, he is now setting his precious kingship up for disaster.

Vortigern, who already has three sons, should not be looking to marry again. That would guarantee a crisis of succession (and possibly a war) between his current sons and any children born to him and Renwein. The marriage would make the intrusive presence of the Saxons within Britain permanent, and as Membritius explained to Brutus when he suggested that the Trojans leave Greece with Ignoge as a prize, this would set the stage for continuous future conflict. The Saxons are still attached to their homeland and are not looking to assimilate with the Britons, and Renwein is still very much attached to them. Ignoge had to be permanently separated from her homeland and her identity as a Greek woman all but erased for the sake of creating a new British bloodline. Any British-Saxon bloodline coming from Vortigern and Renwein would be fraught with instability from the start.

Having failed to learn his lesson from the Picts, Vortigern continues to regard the Saxons as if they, with such a great military force, will always be content with fighting off whichever minor people harasses Britain. Now in his drunken, enamored state, he is completely open to Hengist's manipulation. Hengist, being the truly *callidus* one in this episode, is able to observe the extent to which Vortigern has lost all control over himself: *Hengistus ilico erat prudens comperta levitate animi regis*. "Hengist, who was a very clever man, noticed the unbalanced nature of the king's personality" (Griscom 371, Thorpe 160). The Saxon ruler recognizes that Vortigern would make any request he asked. Vortigern, concerned only about the pleasure he could get by sleeping with Renwein, immediately agrees to an exchange of the entire province of Kent for the Saxon woman he so desires.

Hengist then makes his first assertion of his authority over Vortigern: *Ego sum pater tuus & consiliarius tibi esse debeo. Noli igitur preterire consilium meum quia omnes inimicos tuos virtute gentis mee superabis*. "I am now your father-in-law and I have the right to give you advice. You must not spurn what I say, for with the powerful support of my people you will be able to overcome all your enemies" (Griscom 372, Thorpe 160-161). Hengist requests that some of his relatives be granted lands in the north of England; Vortigern agrees immediately and enthusiastically.

The Britons are now afraid of rebellion by the Saxons. They see the pagan people continue to plant deeper roots in Britain, and now, due to intermarriage, *Iam nescibatur quis paganus esset quis christianus*. "already no one could tell who was a pagan and who was a Christian" (Griscom 373, Thorpe 161). Vortigern dismisses their fears *quia super omnes gentes propter coniugem suam ipsos diligebat*. "because of his wife, he loved the Saxons above all other

folk” (Griscom 373, Thorpe 161). Though Geoffrey had shown him to be fond of the Saxons before he meets Renwein, he is influenced more by that woman than by anyone else.

Vortigern’s inaction is the final straw, however, and the Britons promote his son Vortimer to the kingship. He engages with the Saxons in battle, and the Saxons finally meet defeat. They send Vortigern *qui in omnibus bellis ipsis aderat* “who had fought on their side in all the battles” for permission to withdraw to Germany (Griscom 374, Thorpe 162). During Vortigern’s conference with Vortimer, all the Saxon men flee in their ships, leaving their women and children behind to maintain a presence on the island.

It appears that Vortigern’s reign is at an end and that the anti-Saxon Vortimer will eradicate Saxon influence from the island and bring this romance episode to a favorable conclusion, perhaps ending with a mention of his competent rule. Renwein steps in to ensure that this will not be the case:

*Set bonitati eius invidit ilico diabolus qui in corde Renwen nouerce sue ingressus incitavit eam ut neci ipsius imineret. Que ergo ascitis universis veneficiis dedt illi per quendam familiarem suum venenum potare quem innumerabilibus donariis corruperat* (Griscom 374).

A certain evil spirit which had found its way into his stepmother Renwein immediately became envious of this virtuous behavior of his and began to plot his death. Renwein collected all the information she could about noxious poisons, and then, by the hands of one of his servants whom she had corrupted with innumerable bribes, she gave Vortimer a poison to drink (Thorpe 162).

Geoffrey continues to associate Renwein with sensuality, passion, and consumption of liquids. It doesn’t seem out-of-character for her to “become envious” of Vortimer’s “virtuous behavior.” Yet for whatever reason, Geoffrey chooses to place some of the reason for Renwein’s murder in *ilico diabolus* “a certain evil spirit.” It is unlikely, though, that he was actually trying to remove some of the agency from Renwein – other women, like Loctrinus’s wife Gwendolen, commit murders of passion earlier in the book, and Geoffrey did not attempt to blame anyone but

Gwendolen for Estrildis and her daughter Habren's deaths by drowning in a river. Like Gwendolen, Renwein finds herself on the wrong side of a crisis of succession; She had previously been queen and the would-be mother to Vortigern's heir, but now she has been pushed out of the picture, her bloodline going nowhere if Vortimer stays on the throne. It is likely that Geoffrey used the term "a certain evil spirit" to emphasize her pagan heartlessness in going to such lengths to restore her own power.

Vortimer's murder predictably results in the return of Vortigern to the kingship, and with it, Saxon influence in Britain. Renwein continues to influence the affairs of the state than any woman should have: *precibus coniugis sue commotus, misit nuncios suos ad hengistum in germaniam mandavitque ei ut iterum in britanniam rediret*. "At the request of his wife, he sent messengers to Hengist in Germany to ask him to return to Britain" (Griscom 375, Thorpe 163). Vortigern requests that Hengist come with only a few men, not wanting to anger the Britons. However, Hengist has already left with his entire army ready to conquer the island. This is the first time Hengist does something that angers Vortigern, and he finally starts to see Hengist and his fleet of ships as a real threat to his power on the British throne. Geoffrey uses Renwein's last appearance in the book as an opportunity for her to betray the Britons once more: *Quod cum filia sua hengisto per internuncios indicasset confestim cogitavit quid potius contra id agendum esset*. "The daughter of Hengist sent messengers to tell her father of this decision, and he in turn considered what he could do to counteract it" (Griscom 376, Thorpe 163). Hengist decides to pretend to hold a peace conference and then *prodere* "betray" the Britons. When Vortigern is let free after being captured by the Saxons, he decides to consult his magicians. Soon after this, Geoffrey begins the *Prophetie Merlini*.

Problems of succession drive the conflicts that characterize the romance narratives of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*. They are a consequence of the genealogical concerns of the entire work. The problems of the romance episodes keep the book interesting and allow scholars to explore the possible meanings of the *Historia* through a literary lens even as historians have dismissed the work for being too fanciful to be called a “history.” The detailed nature of the romance narratives permits close readings which can yield fascinating insights into how the *Historia Regum Britanniae* functions as both a genealogical and romance narrative.

The characterization of a ruler does much to determine how they will approach the crisis of succession that are typical of romance narratives within the book. While the romance narratives are interesting, it is in the interests of the ruler and the people to resolve crises of succession and return to the unproblematic genealogical narrative. Brutus, an idealized patriarch, resolves a crisis of succession and a war with the Greeks by marrying Ignoge. Vortigern, a much more careless ruler, sets himself up for a disastrous crisis of succession when his marriage to Renwein turns into an opportunity for Hengist to make Britain easier to invade. Both episodes provide insight into how Geoffrey viewed the function of the *Historia* as the mythos of the British (and later the English) people.

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