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Speculum, Volume 65, Issue 3 (Jul., 1990), 537-563.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0038-7134%28199007%2965%3A3%3C537%3ALA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-X

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By Daniel Donoghue

A central topic in the scholarship of La3amon's *Brut* has been the apparent inconsistency between its verse style, in many ways reminiscent of classical Old English verse, and its content, much of which vilifies the first generations of Anglo-Saxon invaders in Britain and praises their enemies the Britons. Jorge Luis Borges, an admirer of Old English poetry and La3amon, sets this opposition in the strongest possible terms: "Layamon sang with fervor about the ancient battles of the Britons against the Saxon invaders, as if he were not a Saxon and as if Britons and Saxons had not been, since Hastings, conquered by the Normans."[1] He goes on to note how little we know about the author of *Brut* and the circumstances of its composition, and concludes by calling La3amon a "forgotten man, who abhorred his Saxon heritage with Saxon vigor, and who was the last Saxon poet and never knew it."[2]

Borges's quaint and unflattering portrait of La3amon has found little favor among other students of La3amon, who prefer to reconcile the discrepancy between his style and content in terms of irony. According to this view, any possible contradiction is neutralized under the unifying claims of nationalism, and the struggle between the noble Britons and the villainous Anglo-Saxons is interpreted as a temporary stage in the teleological movement of history toward nationhood, where the competing races merge into a united England. The higher principle of nationalism thus reconciles the irony of La3amon's use of an Anglo-Saxon verse form to disparage the earliest Anglo-Saxons.

In place of Borges's naively self-hating Anglo-Saxon and everyone else's visionary nationalist, I propose an altogether different interpretation for La3amon and his poetic strategy. In this article I argue that there is no need to reconcile the style and content, because the disparity is consistent with an ambivalence toward the past which La3amon demonstrates throughout his chronicle and which can be seen as part of a wider cultural ambivalence in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England.[3] The players in his history (primarily the *Anglen* and *Brutten*) are defined not by nation but by race, and the unifying principle of his history is not nationhood but divine providence, as

[1] Borges, "The Innocence of Layamon," *Other Inquisitions, 1937–1952*, trans. Ruth L. C. Simms (New York, 1965), p. 161. My thanks to Professor Fred C. Robinson for this reference. A shortened version of this paper was delivered to the Southeastern Medieval Association Conference at the University of Richmond in 1988. I wish to thank Professors Derek Pearsall, Larry Benson, Nicholas Howe, Mr. Stephen Brehe, and the anonymous readers for *Speculum* for their suggestions and comments.

[2] "Innocence," p. 162.

[3] On the date of composition see E. G. Stanley, "The Date of La3amon's 'Brut,'" *Notes & Queries* 213 (1968), 85–88, where he argues for the limits from "1189 to some time not very early in the second half of the thirteenth century" (p. 88).

interpreted by the historiographic typology begun by Gildas and continued through Bede and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

Before discussing these issues, however, it is important to establish more precisely La3amon's relation to his Anglo-Saxon past, especially to the Old English literary tradition. Following E. G. Stanley's persuasive discussion of La3amon's antiquarian sentiments, I begin by exploring the extent to which La3amon was successful in recalling the Old English heroic ethos and the extent to which his efforts fall short. I restrict the discussion to battle scenes, which traditionally have been a prime hunting ground for evidence of continuity, though they also reveal a range of important, irrecoverable losses, which have drawn much less attention.

For much of this century the origins for La3amon's peculiar verse form were attributed either to a popular alliterative verse in oral tradition that survived the demise of written, classical Old English verse or to the survival of the Old English tradition itself, much weakened by La3amon's day and preserved in manuscripts now lost. Both views are now discredited as somewhat romanticized reconstructions of La3amon's literary heritage, in which the key elements for continuity (an oral tradition or lost manuscripts) must be conjectured. In recent years discussion of La3amon's prosody has shifted its focus to literary sources that have survived, with special prominence given to rhythmical prose such as Wulfstan's and Ælfric's homilies, which continued to be copied and read well into the thirteenth century. At the same time the traditional distinction between verse and prose in this transitional period has come into question. In an influential article N. F. Blake has warned modern readers of the danger of forcing modern, rigid categories of "prose" and "verse" on all early Middle English works. He points out that a number of works, such as Ælfric's *Lives* and *The Life of Saint Katherine,* blur the boundary between prose and verse and make up instead a more inclusive category that he calls rhythmical alliteration.[4] In making a similar point, Angus McIntosh proposes the term "metrical system" to avoid pigeonholing texts as prose or verse.[5] Writers like La3amon were free to choose their models from a range of alliterative texts, "because the boundaries between poetry and prose were more flexible at that time."[6] The strength of this analysis is that it offers a coherent account of early Middle English alliterative writing without invoking lost antecedents, and as such, it is a healthy corrective to the earlier theories.

If this analysis has any weakness, it is its insistence on the similarities at the expense of clear differences among alliterative works. It can give the

[4] N. F. Blake, "Rhythmical Alliteration," *Modern Philology* 67 (1969), 118–24. The most recent discussion of the use of rhythmical prose as a model is in Elizabeth Salter, *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England,* ed. Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge, Eng., 1988), pp. 56–58.

[5] Angus McIntosh, "Early Middle English Alliterative Verse," in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and Its Literary Background,* ed. David Lawton (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1982), p. 22. Derek Pearsall speaks of a "'continuum' of alliterative writing" in *Old English and Middle English Poetry,* The Routledge History of English Poetry 1 (London, 1977), p. 77.

[6] Blake, "Rhythmical Alliteration," p. 120.

impression that writers considered all rhythmical alliteration as equivalent or interchangeable. Blake is careful to note, even though "La3amon and other early Middle English poets drew their examples and inspiration" from rhythmical alliteration, they made the rhythm "more regular and insistent in order to form a new kind of poetry."[7] Blake does not elaborate, but this observation suggests that all specimens of rhythmical alliteration were not perceived as equivalent: some had a "more regular and insistent" rhythm than, for example, Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*. It implies a range with more verselike compositions at one end, which writers used as standards of versification.[8] Rhythmic prose alone could not induce writers to tighten the rhythm. It also suggests that a variety of sources were available to a poet like La3amon. I will later discuss some of these sources and try to reclaim a place for Old English poetry among them. But first it will be helpful to examine the *Brut* for textual evidence about its place in the spectrum of rhythmical alliteration.

La3amon certainly considered the *Brut* to be poetry. The internal evidence is clear: early on he calls it a *loft-songe* or "song of praise" (line 36), and in both extant manuscripts it is copied with punctuation that distinguishes the caesura and the end of the full line.[9] The meter of the half-lines, as many have remarked, is looser than classical Old English verse and conforms somewhat to John C. Pope's definition of Ælfric's rhythmical prose: "a loosely metrical form resembling in basic structural principles the alliterative verse of the Old English poets, but differing markedly in the character and range of its rhythms as in strictness of alliterative practice."[10] This definition is not a perfect fit, however, because even within the same passage La3amon's verse form can show variations in the number of stressed syllables, in alliterative patterns, and in the use of rhyme.[11] Two-stress lines are the norm, but three or four stresses are sometimes found. Three lines in ten lack alliteration, which suggests that alliteration is less than obligatory but more than ornamental. Rhyme or off-rhyme is frequent and links half-lines rather than full lines; it is often used in addition to alliteration. On the other hand, this variegation should not be overemphasized. The *Brut*'s verse is more regular than other alliterative poems of this period, and many half-lines reproduce Old English metrical types perfectly. In the absence of a more pervasive formal principle, it is safe to say that the basic verse structure consists primarily of two-stressed half-lines linked by alliteration.

In contrast to its prosodic diversity, the *Brut*'s vocabulary is remarkably

[7] "Rhythmical Alliteration," pp. 120, 121.

[8] Blake, "Rhythmical Alliteration," p. 120, would assign these differences to a high style and a low style.

[9] All line references are to *La3amon: Brut*, ed. G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie, 2 vols., EETS OS 250 and 277 (London, 1963 and 1978).

[10] *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, EETS 259 (London, 1967), p. 105.

[11] This variety in prosody is a characteristic of early Middle English verse, which Pearsall (*Old English*, p. 85) and Thorlac Turville-Petre (*The Alliterative Revival* [Cambridge, Eng., 1977], p. 11) have called amorphous. See also McIntosh, "Alliterative Verse," pp. 21–22, and Salter, *English and International*, pp. 53–55.

homogeneous. It is almost exclusively limited to words of Germanic origin: in over sixteen thousand lines, only a few dozen Romance words appear.[12] Even the orthography is archaistic.[13] La3amon is the most prolific inventor of poetic compounds in this period, some of which have parallels in Old English literature, while others seem to be unique.[14] The artificial limitations of La3amon's poetic vocabulary are striking in comparison with those of two works that were written roughly at the same time and in the same area as *Brut: Ancrene Wisse* and *Sawles Ward.* They have a much larger proportion of words from French and Latin, a proportion that is probably closer to the literary norm for La3amon's day. The contrast is even greater with *The Owl and the Nightingale*, which survives in one of the two manuscripts that contain a copy of *Brut* (British Library, Cotton Caligula A.ix). Although its date of composition may be within a generation or two of *Brut*, *The Owl and the Nightingale* not only uses a much higher proportion of French words, but its meter is naturalized (or anglicized) French octosyllabic couplets.[15]

What makes La3amon's language and verse form even more remarkable is that his principal source was a Norman French chronicle of fifteen thousand lines in octosyllabic couplets, the *Roman de Brut*, completed by Robert Wace in 1155.[16] Translating from a French source would have tempted any other English translator to borrow words, even if not to the extent that Chaucer and Caxton did in later centuries, but La3amon takes pains to recast the language and meter into recognizably Germanic forms. At the same time, however, he is careful to restrict his changes in other respects; most importantly he rarely tampers with the basic events narrated in his source.[17] The

[12] B. S. Monroe, in "French Words in Layamon," *Modern Philology* 4 (1907), 559–67, counts about 150 Romance words in both versions. J. P. Oakden, in *Alliterative Poetry in Middle English*, 2 vols. (Manchester, Eng., 1930), 2:172–74, counts even fewer.

[13] E. G. Stanley, "La3amon's Antiquarian Sentiments," *Medium Ævum* 38 (1969), 23–37.

[14] See Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry*, 2:172–73; J. S. P. Tatlock, "Epic Formulas, Especially in La3amon," *PMLA* 38 (1923), 494–529.

[15] A random sampling from *Ancrene Wisse* shows 8 percent to 10 percent of its words from French and Latin. E. J. Dobson dates it from 1215 to 1221 or perhaps a little later in "The Date and Composition of Ancrene Wisse," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 52 (1966), 181–208. *Sawles Ward* has been dated before 1225 by one editor, R. M. Wilson (Leeds, 1938), p. xxxviii, and at the end of the twelfth century by J. A. W. Bennett and G. V. Smithers, in *Early Middle English Verse and Prose* (Oxford, 1966), p. 246. E. G. Stanley places the date for *The Owl and the Nightingale* between 1189 and 1216 in his edition (1960; repr. Manchester, Eng., 1972), p. 19.

[16] *Le roman de Brut par Wace*, ed. I. Arnold, 2 vols. (Paris, 1938 and 1940). Though La3amon listed three books he used as sources, and though the influence of other sources has been detected, he relied almost exclusively on Wace for the historical details of his chronicle. A thorough study of Wace and other, minor sources is by Herbert Pilch, *Layamons "Brut": Eine literarische Studie* (Heidelberg, 1960) pp. 18–96. A more recent study is Françoise Le Saux, *Layamon's "Brut": The Poem and Its Sources* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1989).

[17] Frances Gillespy, in *Layamon's Brut: A Comparative Study in Narrative Art*, University of California Publications in Modern Philology 3 (Berkeley, 1916), pp. 361–511, identifies and categorizes many of La3amon's changes and additions. See, for example, her discussion of the scene where Ursele and her companions are shipwrecked, pp. 393–94.

A simple comparison of the number of lines of each chronicler, about fifteen thousand lines for Wace and sixteen thousand lines for La3amon, is misleading because La3amon's lines, made

material he introduces is often imaginative detail as, for example, when he transforms descriptive passages to direct speech, which adds some psychological motivation for the characters' actions and heightens the dramatic effect.[18] Even where Laȝamon does not add materially to Wace, he can add small touches in such things as formulaic phrasing, characterization, and rhetorical devices that preserve, in the words of Frederic Madden, the first editor of the *Brut*, "the spirit and style of the earlier Anglo-Saxon writers."[19]

These evocative changes are not enough reason to resurrect the old argument that Laȝamon was working in a living tradition. Some recent studies, while admitting the likelihood that Laȝamon may have known some Old English verse, have placed it rather vaguely among other literary influences in early Middle English.[20] Their hesitation in assigning it a more prominent position is prudent in light of the lack of solid evidence that Laȝamon knew any Old English poetry at all. On the other hand, poems were available to him. He lived about ten miles from the monastery library at Worcester, a center of literary activity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We know of at least ten Old English poems in manuscripts there, including the six chronicle poems.[21] The chronicle poems range from classical heroic verse (*Battle of Brunanburh*) to the loose, mixed style more characteristic of early Middle English (*Death of Alfred*). Thorlac Turville-Petre points out that the chronicle also contains examples of rhythmic prose as well as unornamented prose.[22] But the Worcester library had a much more extensive selection of rhythmic prose: at least six collections of homilies, four of which have a large number by Ælfric.[23]

Demonstrating that a large body of Old English alliterative verse and prose

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up of two alliterating half-lines, contain more words. I estimate that the *Brut* contains more than half again as much material as Wace's *roman*.

[18] See Gillespy, *Layamon's Brut*, pp. 464–67, and C. S. Lewis, "Genesis of a Medieval Book," in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, Eng., 1966), p. 29. A shorter version of Lewis's essay appears as the introduction to G. L. Brook, ed., *Selections from Laȝamon's Brut* (Oxford, 1963), pp. vii–xv.

[19] Madden, ed., *Laȝamons Brut, or Chronicle of Britain: A Poetical Semi-Saxon Paraphrase of the Brut of Wace*, 3 vols. (London, 1847), 1:xxiii. On Laȝamon's use of formulas see footnotes 29 and 41. For changes in characterization see Gillespy, *Layamon's Brut*, pp. 411–25. For rhetorical devices see the articles by James Noble, "The Larger Rhetorical Patterns in Laȝamon's *Brut*," *English Studies in Canada* 11 (1985), 263–71; and "Variation in Laȝamon's *Brut*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 85 (1984), 92–94.

[20] Geoffrey Shepherd, "Early Middle English Literature," in *The Middle Ages*, ed. W. F. Bolton, History of Literature in the English Language 1 (London, 1970), pp. 80–82. See also McIntosh, "Alliterative Verse," pp. 26, 29; Pearsall, *Old English*, pp. 85–89; and Salter, *English and International*, pp. 48–61.

[21] The other four are *Cædmon's Hymn*, *The Metrical Preface* and *Epilogue to the Pastoral Care*, and *The Metrical Preface to Gregory's Dialogues;* compiled from N. R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), and *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 6 (New York, 1942).

[22] *Alliterative Revival*, pp. 6–7.

[23] P. J. Frankis, in "Laȝamon's English Sources," in *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller*, ed. Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca, 1979), pp. 64–75, argues that Laȝamon drew directly from some of Ælfric's homilies.

was available is not proof that La3amon read any part of it or used it in shaping his verse, but glosses in the "tremulous" hand of Worcester provide independent confirmation that these texts were read in the thirteenth century. According to S. J. Crawford, this glossator "was a good Latin scholar (the majority of his glosses are in that tongue), acquainted with Anglo-Norman, and, what was becoming rarer, he possessed a competent knowledge of Old English — at any rate of the prose speech. Unfortunately we have no evidence that he was interested in poetry. On his own lines, he deserves to be mentioned with his (probably) slightly younger and more romantic contemporary La3amon."[24] Glosses in his distinctive hand show that he read extensively in Old English texts; they appear in sixteen of the thirty-five Worcester manuscripts listed in Ker's *Catalogue*, including all six collections of homilies mentioned earlier, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, two translations of Gregory's *Dialogues*, and two translations of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*.[25] Another measure of his interest in Old English is found in Worcester Cathedral MS F. 174, the only manuscript in which the "tremulous" hand is the text hand. It contains a fragmentary copy of Ælfric's *Grammar and Glossary*, but it has the additional interest of a possible clue about the influence of Old English on early Middle English verse, because the glosses are followed by two early Middle English pieces in rhythmical alliteration copied out in the same tremulous hand.[26] The first is a short fragment in rhythmical prose beginning "Sanctus Beda was iboren her," and the second is the poem *The Soul's Address to the Body*.[27]

There is no evidence that the "tremulous" glossator had any influence on La3amon, just as there is no solid evidence that La3amon read any of the Old English manuscripts at Worcester. It is also possible that the glossator and La3amon were independent eccentrics, without a supporting literary environment. But it is at least as likely that their activities represent two parts of a movement that promoted and sustained an interest in Anglo-Saxon scholarship and literature. We know that the two extant copies of the *Brut* could not be the only ones made, a fact that gives evidence of a wider

[24] "The Worcester Marks and Glosses of the Old English Manuscripts in the Bodleian, together with the Worcester Version of the Nicene Creed," *Anglia* 52 (1958), 1–2. E. G. Stanley points out some differences in the antiquarian learning of La3amon and the "tremulous" glossator in "Sentiments," p. 32.

[25] Following the numbering of Ker's *Catalogue*, the manuscripts are 23, 30, 41, 48, 67, 73, 178, 182, 225, 324, 328, 331, 332, 333, 338, 343, and 398. See Angus Cameron, "Middle English in Old English Manuscripts," in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (Kent, Ohio, 1974), pp. 218–29. On the diversity of library holdings in the west Midlands, see Salter, *English and International*, pp. 68–69.

[26] I use Blake's "rhythmical alliteration" deliberately, because in one book Ker calls the pieces "rhythmic-prose" (*Catalogue*, no. 398) and in another he and Ivor Atkins call them "verse" (in Patrick Young, *Catalogus librorum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae Wigorniensis, Made in 1622–1623*, ed. Ivor Atkins and N. R. Ker [Cambridge, Eng., 1944] p. 19, n. 2).

[27] *The Soul's Address to the Body* has recently been edited by Douglas Moffat, Medieval Texts and Studies 1 (East Lansing, Mich., 1987). See pp. 1–3 and his superb discussion of prosody, pp. 25–33.

audience, but the "tremulous" glosses show that the older language was already less accessible to thirteenth-century English speakers.

This discussion of Old English sources is not intended to obscure the influences that other studies have put forward, such as French, Anglo-Norman, and Latin verse,[28] or, for that matter, an oral tradition of alliterative verse.[29] It is only meant to show that the evidence for the influence of Old English verse is at least as extensive as any other influence except Old English rhythmic prose. Laȝamon turned this diversity of influences entirely to his advantage by using them to create a verse style that could adapt to a variety of modes within a long historical narrative, from the straightforward chronicling of genealogies, births, deaths, and the successions of rulers to more imaginative passages such as journeys, rebellions, battles, and dialogues. Laȝamon had no English chronicles or narratives to follow as models.[30] After the late-twelfth-century *Ormulum*, the *Brut* is the first long poem in the English language ("long" according to Middle English standards; the Old English *Beowulf* and *Genesis* are far shorter). The implications of this simple fact are significant: with no precedent to guide him, Laȝamon had to improvise a verse style that could accommodate the demands of this new English genre without lapsing into metrical tedium over so many thousands of lines. While alliterative verse and prose were dominant influences, he drew from a range of genres and literatures to introduce flexibility and stylistic variation. His approach was eclectic and practical. And while his mixed style has received qualified praise from modern readers, any assessment of his technique should begin by considering it as a response to the demands of sustained narrative never encountered before in English poetry. A measure of his success can be seen in comparison with Orm, the author of *Ormulum*, who arrived at a style that can charitably be described as monotonous. If nothing else, the *Brut*'s style as a whole is more engaging, and many modern readers have found passages worthy of genuine admiration. Laȝamon's success in forging a viable verse style may be one of the least appreciated achievements in early Middle English.

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the *Brut* is that the verse, so innovative in some respects, seems to preserve old-fashioned features in diction and in the alliterative line. But it is difficult for modern readers to know how much of it thirteenth-century readers would have considered archaic. In his useful study of Laȝamon's language and orthography, E. G.

[28] Elizabeth Salter makes the most persuasive argument for the influence of French and Anglo-Norman models as well as Latin heroic verse on *Brut*, especially in connection with its use of extended similes, where the Latin influence she concludes is "beyond doubt" (*English and International*, p. 66).

[29] Recent studies include Mark Amodio, "Laȝamon's Anglo-Saxon Lexicon and Diction," *Poetica* (Tokyo) 28 (1988), 48–59; and Jean Ritzke-Rutherford, "Formulaic Microstructure: The Cluster," and "Formulaic Macrostructure: The Theme of Battle," in *The Alliterative Morte Arthure: A Reassessment*, ed. Karl-Heinz Göller, Arthurian Studies 2 (Cambridge, Eng., 1981), pp. 70–82, 83–93, 167–69, 169–71.

[30] See Shepherd, "Early Middle English Literature," pp. 67–68; and Salter, *English and International*, pp. 59–61.

Stanley approaches this question by making a crucial distinction between the archaic and the archaistic. While the "archaic" preserves genuine early forms, "the archaistic is merely imitative of the archaic, and derives from it by a deliberate act of recreation." He also speculates that archaistic spellings may fall into two categories: "one kind is akin to record forgeries, the other is akin to sentimental *ye olde* spellings; and it may not be easy to keep these two kinds apart."[31] The first kind is deceptive, the second is a curiosity; this second kind accounts for more than a few of the archaisms in La3amon's language and orthography.

Our knowledge of early Middle English is scant enough that we may have to rely on outside clues to detect thirteenth-century archaisms, but fortunately in the case of the *Brut* a good source of such clues survives. There are two extant manuscript copies: British Library, Cotton Caligula A.ix (C) and Cotton Otho C.xiii (O). Though both are of roughly the same date, the second copy, O, is a much-shortened version of the original (represented by C); the scribe responsible for the deletions is called the Otho Reviser.[32] Altogether he removed about twenty-five hundred lines, or one-sixth of the original, and altered the reading of C in about twelve hundred places, in most instances by substituting a less archaic word.[33] Because the Otho Reviser's substitutions cannot be simply the result of linguistic change, they provide good evidence of archaistic words and spellings in the original. His changes follow a consistent pattern. "The Otho Reviser," writes Stanley, "cleansed the poem of its poeticisms, not, I think, merely to save space, nor because he regarded them as virtually incomprehensible — though there may have been a touch of that too — but rather because he was out of sympathy with the antiquarian modulation of the poet."[34] What La3amon considered poetic embellishments, such as extensive *amplificatio*, which helped establish the archaic mood of the chronicle, the Otho Reviser considered so much excess baggage. Thus by identifying words the Otho Reviser omitted or replaced and the spellings that he changed, we can reasonably guess what elements of La3amon's original were the archaistic *ye olde* signs of his time.

Stanley bases his observations largely on the orthography and diction of *Brut*, but more can be learned by seeing whether La3amon's deliberate use of archaisms extends to more thematic areas as well. An obvious source for making such observations are battle scenes, of which there are well over one hundred. They provided La3amon with his greatest opportunities to draw from the Old English heroic tradition, which in earlier centuries provided the ethos of such poems as *Beowulf*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and *The Battle of Finnsburh*. This association is nothing new. La3amon, writes C. S. Lewis, "sees all [his] battles in terms of the heroic past."[35] A number of scholars have

[31] "Sentiments," pp. 25, 27.

[32] See W. J. Keith, "La3amon's *Brut*: The Literary Differences between the Two Texts," *Medium Ævum* 29 (1960), 161–73. It is possible that two or more scribes contributed to the changes in O, but for the sake of convenience I refer to only one.

[33] Oakden, *Alliterative Poetry*, 2:172–74.

[34] "Sentiments," p. 29. See also Keith, "Literary Differences."

[35] "Genesis," p. 25. J. P. Oakden writes, "La3amon's *Brut* is the one work in early Middle

noted that Laȝamon's verse form most closely resembles that of classical verse in such scenes.[36] But as much as Laȝamon may have admired and sought to imitate Old English verse, his knowledge of it was limited to the extent that he could neither have been working in a living tradition nor have relied on an extensive reading of Old English poetry (which is much the same thing).[37] Wherever and however Laȝamon acquired his acquaintance with the heroic tradition, the "purity" of his battle scenes does not approach the purity of his diction.

For most of the battle scenes Laȝamon introduces few changes to his source, which follows a standard thematic pattern: the conflict begins with an exhortation by the leader followed by the confrontation and attack, which is sometimes followed by descriptions of individual struggles.[38] Laȝamon may alter or add small details to his source while leaving the main action intact. For example, in a typical passage in *Brut* Wace tersely summarizes a battle by saying that the Anglo-Saxon army was conquered and that its leaders, Octa and Eosa, were killed:

> E cil venqui ki veintre dut;
> Vencu fu e ocis Octa
> E sis buens cusins Eosa.
> (8910–12)

Laȝamon does not pass up the opportunity to introduce twenty lines of detail that, along with vocabulary and verse form, give the battle a distinctly Old English flavor, especially in the initial onslaught:

> Cnihtes gunnen riden: gæres gunnen gliden.
> breken brædе speren br(u)sleden sceldes.
> helmes þer scenden: scalkes feollen.
> Þe Bruttes weoren balde: ⁊ bisie to fihten.
> ⁊ þa hæðene hundes: hælden to grundе.
> Þer wes islaȝen Octa: Ebissa ⁊ Ossa.
> þer seouen-tene þusend: siȝen into helle.
> (9755–61)[39]

English which above all others recalls the Old English heroic poetry," *Alliterative Poetry*, 2:20; see also Dorothy Everett, *Essays on Middle English Literature*, ed. Patricia Kean (Oxford, 1955), pp. 35–36; and Derek Pearsall, *Old English*, p. 112.

[36] See, for example, Pearsall, *Old English*, pp. 80–81, and Gillespy, *Layamon's Brut*, p. 418.

[37] The former view is advanced by Lewis, "Genesis," Amodio, "Lexicon," and Ritzke, "Microstructure" and "Macrostructure," and the latter by Gillespy, *Layamon's Brut*. While it may be impossible to disprove either theory, I am convinced that the evidence is stronger in support of the theory that Laȝamon's acquaintance with the past was acquired principally by antiquarian learning.

[38] See Gillespy's summary, *Layamon's Brut*, pp. 411–20.

[39] Translation: "Knights began to ride, spears began to glide; broad spears broke; shields shivered; helmets split there; warriors fell. The Britons were brave and busy in fighting, and the heathen hounds sank to the ground. There Octa, Ebissa, and Ossa were slain; there seventeen thousand journeyed to hell."

The shifting perspectives convey a sense of the confusion and fury of battle that is not found in Wace. This same technique, used with the same effect in Old English poems such as *Beowulf* and *Maldon,* gives the battle a touch of dramatic realism lacking in Wace.[40] However, the changes La3amon introduces do not affect the outcome of the main action: the victims are the same; the victorious army is the same. His touches here are typical. In fact the rhyming formula "cnihtes gunnen riden: gæres gunnen gliden" is repeated, with slight variations, in a number of battle scenes.[41]

Besides La3amon's antiquarian sentiment, this passage also illustrates the fundamental irony of *Brut* which Borges relished. Here the victors, celebrated in poetry reminiscent of Old English verse, are led by Uther, a Celtic hero and the father of Arthur. The foes are Anglo-Saxon invaders, one of whom is the son of Hengest, the legendary invader of Britain. Even though La3amon initially praises Hengest as the most splendid of all knights, he later condemns him with the phrase "Hængest þe leod-swike," "the meaning of which," writes Stanley, "lies somewhere between 'the archtraitor' and 'the traitor of nations.'"[42] But more to the point here, La3amon puts the Anglo-Saxons in the role of villains at the same time he imitates the verse that perpetuated the fame of Germanic heroes such as Hengest. I will return to this problem in the second part of this essay.

At times La3amon's changes in battle scenes go beyond the linguistic exercise of translating from Norman French to an archaistic English. He consistently changes Wace's modern Norman arms and fighting style to something more reminiscent of the preconquest Anglo-Saxons, even to the extent of transforming chivalric knights into Germanic foot soldiers. In one episode, for instance, Arthur is besieging Frolle, the king of the Gauls, within Paris. The citizens, who are dying from hunger, plead with their leader to come to terms with Arthur. Instead, Frolle challenges Arthur to single combat, the winner to receive all France. Arthur happily agrees. The fight is set to take place on an island in the river. The armies of the contending sides are ranged along opposite banks. As Wace describes it, the fight is a joust; and he relishes the technique involved in the charge. He writes,

> Quant il furent apareillied,
> De dous parz se sunt esluinied;
> Esporunant, rednes laschiees,
> Escuz levez, lances baissees,
> S'entr'alerent entreferir
> Amdui, de merveillus aïr.
> (10041–46)[43]

[40] See Alain Renoir, "Point of View and Design for Terror in *Beowulf*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 63 (1962), 154–67.

[41] On formulas in La3amon, see J. S. P. Tatlock, "Epic Formulas," and the series by H. C. Wyld, "Studies in the Diction of La3amon's *Brut*," *Language* 6 (1930), 1–24; 9 (1933), 47–71, 171–91; 10 (1934), 149–201; 13 (1937), 29–59, 194–327; and Pilch, *Layamons "Brut,"* pp. 97–135.

[42] "Sentiments," p. 34.

[43] "When they were ready and separated at two ends, they struck their spurs, loosened the reins, and, with raised shield and lance at rest, hurtled together with marvelous violence."

Little of this technical detail survives in Laȝamon. In just two lines he describes how the warriors prepare for the charge:

> heo quehten heore scaftes: kine-wurðe cnihtes.
> heo græneden heore steden: gode cnihtes heo weoren.
> (11930–31)[44]

Arthur wears chain mail ("ibroiden of stele," 11859), and he and Frolle brandish ("quehten") their spears overhead. While neither of these details is necessarily anachronistic in the military reality of Laȝamon's time, when sturdier armor and couched lances were being adopted at a gradual rate, they would probably have struck Laȝamon's first readers as throwbacks to an earlier age.[45] To readers with an acquaintance of thirteenth-century romances, Laȝamon's martial conventions would be thoroughly outdated. In both accounts Arthur defeats Frolle, but in Wace what brings down Frolle is Arthur's superior technique:

> E Artur ad Frolle feru
> Desuz la bucle de l'escu,
> De sun cheval l'ad luin porté
> Tant cum hanste li ad duré.
> (10049–52)[46]

Arthur aims his lance accurately and knocks his opponent over the horse's back; in this context the detail that the lance does not break is crucial. Laȝamon overlooks the technical precision of Wace:

> Arður smat Frolle: mid feond-stronge maine:
> uppen þene sceld hehȝe:
> and þe stede þe wes god: leop ut i þe ulod.
> (11939–41)[47]

Here the strength of Arthur's blow, not its accuracy, unhorses Frolle. Laȝamon has gone beyond rendering his French source in English words and clothing it with antique sentiment. In a compromise between the typical Old English battle scene that pits foot soldiers against each other and Wace, who makes Arthur and Frolle mounted knights, Laȝamon puts two foot soldiers on horseback. The narrative seems to become more vigorous after Arthur and Frolle have lost their mounts and fight each other on foot (lines 11949–69). Yet whether on foot or on horseback, the fighting style would seem archaistic to Laȝamon's contemporary audience, and even antichivalric. Such archaizing should not be taken as equivalent to regression in literary value; Chaucer, as C. S. Lewis argues in an influential study, medievalized

[44] "They, the noble knights, brandished their spears; they urged on their steeds. They were good knights."

[45] See Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford, 1984), pp. 184–88.

[46] "And Arthur struck Frolle directly on the boss of his shield so that he was carried over the back of his horse as long as the lance shaft held."

[47] "Arthur struck Frolle high on the shield with ferocious strength, and the good steed leaped into the water."

his "renaissance" source for *Troilus and Criseyde*, Boccaccio's *Il filostrato*, and in his hands the story gained in subtlety and complexity.[48]

Another episode shows even more clearly how Laȝamon prefers the Anglo-Saxon foot soldier to his mounted, chivalric counterpart. Belin and Brennes, two brothers who share the rule of Gaul and Britain, decide to conquer Rome for the remarkable reason that they wanted

> to wreken o þon folke: Remus þene feire.
> þe Romulus his broðer: in Rome of-sloh.
> þer bi-foren fele ȝere.
> (2613–15)[49]

After forcing the city to submit to them without a fight, the brothers exact tribute and keep hostages to ensure that the Roman citizens adhere to the terms. But soon the Romans revolt, and the brothers return with an army to punish them. When the British army fails to breach the walls, they erect gallows and hang the hostages in full sight of the city. The Romans become furious and plan to counterattack. Their troops are reinforced by the unanticipated arrival of the armies of Gabius and Prosenna, who had been engaged in another war. After the initial onslaught, Belin and Brennes order their forces to retreat in order to reorganize. Geoffrey of Monmouth, the immediate source for Wace, is quite brief in his account of their regrouping: "admodum anxiati socios hortari coeperunt, atque in turmas resociare."[50] Wace elaborates on this summary and volunteers more details about how the men are divided and deployed:

> Des plus hardiz, des plus aidables
> Firent maistres e constables
> A chescune eschiele par sei,
> Quis face tenir en conrei.
> Les plus hardiz combateors
> Mistrent avant as fereors;
> Lez cels firent destre e senestre
> Arbelastiers e archiers estre.
> Le mielz de lur gent e le plus
> Descendirent des chevals jus,
> En mi le champ furent a pied
> Ordeneement e rengied.
> (3119–30)[51]

Wace divides his soldiers into four groups: the cavalry, the crossbowmen, the archers, and the newly formed troop of foot soldiers. In the ensuing battle

[48] "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*," *Essays and Studies* 17 (1932), 56–75.

[49] "To avenge on the people the fair Remus, whom his brother Romulus killed in Rome many years ago."

[50] "The distraught leaders began to exhort their comrades and reorganized them in ranks." J. A. Giles, ed., *Galfredi Monumentensis Historia Britonum* (1842; repr. New York, 1967), p. 47.

[51] "The bravest and most ablebodied became leaders and chief officers, each given a body of troops who were formed in a company. The bravest fighters advanced before the troops; those on the right and left side were crossbowmen and archers. Most of the men and the best dismounted and were deployed on foot in ranks on the field."

the tactic of diversified, coordinated forces is as much responsible for victory as the bravery of the soldiers. The corresponding passage in Laȝamon departs markedly from both Wace and Geoffrey. It is no longer a narrative description at all, but a hortatory speech by Belin and Brennes:

> Lihteð of eowre blanken. and stondeð on eowre sconken:
> and kerueð eowre spere longe. ⁊ makiet heom scorte: ⁊ stronge:
> scradieð eower sceldes. al of þe smal enden:
> and we eow wulleð bi-foren. libben oðer liggen:
> ⁊ auer-alc god mon: harde hine sulue.
> for her scullen þe wædlen: alle i-wurðen riche.
> (2924–29)[52]

In a complete reversal of his source, Laȝamon substitutes an older form of fighting for Wace's modern, complex tactics. All of his *cnihtes* dismount; he does not mention archers or crossbowmen. The foot soldiers form a single troop reminiscent of an Old English shield wall.[53] His simplification of battlefield strategy, though extensive in this case, is consistent with smaller changes Laȝamon introduces throughout his chronicle which allow more scope for individual heroism.[54]

Though greatly outnumbered, the British rout the Romans, slay Gabius, and capture Prosenna. To drive his point home, Laȝamon adds an explanation not found in Geoffrey or Wace:

> Mid þe forwarde monnen: ut wenden Prosenna.
> Gabius him com æfter: mid fifti hundred cnihtes.
> mid alle heore wepnen: þe weoren vniwælde.
> Þa oðere weoren swifte: heore wepnen weoren lihte.
> heo leiden to-gadere: ⁊ feon-liche fuhten.
> Weoren heo of Rome: alle ridinde.
> þa o(ð)ere a-foten: and fengen heom to-ȝæines.
> and slowen alle heore hors: here hæp wes þe lættere.
> Gabius heo slowe: Prosenna heo nomen.
> heo duden heore wille: of þan Rom-monen.
> alle heo slowen: þat heom aȝen stoden.
> (2941–51)[55]

[52] "Alight from your horses and stand on your legs and cut off your long spears and make them short and strong; cut off the short end of your shields, and we will either live or lie dead in front of you. And let every good man steel himself, because all the poor will become wealthy here."

[53] Elsewhere Laȝamon explicitly mentions the shield wall (*sceld-trume*), as, for example, in line 8171, where Aurelius the Briton uses one against Hengest the Anglo-Saxon, and less than fifty lines later (8216) Hengest uses one against Aurelius.

[54] In other passages Laȝamon reveals an aversion to technological details, such as the siege machines used in taking Cirencester (lines 14597–618), and instead relies exclusively on the story of the burning sparrows.

[55] "Prosenna went out with the vanguard, and Gabius came after him with five thousand knights with all their weapons, which were unwieldy. The [Britons] were swift, their weapons were light. They rushed together and fought ferociously. All those from Rome were riding; the others were on foot and met them and killed all their horses: their fate was the worse. They killed Gabius and captured Prosenna, and had their way with the Romans. They killed all that stood against them."

According to Laȝamon's account, light armor and short spears become an advantage because they give greater mobility. Heavily armed and mounted knights are at a disadvantage. Whether Laȝamon's nostalgic view is militarily correct or not is largely irrelevant.[56] His preference for the lightly armored foot soldier, reminiscent of the heroic warrior in Old English verse, is motivated by the same antiquarian sentiment that leads him to adopt an archaistic vocabulary and alliterative verse.

The changes in the Belin and Brennes episode are more extensive than in most other battle passages. Usually Laȝamon restricts himself to changes of small details, such as those in lines 9755–61 discussed earlier and those listed in the following catalogue by Frances Gillespy: "The combination of concrete detail with the semi-personification of strife and sorrow; the insistence on the part of fate (some equivalent of 'the fated men fell' occurs in almost every battle), the spirit in which the battle is conceived — of acceptance of destiny, of victory or death (*libben oðir liggen*), of grim joy that reveals itself in the fierceness of onset, and in the characteristic *play* and *game* as synonyms for battle; the absence of elaborated metaphor when the battle is in full swing; the alliterative measure that emphasizes every important detail of the clash of onset — all are reminiscent of Old English poetry."[57] Laȝamon introduces still other changes that, while used in the Old English tradition, are not exclusively part of that tradition. Important examples are speeches and dialogues, which, though found in many medieval battle narratives such as the chansons de geste, fit neatly into his strategy for archaizing the battle scenes in a way that evokes Old English poetry.

Laȝamon added about twenty to thirty times as many lines of direct speech as he found in Wace. And rather than an equivalent change from Wace's to Laȝamon's narrative styles, they are seen by many as one of the ways Laȝamon improves his source: they add drama, realism, and psychological complexity to his characters.[58] In Laȝamon's battle passages I distinguish two kinds: the exhortation and the boast. The exhortation by Belin and Brennes (lines 2924–29, quoted above) has three parts: they swear to "live or lie" in the front ranks, tell the men to "steel themselves," and conclude by holding out the promise of plunder. The motivation is unclear (is it desperation? plunder?), but in many ways this exhortation is typical of others in the *Brut*: the leaders simply rally the men to battle. A similar exhortation is given by Hengest:

[56] See, for instance, Lynn White, jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (Oxford, 1962), who argues that shock combat was a revolutionary innovation in battle. J. F. Verbruggen, on the other hand, acknowledges the rapid spread of heavy cavalry after the ninth century throughout western Europe (except in England), but points out how well-trained foot soldiers were able to defeat cavalry on a number of occasions, such as the battle of Courtrai in 1302; see *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, from the Eighth Century to 1340*, trans. Sumner Willard and S. C. M. Southern, Europe in the Middle Ages 1 (Amsterdam, 1977), pp. 150–73.

[57] *Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 417–18.

[58] See Lewis, "Genesis," p. 29; Gillespy, *Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 464–67; Michael Swanton, *English Literature before Chaucer*, Longman Literature in English Series (London, 1987), p. 183.

Nulle ich na mare fleon! ah nu ich wulle fihten
. . . . . .
⁊ ȝif we hom ne falleð! þænne beon we fæie.
ilæid on felde! ⁊ freonde bidælde.
(8209, 8213–14)[59]

This one is perhaps even closer to Old English models, not through conscious imitation but perhaps because Hengest's situation is so desperate that he can hold out no motivation to his men except the will to live.

In Old English, on the other hand, an appeal to honor is a fundamental part of the exhortation and derives from a well-defined heroic ethos. Perhaps the most famous and explicit examples of heroic exhortations are interspersed among the speeches of Byrhtnoth's loyal retainers in *The Battle of Maldon* beginning with Ælfwine (lines 211–24). Even in less explicit examples the exhortation presupposes that the warrior is honor bound to act, as, for example, in the following lines from *The Battle of Finnsburh*:

Ac onwacnigeað nu, wigend mine,
habbað eowre linda, hicgeaþ on ellen,
winnað on orde, wesað onmode!
(10–12)[60]

The connotative meanings of *ellen* and *onmod* depend to a large extent on the heroic ethos, so that explicit mention of honor is superfluous. This ethos seems to be beyond Laȝamon's recall, and his failure to evoke it is not limited to exhortations.

The same shortcomings emerge in the second kind of direct speech, the heroic boast. In Old English poetry a boast, usually expressed either as *bēot* or *gielp*, is a formal utterance that combines the meanings of boast, promise, and vow.[61] When Beowulf, for instance, boasts that he will kill Grendel in hand-to-hand combat, he is honor bound to fulfill his *beot* or die in the effort. And if Grendel kills him, his honor is not diminished. In *Maldon* the warriors who stay to fight after Byrhtnoth has been slain are reminded of their boasts by Ælfwine:

Gemunu þa mæla þe we oft æt meodo spræcon,
þonne we on bence beot ahofon,
hæleð on healle, ymbe heard gewinn;
nu mæg cunnian hwa cene sy.
(212–15)[62]

[59] "I will flee no more but now I will fight. . . . And if we do not fell them, then we will be doomed, laid on the field and deprived of friends."

[60] From *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Dobbie, p. 3; trans.: "Awaken now, my warriors, take your shields; think of deeds of valor; contend in the front; be resolute!"

[61] This meaning is reflected in *bēot*'s etymology (<**bi-hāt*); see Alistair Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959), §238.2.c.

[62] "I recall the speeches that we often spoke over mead, when we, warriors on the bench in the hall, raised boasts concerning fierce conflict; now one can find out who is brave" (*Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, ed. Dobbie, p. 13). Following Fred C. Robinson ("Some Aspects of the *Maldon* Poet's Artistry," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 75 [1976], 35–37), I retain the manuscript reading "gemunu" as an old form of the first-person present singular.

Here as elsewhere in Old English a boast is a formal utterance, often part of a ceremony involving the drinking of mead.

Warriors in *Brut* often make boastful speeches or challenges, but the formal, honor-bound nature has been radically weakened. Where the older meaning of *beot* is a combination of boast, promise, and vow, its primary meaning in *Brut*, according to Madden's glossary and the *Middle English Dictionary*, is "threat." In the following passage, for example, *beot* has no reference to ceremonial boasting:

> Helmes þer gullen: beornes þer ueollen.
> sceldes gunnen scenen: scalkes gunnen swelten.
> at þan forme rese: fifti þusende.
> baldere beornen: heore *beot* wes þæ lasse.
> (15590–93)

Madden translates: "Helms there resounded, knights there fell; shields gan shiver, warriors gan perish; at the first assault fifty thousand bold men, — their *threatening* was the less!" The distinction may seem slight but it is telling. The warrior who utters a threat is not as obliged to fulfill it as much as he is to fulfill a vow, which is more solemn.[63] A threat is directed only at the enemy. A vow, too, is directed at the enemy, but failing to fulfill it would ruin the all-important honor of the Old English warrior. A man may utter an idle threat, but a warrior may never utter an idle *beot*. It is a clear example of a speech act.

The other Old English word for boast, *gielp*, appears as *ȝælp* in *Brut* as well as in a few other Middle English works, where it means a simple boast (that is, not formal or honor bound).[64] Like *beot*, *ȝælp* lost its heroic connotations by the thirteenth century, but the semantic weakening is more extensive with *beot*, and Laȝamon used it at a time when the word was falling out of use. In fact, Laȝamon's *Brut* is the only Middle English work where *beot* survives, but its final occurrence there carries more than the obvious philological interest. As much as any other word, *beot* evoked a cluster of connotations that were central to the Old English heroic ethos, such as ceremonious boasting, honor, loyalty, comitatus, and courage. The word's gradual semantic weakening and eventual disappearance in early Middle English is a solid clue that the old ethos was lost before Laȝamon's attempt to resuscitate it.

The Otho Reviser, who eliminated much of the archaic-sounding poeticisms of the original, almost always avoided using *beot*. Whether he omitted it because it was too old-fashioned for his tastes or for another reason can only be conjectured. Forms of *beot* appear fifteen times in the longer Caligula version. The Otho Reviser deleted six passages where the word occurs; damage to the manuscript has obscured two more places. For another five he substituted five words: *thret*, *broc* ("threat"), *prude*, *bolde wordes*, and *drede*.

[63] On the formal and ceremonial characteristics of a *beot*, see the discussion by Fred C. Robinson in *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville, 1985), pp. 66–67 and 74–80.

[64] The *Middle English Dictionary* gives examples from, among others, *Dame Sirith*, line 227; *The Owl and the Nightingale*, lines 567, 608; and *Sawles Ward*, line 212. It survives in Modern English as "yelp," the ultimate deterioration from its original heroic meaning.

The disparity among the meanings of the five substitute words suggests that the Otho Reviser was unsure of the exact meaning of *beot*. On two occasions, however, he retained it (lines 11813 and 11817, quoted below). Both fall in the same passage, and, interestingly, on these two occasions the use of the word comes close to the Old English meaning of vow, promise, and boast. These are also the only instances in which the word refers to a speech in which a warrior formally states his *beot*. In all the other uses of the word, it refers to a boast or threat in a general sense, and it may not refer to an utterance at all. (A warrior's charge, for instance, can be his *beot* or threat.) The two occurrences are in a passage after Frolle challenges Arthur to single combat. (This episode was discussed earlier.) Arthur agrees to the fight and sets the time for the next day. Then he adds,

> And whaðer unker þe geð abake: ⁊ þis feoht wulle for-sake.
> beon he in ælche londe: iqueðe for ane sconde.
> þenne mæie me singe: of ane swulche kinge.
> þe his *beot* haueð imaked: and his cniht-scipe for-saken.
> Þæt iherde Frolle: þe king wes of France.
> þat Arður fehten wolden: him-seolf buten cnihte.
> Strong mon wes Frolle: and sterc mon on mode.
> and his *beot* imaked hafde: bi-foren al his duȝeðe.
> and [h]e ne mihte: for scome muchelen: scenden hine seoluen.
> bi-læuen his balde *ibeot*: þat he i burh hafde iseid.
> (11810–19)[65]

(The third italicized word, *ibeot*, was omitted by the Otho Reviser.) This speech has the sound of an Old English boast: a vow to fight to the death, and the loss of honor to the coward who retreats. It is probably Laȝamon's invention, since it is not found in Wace or Geoffrey of Monmouth. However, there are still important differences between Frolle's actual boast (11769–92) and Arthur's summary of it (11803–13). First, Frolle says that he will fight only if Arthur agrees to it; second, he swears upon his sword and gives up hostages as if his word is not binding enough; and finally, he calls his boast a *forward* (11781; as does Arthur, 11806), that is, an agreement or covenant. What Arthur accepts as a *beot* or vow was delivered as a challenge, and a challenge is a vow with conditions attached. Ideally, the Old English warrior never qualifies his boast; it is absolute. Nevertheless, Arthur interprets Frolle's challenge as a formal *beot* in such a way that it comes close to the older meaning. In light of Arthur's interpretation of *beot* and the Otho manuscript's retention of two of the three occurrences of it in this short passage, the Otho Reviser, far from being unacquainted with *beot*, may have understood its older, more specialized meaning and reserved it for those occasions in which

[65] "'And whoever turns back and wants to forsake this fight will be in each land proclaimed a coward. Then men may sing of such a worthless king, that he had made his *beot* and forsaken his knighthood!' Frolle, who was king of France, heard that Arthur wanted to fight him without any knight. Frolle was a strong and courageous man and had made his *beot* before all his retainers, and he could not, because of the great shame, disgrace himself by forsaking his firm *ibeot* that he had said in the stronghold."

it approximates that meaning. As archaic as the word must have sounded to him, no other word would do.

Laȝamon's attempt to reanimate *beot,* which was of central significance in Old English heroic poetry, and the Otho Reviser's cautious treatment of it indicate that the word was truly archaic rather than archaistic in Laȝamon's time. If one wished to pinpoint when the Old English heroic tradition gave way to something else, a good choice for the terminus ante quem would be *Brut,* where *beot* has only the faintest echoes of the old ethos. It is convincing evidence that for Laȝamon the heroic tradition was a faltering memory.

Though I place a great deal of importance on the dissolution of formal boasting in Laȝamon's battle scenes, his recollection of other areas of Old English verse is faulty as well. His efforts to archaize his style fall short in the well-known features of apposition, enjambment, understatement, convoluted syntax, kennings.[66] A number of the classic heroic conventions do not appear at all in *Brut.* In the hundred or more battles, for instance, the beasts of battle are nowhere to be found.[67] Despite efforts to interpret feasting in the *Brut* as an expression of the comitatus, there is little of the ritual of the Anglo-Saxon mead hall;[68] no lord gives rings to his retainers, and retainers never swear loyalty to their leader. Arthur's knights, for example, who should represent the highest martial ideals, love him but fear him even more, because Arthur is capable of inflicting the most savage punishments against transgressors. Violence and treachery are commonplace, and unlike most Anglo-Saxon poets Laȝamon relishes itemizing the wounds suffered by warriors or by their innocent victims.[69] The armor worn by Laȝamon's knights may be splendid (like Arthur's, lines 11855–70), but it does not serve, like Beowulf's, as an external manifestation of inner virtues or physical prowess. Laȝamon never successfully replaces Wace's feudalism with a Germanic comitatus, and though he transforms his fighting men from Wace's *chevaliers,* he cannot complete the transition to the *Beowulf*-poet's *duguþa.* The heroic tradition is irrevocably beyond his grasp. Laȝamon is an antiquary, one of the first students of Old English literature.

At the beginning of this paper I quoted Borges on a fundamental inconsistency of Laȝamon's chronicle: he praises Celtic warriors in a poetic medium directly derived from their enemies, the Anglo-Saxon descendants of Hengest. It is inconceivable that Laȝamon was unaware of this inconsistency, yet

[66] J. S. P. Tatlock lists some of these shortcomings and situates the *Brut* in a tradition of poems in a popular style, which would include transition poems such as *Edgar, The Proverbs of Alfred,* and *The Body and Soul;* see "Laȝamon's Poetic Style and Its Relations," *The Manly Anniversary Studies in Language and Literature* (Chicago, 1923), pp. 8–11.

[67] See Gillespy, *Layamon's Brut,* p. 417, and Swanton, *Before Chaucer,* p. 183.

[68] See Gillespy, *Layamon's Brut,* pp. 401 and 499, where she cites the scene of Galerne in the banquet hall: "þæ quene bar to drinken: ⁊ alle hire bur-lutlen," line 15368.

[69] R. S. Loomis calls Laȝamon "a barbarian at heart" ("Layaman's *Brut,*" in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages,* ed. R. S. Loomis [Oxford, 1959], p. 107); see also Lewis, "Genesis," p. 27, and Swanton, *Before Chaucer,* pp. 181–82.

he sustained it over sixteen thousand lines of verse.[70] Viewing it from their vantage point of hindsight, twentieth-century scholars consider it Laȝamon's fundamental irony, and most have reconciled the irony by claiming that Laȝamon's sympathies were nationalistic. A recent study is quite explicit with this interpretation: Laȝamon's is "a national and not a racial history. . . . [T]he story is not of the Britons but of the land of Britain."[71] The history of England follows a recurring pattern of a population that is invaded, but that eventually absorbs the invaders into the heterogeneous British/English nation. The Germano-Celtic hostilities are part of the overriding "provisional pattern of transient fortune."[72] Thus Laȝamon's nationalistic sensibilities enabled him to overlook the contradiction in using a verse form, a poetic diction, and many literary themes that derive directly from Old English literature to chronicle the atrocities of the first Anglo-Saxons. He would see no inconsistency after declaring his intention (in the first few lines of the *Brut*) to recount the noble lineage of the English to proceed to tell the history of Celtic Britain. Both groups eventually become one nation.

This nationalist argument rings hollow because it suppresses the very opposition that Laȝamon sustained with such great and deliberate effort. The two key terms, irony and nationalism, are in different ways inapplicable to Laȝamon. No one argues that he was a consciously ironic poet.[73] Irony is part of the modern critical reception, yet it is precisely this irony that Laȝamon's nationalism is invoked to reconcile; unlike the irony, nationalism is considered a conscious part of his narrative strategy. Nationalism is difficult to define, but it is a sentiment that follows the shift of loyalties from the family, local community, or religious group to the state.[74] Conversely the

[70] R. S. Loomis claims Laȝamon "forgot about his promise to the reader": "Ironically enough, the poet who set out to celebrate the noble deeds of the English followed through to the end a book in which that race is held up for execration. . . . Ironically, too, it uses the language, the poetic form, and the style of the people it disparages" ("Layaman's *Brut*," p. 105). Derek Pearsall sees it arise from confusion: "there is no doubt that Laȝamon is at odds with himself for half the poem, confused to know where to place his sympathies" (*Old English*, p. 110).

[71] Swanton, *Before Chaucer*, p. 176. Most studies are not as explicit as Swanton, but use "national" in an imprecise way.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Shepherd, for example, writes that "it was possible for an English poet, born not much more than a century after the Conquest and writing in English and retaining some knowledge of Old English poetic methods, to take over the whole story of Brutus's Britain and present it without irony as the heroic record of his own race" ("Early Middle English Literature," p. 80). The phrase "without irony" implies irony from a modern perspective.

[74] I find it difficult to accept V. H. Galbraith's broad definition of a nation as "any considerable group of people who believe they *are* one; and their nationalism as the state of mind which sustains this belief," in "Nationality and Language in Medieval England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th ser., 23 (1941), 113. It allows him to speak of "provincial nationalities," where the qualification strains the usefulness of the concept. My definition of nationalism and the state follows Joseph R. Strayer, *On the Medieval Origins of the Modern State* (Princeton, 1970); see especially pp. 9–10, 109–10.

The first recorded use of the word "nation" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed., 1989) is from *Cursor mundi*, dated around 1300. The definition is relevant here: "I.1.a. An extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language, or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and

population comprising the state must include a variety of groups that once had narrower and often competing loyalties. For too many modern readers, La3amon's nationalism forms a crucial but unexamined assumption in their critical arguments and, as such, runs the risk of projecting anachronistic, modern political ideals on the medieval past. This assumption deserves closer scrutiny: when did nationalism became a recognizable sentiment in England, and when did other writers first employ it as part of a narrative strategy?

Even though historians disagree on what nationalism is and when it first appeared, all seem to agree that it first became recognizable after the 1230s. M. T. Clanchy sees an early form of nationalism overtaking the lay magnates in Henry III's reign; Maurice Powicke places its inception in Edward I's reign, specifically in the state crises of the 1290s; Joseph Strayer sees its seeds sown in the later Middle Ages but does not see it fully developed until the seventeenth century.[75] Elizabeth Salter makes a compelling case for considering the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as a period when England's self-identity is better described in terms of internationalism; it was an age when England's obsession with the Continent, especially in literary matters, was still strong.[76] So according to Clanchy, Powicke, and Strayer, the political loyalties of La3amon's age were less than national, and according to Salter the cultural affinities were more than national, so in neither case is the concept of nationalism available for La3amon's narrative strategies.

Nationalism makes a slow start in literature in England. Galbraith observes that "the proper source for the study of medieval national feeling in the twelfth century is the works of the Latin historians," but he concludes that such feeling took much longer to work its way into the vernaculars, and the connection between the vernacular and nationalism did not develop until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[77] In her study of Anglo-Norman romances, Susan Crane detects a strong tension between the earlier, feudal allegiances and the nascent nationalism of late-thirteenth-century England. "Yet even when nationalism is an important force in romances of English heroes, a strong underlying allegiance to the political ideals of the barony remains."[78]

There is no internal evidence in the *Brut* that nationalism was a concept that appealed to La3amon or, for that matter, to his audience. If La3amon truly wanted his chronicle to affirm national unity, it is hard to explain why he would choose a diction and style that draw so heavily from Old English

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occupying a definite territory. In early examples the racial idea is usually stronger than the political; in recent use the notion of political unity and independence is more prominent."

[75] M. T. Clanchy, *England and Its Rulers, 1066–1272: Foreign Lordship and National Identity* (Oxford, 1983), pp. 241–44; Maurice Powicke, *The Thirteenth Century, 1216–1307*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1962), pp. 257–58; Strayer, *Medieval Origins*, pp. 57–111.

[76] Salter, *English and International*, pp. 1–74.

[77] Galbraith, "Nationality and Language," pp. 114, 122. His claim for the appearance of national feeling in the twelfth century should be qualified in light of his vague definition of nationalism.

[78] Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature* (Berkeley, 1986), p. 67.

literature and (with some isolable exceptions) eschew overt French influence. The anti-Anglo-Saxon content is clothed in an Anglo-Saxon style. Moreover, the competing parties in his chronicle are defined by race (*leoden*), and he is careful to keep the two main races, the *Brutten* and the *Anglen*, distinct.[79] Their relationship never approaches the unity of nationhood. In fact, the chronicle ends with the last ruler of the Britons, the last threat to Anglo-Saxon hegemony, being chased into Wales. Laȝamon concludes his chronicle, "and they dwell there still as they will forever. And English kings (*Æn̄glisce kinges*) ruled those lands, and the Britons (*Bruttes*) lost it — this land and those people — so that afterwards they were never kings here" (lines 16090–93). In the *Brut* language, style and racial groupings have a retrospective and nostalgic insistence in comparison with the cosmopolitan literary and social complexity of thirteenth-century England.[80] All the evidence, internal and external, undermines the argument that nationalism was a part of the *Brut*'s narrative strategy.

Laȝamon's nationalism, like his irony, is a modern invention. It is the product of a generation of scholars primarily from the first half of this century (Gillespy, Oakden, Wyld, Tatlock, Lewis, Everett) who assumed that Laȝamon's sense of Englishness was similar to their own sense of nationhood. Long after the fallacy of equating linguistic consciousness with national consciousness was pointed out by Galbraith in 1941, the tendency persists and can often be detected in the way that the adjective "English" slips from the language to the nation.[81] Examples could be multiplied, but even a cautious scholar like E. G. Stanley calls Laȝamon a "most English" poet, a phrase that conceals a nationalist sentiment.[82] If it is meant to suggest degrees of "Englishness" in language (a questionable concept itself), the substitutions of the Otho Reviser support just the opposite conclusion: Laȝamon's language was *less* English than that of his contemporaries. Because "English" in such a phrase cannot refer to the language, it encourages an interpretation of Laȝamon as a poet of the English nation. Others in a more romantic vein have looked upon Laȝamon as a kind of resistance fighter against the linguistic invasions of the French language, which becomes the equivalent of seeing him as the defender of a national literature.

The modern canonization of Laȝamon as a poet of the English nation is analogous to Laȝamon's own attempt to resuscitate the Anglo-Saxon traditions of English verse. Both are efforts to place a text in literary origins, one national and the other racial, but neither could succeed. Modern scholars overlook the fact that the English language was no less "English" even after

[79] There are two apparent slips, both changed by the Otho Reviser. In 7107, C reads "a þet come Densce men: and driuen ut þa Bruttes," where O reads "cnihtes" for "Bruttes." The second one appears in line 14297, which I will discuss at the end of the essay.

[80] On the English sense of racial identity, see below, pp. 560–61.

[81] V. H. Galbraith, "Nationality and Language," pp. 113–28. Perhaps the most sustained example of this fallacy is R. W. Chambers, *On the Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and His School*, EETS 191A (London, 1932).

[82] "Sentiments," p. 34.

the introduction of French vocabulary and that English national sentiment was still decades, if not centuries, away.

If La3amon is not a poet of English nationalism, and if he is too astute a writer to make an "ethnographic howler"[83] in vilifying the Anglo-Saxons in a verse form derived from Old English, then how are we to view the incompatibility between his style and content? In place of irony, I suggest considering this relationship in terms of ambivalence, which has the advantage of preserving the clash without promoting one side over the other. Ambivalence and irony, after all, have much in common. They both result from oppositions between such pairs as family and nation, fate and free will, principles and compromise, moral standards and actual behavior — or in this case between literary style and content. In irony one side of this opposition holds the upper hand, or a higher principle reconciles the oppositions, but there is always a resolution. In this light it is revealing that Borges the Argentinian reconciles the irony the former way, by promoting La3amon's abhorrence of his own Anglo-Saxon heritage. Most Anglo-American scholars, by contrast, choose the latter course and neutralize the opposition by reconciling it under the higher principle of English nationalism.

Ambivalence preserves the opposition. The two sides are at an equilibrium, a tension pulling in two directions. La3amon, I believe, recognized the ambivalent signals in using an Anglo-Saxon verse style to compose a long anti-Anglo-Saxon tract. Far from neutralizing the opposition, he took pains to heighten the racial antipathies, and in doing so perhaps he was trying to direct the attention of his contemporary English readers to a powerful historical analogy: just as the Britons had been punished for their wickedness by the invasions of the Anglo-Saxons, so the Anglo-Saxons were punished by the Norman Conquest.[84]

This strategy of viewing the history of the island of Britain in terms of divine salvation and retribution goes back as far as the middle of the sixth century, to Gildas's *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae.* It was continued and expanded by later historians, most notably Bede. As Robert Hanning observes in his admirable study of this tradition, Gildas developed a method of historiography "that was indelibly stamped with the impress of religious ideas, developed in a typological manner through an exegetical method. By a strange accident of history, Gildas imposed a form upon British history which lived on in the medieval historical imagination for at least the next five hundred years."[85] La3amon, through the lineage of Bede, the *Historia Brittonum,* and Geoffrey of Monmouth, was a direct descendant of this historiographical tradition. It was not, however, limited to chroniclers; in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos,* Wulfstan specifically invokes Gildas and his tradition: "There

[83] The phrase (though not the opinion) is Stanley's, "Sentiments," p. 33.

[84] This view has been advanced by Lewis, "Genesis"; Everett, "Earliest Middle English"; and Stanley, "Sentiments," who confuse the issue, however, by interpreting the history of the Anglo-Saxons as part of a national history.

[85] *The Vision of History in Early Britain* (New York, 1966), p. 61. For a recent and comprehensive study of this tradition see Nicholas Howe, *Migrations and Myth-Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Haven, 1989). The following argument draws heavily from these studies.

was a historian in the times of the Britons, called Gildas, who wrote about their misdeeds, how with their sins they angered God so excessively that finally he allowed the army of the English to conquer their land and to destroy the host of the Britons entirely."[86] Twelfth-century Latin historians, such as Florence of Worcester and William of Malmesbury, breathed new life into the tradition and expanded the scope of historical analogy to include the conquest. "It is these historians," writes Geoffrey Shepherd, "who interpreted the Norman Conquest to later generations. To them the world of the Anglo-Saxons had acquired the distance of an ancien régime over which they are inclined to moralize. The last king of the English is turned into the saintly figure of Edward the Confessor. Duke William becomes an instrument of the wrath of God upon a sinful people."[87]

In the broadest terms, writers from Gildas to William of Malmesbury established an Anglo-Saxon historiographical tradition that Laȝamon inherited independent of Wace. We cannot know which of them Laȝamon may have read, but it seems impossible that he could escape their influence altogether. The nearby Worcester cathedral library, for example, contained a copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (believed to be used by Florence), a copy of Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi* (in a homiliary glossed by the "tremulous hand"), and a copy of the Old English translation of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*.[88] Moreover, Laȝamon claims that he traveled "wide ȝond þas leode" and used as one of his sources "þa Englisca boc: þa makede Seint Beda" (lines 14, 16). Though Laȝamon used very little of the historical information in Bede (if any at all), it is quite possible that he used it, not as a source of facts, but as a model for historical interpretation.[89]

The development of this tradition makes it easier to understand Laȝamon's cultural ambivalence. In the sixth century Gildas created his eschatological interpretation of the defeat of the Britons at the hand of the Anglo-Saxons in order to make sense of the past; in the eighth century Bede made it essential in Anglo-Saxon historiography; in 1014 Wulfstan adapted it as a prophetic warning to prevent an analogous defeat of the Anglo-Saxons at

[86] "An þeodwita wæs on Brytta tidum, Gildas hatte, se awrat be heora misdædum, hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinnan ⁊ Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle" (ed. Dorothy Whitelock, Methuen's Old English Library, 3rd ed. [New York, 1966], lines 184–88; I have substituted the letter *w* for wynn). The translation is from *English Historical Documents, c. 500–1042*, ed. Dorothy Whitelock, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), p. 859.

[87] "Early Middle English Literature," p. 70.

[88] The manuscripts are, respectively, London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.iv; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113; and Cambridge, University Library, Kk.3.18 (numbers 192, 331, and 23 in Ker's *Catalogue*).

[89] The other source cited by Laȝamon, "Seinte Albin" and "þe feire Austin," may refer to a manuscript containing works both by Alcuin (i.e., Albin) and Augustine (Stanley, "Sentiments," pp. 31–32). Though Alcuin cites Gildas's interpretation of the defeat of the Britons in his letter to Archbishop Ethelhard after the sacking of Lindisfarne in 793, it is unlikely that Laȝamon knew of this letter. Stanley's identification of "Seinte Albin" with Alcuin is not entirely convincing since it may mean St. Alban, the first British martyr, whom Laȝamon refers to at lines 5437 and 9708.

the hands of the Scandinavians; the twelfth-century Latin historians and Laȝamon lived in an age that saw Gildas's historiography vindicated and Wulfstan's prophecy fulfilled, with the Norman victors as the instruments of God's punishment. The roles have shifted and the Anglo-Saxon conquest is no longer the most recent one, but the movement of history is the same. In an early passage, before Julius Caesar invades the island and after the only reference to the Normans, Laȝamon reveals his cyclical view of history: "Thus has all this land fared, for foreign races (*uncuðe leoden*) who have conquered this land were then driven out, and others who were foreign seized it" (lines 3549–51). By the time Laȝamon was writing, not only had history come full circle, but it had done so several times.

A related but separate influence in Laȝamon's conception of history concerns the racial identity of the Anglo-Saxons. By "race" (Laȝamon's *leod*) I do not mean a narrow definition simply based on birth but one that adds to it a cluster of associations that include language, social structures, and a common myth of origin. The myth of origin plays a prominent part in Anglo-Saxon historiographical writings, as Nicholas Howe has recently demonstrated. He characterizes the myth as "an account of that ancestral past which, despite any evidence to the contrary, gives a group its irreducible common identity. And," he continues, "for the Anglo-Saxons, there was considerable evidence that they were a loose amalgam of shifting kingdoms and dialect groups rather than a cohesive people."[90] The myth that gave this loose amalgam its common identity was the migration of a group of Germanic tribes from the Continent to the island, or the *adventus Saxonum:* "The English could see themselves as a þeod ['people, race, tribe'] because they shared a memory of migration."[91] This identity distinguished them from, for example, later Germanic settlers, such as the Scandinavians, as well as from the Anglo-Normans. It also distinguishes their identity as a people from that of a modern nation. The migration provides a central point of reference both in Bede's history and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,* where it is invoked as a standard for measuring the magnitude of an event in phrasing that is almost formulaic. It is used, for example, in the entry for the murder of King Edward in 979: "And no worse deed than this for the English people was committed since first they came to Britain."[92] Similar phrasing occurs in the *Chronicle* poem *The Battle of Brunanburh* to describe how such masses had never been killed in battle since the "Engle and Seaxe" came to Britain and conquered the "Wealas." Parenthetically it adds, "as books, ancient scholars, tell us."[93] Though the Worcester copy of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was continued with entries recorded up to 1097, it was not necessary for Laȝamon

[90] Howe, *Migrations,* p. 5.

[91] Howe, *Migrations,* p. 12.

[92] "Ne wearð Angel cynne nan wærsa dæd ge don, þonne þeos wæs syððan hi ærest Bryton land ge sohton" (translation by Whitelock, quoted from Howe, *Migrations,* p. 30).

[93] "þæs þe us secgað bec, / ealde uðwitan," lines 68b–69a, in *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems,* p. 20. See the discussion by Howe, *Migrations,* pp. 30–31.

to discover his racial identity in it.[94] Following Wace and Geoffrey, his own chronicle details the *adventus Saxonum* and the establishment of Anglo-Saxon dominance.

The events of Laȝamon's *Brut* stop far short of 1066, yet Gildas's historiographical tradition and the migration myth provided powerful models to interpret the Norman Conquest as part of an overriding providential design. The island becomes not only a field on which different races (*leoden*) strive for dominance, but it is also the prize. In this light his archaistic Old English vocabulary and style would drive home the analogy between the English conquered by Normans and the Celts overrun by the Anglo-Saxons. The style and vocabulary are archaistic precisely because the old order has passed. They act as a common middle term that never lets Laȝamon's contemporary reader forget that the role of victims has shifted from the Britons to the postconquest Anglo-Saxons and that the role of victors has shifted from the Anglo-Saxons to the Normans. However hateful the invaders may be, they are the instruments of God's punishment, which has been brought on by the unrepentant behavior of the Anglo-Saxons and, earlier, the Britons. Because the tradition of historiographical typology was so pervasive, it was not necessary for Laȝamon to spell out the analogy in any detail; the clash between style and content was enough. (His reference to Bede as a source in line 16 is perhaps another clue.) This explanation does not depend solely on the opposition between the style and content of the Arthurian section of the chronicle, although this takes up two-thirds of the total and makes the strongest typological interpretation. Laȝamon's use of an old style *by itself* evokes memories of an Anglo-Saxon golden age, and his reluctance to use French words *by itself* draws attention to the linguistic and (by extension) political changes of postconquest England. Thus the contrast between the Anglo-Saxon past and present operates even outside the Arthurian section, because Laȝamon draws attention to the literary and cultural complexity of his age precisely in its absence from his archaistic language and style.

Fitting the Norman Conquest into a vision of salvation history presumably would make the change in fortune for Laȝamon's contemporaries comprehensible and easier to accept. They could draw solace in the belief that God's design shows his favor for the island and its inhabitants. At the same time, however, no interpretation could remove the resentment that Laȝamon and his dispossessed contemporaries must have felt at their loss of power.[95] His only reference to the Normans is a disparaging comment: "the Normans came with their evil guiles (*nið-craften*). . . . [T]hey blighted this land" (lines 3547–48). On the other hand, he had adapted to Norman culture at least to

[94] British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.iv.

[95] The sentiment is clear, for example, in *The First Worcester Fragment* from the late twelfth century. Clanchy quotes the bitter observation of William of Malmesbury in 1125 ("no Englishmen today is an earl or bishop or abbot; the newcomers gnaw at the wealth and the guts of England, nor is there any hope of ending this misery") and describes the persistence of the English identity as a distinct people well into the thirteenth century, when ideals of nationalism took root (*Rulers*, p. 241).

the extent of reading French literature and admiring Wace's *roman* enough to translate it.[96] In other respects the new order was advantageous. England was far more prosperous and the church far more vigorous in the thirteenth century than in the eleventh. Cultural ties with the Continent were strong. It may not be too fanciful to look on the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in England as being generally a time of social ambivalence, felt not only by the Anglo-Saxons but also by the Normans in England. Some Normans, for example, referred to themselves as English, even though they could not speak English, and Anglo-Norman ancestral romances sought to establish family histories in England by exploiting local traditions and inventing local ancestors.[97] It was a period when Anglo-Normans found themselves caught between competing allegiances. Clanchy offers an example of how the feudal practice of pledging loyalty to two or more leaders was losing ground: "The sons of William the Marshal or the sons of Simon de Montfort (the elder), who inherited lands on each side of the Channel, had to decide whether they were Englishmen or Frenchmen and they found that difficult. For men at the top the demands of [nascent] nationalism caused a crisis of personal identity."[98] Their hesitation in choosing sides is part of the ambivalence of being torn between changing political structures.

In addition to the prevailing ambivalence between La3amon's Anglo-Saxon style and anti-Anglo-Saxon content, one can draw other parallels between La3amon's contemporary situation and the historical past. One of the main lessons of the chronicle is that rulers, no matter how virtuous and powerful like Arthur, finally suffer defeat and die. Change is constant, and in the typological scheme history repeats itself as the guiding providential design unravels. At the same time, La3amon's writing style hearkens back to a golden age with classical, timeless ideals: a past preserved, however imperfectly, in the language of poetry. The lessons of history, then, taught La3amon to accept the Norman Conquest as part of the process of inevitable change, while poetry allowed him to draw solace from the nostalgic ideals of an Anglo-Saxon golden age.

One can see a similar ambivalence between the desire for permanence and the inevitability of change in language. La3amon's cultivation of an archaistic diction cleansed of foreign elements points to his desire for stability. He regards books as permanent repositories of wisdom,[99] and his disparaging

[96] "Wace could hardly be the only French poet he had read," Pearsall, *Old English*, p. 112. See also Salter, *English and International*, pp. 58–61.

[97] As an example of an Anglo-Norman who could not speak English, Swanton, *Before Chaucer*, p. 192, cites the example of Ordericus Vitalis, born in Shropshire. M. Dominica Legge discusses ancestral romances in *Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Backgrounds* (Oxford, 1963), esp. pp. 174–75 and 276. She also quotes an interesting passage from the ancestral romance *Waldef* which reveals another kind of ambivalence felt by the Normans toward the Anglo-Saxons: "Alas the country of England: the people who come from you are very ill-bred. They are such very silent people that they cannot speak to a woman, nor undertake their service. But they are very beautiful and well-made and there is much goodness in them" (Legge's translation).

[98] *Rulers*, pp. 258–59. See also his comments on Henry III, p. 260.

[99] He gives a hint of this in his reference to three authorities at the beginning of his chronicle, but even more explicitly in his references to the prophetic books of Sibel (lines 12547–48 and

comment about the Normans arises from his resentment of their "corruption" of the name of London.[100] On the other hand, he approves the change of the name of the island from Britain to England ("heo binomen heore namen al for Bruttene sceome," line 14681).[101] And in numerous passages he takes pains to chronicle the change of languages spoken by the inhabitants of the island and the naming and renaming of places.

In viewing the *Brut*'s incompatibility between style and content as part of Laȝamon's historical and cultural ambivalence, I have to disagree with Borges's claim that Laȝamon abhorred his racial heritage as well as with those who would downplay his racial sympathies by subsuming them under the rubric of nationalism. The closest Laȝamon comes to replacing racial antipathies with a unifying nationalism is in a crucial passage near the end, the climax of the Arthurian section, when the mortally wounded Arthur leaves his kingdom to Constantine, predicts that Queen Agante will take him to Avalon and heal his wounds, and promises to return:

> And seoðe ich cumen wulle. to mine kineriche.
> and wunien mid Brutten. mid muchelere wunne.
> (14281–82)[102]

Arthur says he will return to help the *British*, which is consistent with Laȝamon's racial vision of history, yet a few lines later Laȝamon restates the prophecy through Merlin: "þat an Arður sculde ȝete cum Anglen to fulste," that Arthur will come to help the *English* (line 14297). If this change is not a mistake as Madden believed,[103] then it may be an attempt by Laȝamon to extend Arthur's promise to the English as well as the British in a kind of paninsular gesture of unity against outsiders. Yet even if this interpretation is correct, it is the only such glimpse in Laȝamon and postpones the day of national unity to the dim and indefinite future. Laȝamon does not offer a unifying vision. He comes too late to be an Anglo-Saxon bard and too soon to be a nationalist poet. He remains caught between the old and the new, the Anglo-Saxon and the Anglo-Norman, in an age of competing allegiances, and from his middle position he balances the oppositions within the scheme of a historiographical tradition more complex than most of his modern admirers have allowed. Laȝamon does not abhor his Anglo-Saxon heritage — he cherishes it, but he does so in a way that justifies its decline. This is his final ambivalence.

16066). He also makes general references to the authority of books in lines 12114 and 13715. See Jesse Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca, 1985).

[100] Lines 3539–55. This sentiment is repeated in lines 1027–36 but with some regret for the passing of names that Brutus gave to towns.

[101] "They deprived them of their name, all to the disgrace of the Britons."

[102] "And afterwards I will come to my kingdom and dwell with the British with great joy."

[103] Madden, *Chronicle*, 3:510, glossarial note for line 28651: "*Anglen* — This is evidently an error for *Brutten*." The Otho version has "Bruttes" in this line. For another view see J. S. P. Tatlock, *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley, 1950), pp. 504–5.

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