Gwendolyn and Estrildis: Invading Queens in British Historiography

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According to Geoffrey of Monmouth, the twelfth-century author of the *Historia Regnum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*),[1] only twenty-three years after Roman Brutus settled the island of Albion by ridding it of giants, building a capital (*Troia Nova*, or *New Troy*), and decreeing laws, the British were beset by three invaders: Humber, the pillaging King of the Huns; Estrildis, a kidnapped Saxon princess; and Gwendolyn,[2] one of the first queens of Britain. Wace and Layamon,[3] two of Geoffrey's twelfth- and thirteenth-century vernacular translators, adapted the episode in their own histories, pursuing Geoffrey's investigation of British susceptibility to invasion and the different forms invaders take.[4] The episode begins with Humber's unsuccessful military invasion, an attack that allows the British to rally around a fallen leader and the protection of their land. In describing the British routing of Humber, all three historiographers investigate how invasion affects British unity, how possession of the land is critical to invasion, and how invaders can become righteous defenders. In doing so, they broaden the category of invader from the traditional template of the masculine warrior: invaders come as silent Saxon princesses and angry British queens as well as pillaging pirates. Kidnapped by Humber and beloved by Locrinus, a king of Britain, Estrildis invades from below the ground where Locrinus has hidden her, causing a civil war amongst the British and bearing an illegitimate child with claims to Locrinus' kingdom. Jilted by Locrinus in favor of Estrildis, Gwendolyn invades her husband's kingdom and restores temporary order to the British; her success depends on her fluid motion from queen to invader to civil war leader and finally to regent for her son. By fashioning Estrildis and Gwendolyn as invaders, both like and unlike Humber, Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon imagine the position of queen as powerful and potentially dangerous, intimately associated with invasion,

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possession of the land, and violence that can either unite the British or dissolve their tenuous unity.

Because this episode is infrequently treated by critics, a brief summary is useful: Brutus divided Britain amongst his three sons: Locrinus, Kamber, and Albanactus, Brutus' three sons, divided Britain amongst themselves.. Brutus' greatest ally, Corineus, a well-known giant wrestler and the descendant of a distinguished Trojan line, agreed to marry his daughter, Gwendolyn, to Locrinus, unifying their kingdoms and cementing the bond between the two families. In the meantime, Britain faced its first of many invaders. A successful pillager, Humber attacked the island and killed Albanactus, whose people fled to Locrinus. Battle ensued and Locrinus defeated Humber who drowned in a river that received his name for posterity.

While dividing the Hunnish booty among his own men, Locrinus discovered Estrildis, a daughter of the king of Germany, and planned to leave Gwendolyn for her. Threatened by Corineus, Locrinus married Gwendolyn, and secretly hid Estrildis in an underground cave where he could visit her. When Corineus died, he banished Gwendolyn to Cornwall, her family holding, and lived in public with Estrildis and Habren, their illegitimate daughter. Angry at her dismissal, Gwendolyn gathered an army and attacked the borders of Locrinus' territory; with Locrinus dead, Gwendolyn ruled Britain with great success as a regent for Maddan, her son by Locrinus. Leaving nothing to chance, she ordered Estrildis and Habren to be drowned in a river, which she named after Habren.

The first invader of Britain, Humber, king of the Huns, tried to take land that the British felt entitled to by prophetic decree; in defending their claim, the British men performed their ownership of the island. There is nothing subtle or ambiguous about Humber's assault—it comes in the most transparent military terms. In his *Brut*, Layamon dramatizes and romanticizes all moments of proto-British nationalism. His hyperbolic description of Humber and his henchmen is no exception:

> Æfterseouentene ȝere, sone þeræfter,
> Cum liðen to londe þat wes an leodisc king,
> [. . .]

vuele weoren his þewes, his þeines weoren kene.
He hefde moni lond awest and leodene biswikene
And moni hundred eitlonde þa weoren bi sæ-stronde,
Mesten-dal alle heonne to Alamaine.

[Once those seventeen years were passed, speedily after/ came traveling to this territory an alien tribal king,/[. . .] evil were his habits, his henchmen were very bold,/ He had laid waste many lands, and conquered those who lived there/ And many hundred islands more which lay beside the sea-shore,/ Nearly everyone of them from here to Germany.][5]

For Layamon, Humber is the perfect invader of Britain; a "leodisc king" whose evil ways and aggressive henchmen have helped him pillage hundreds of islands. Layamon transparently construes Humber as the opposite of the British: he raids for profit, destroying and conquering people and their lands and moving on. He is not settled like the virtuous British, nor does he travel with the aim of taking what is destined to be his.

When Albanac's fleeing army told Locrinus about the destruction of their land and the death of his brother, the king rallied his men and contacted Kamber to organize a unified military affront. Layamon's narration emphasizes how the battlefield exaggerated the polarity of the two sides, making it an ideal physical and ideological forum for the formulation of masculine British identity. Layamon writes that:

Togædere comen mid soðe þat weoren þa tweiene broðeren,
Locrinus and Camber, and al heora leoden
mid alle þon kniten þe heo bi3eten mihten.
Heo ferden toward Humber mid hæ3ere strengðe,
And Humber wes swa swiðe wod for al þat lond on him stod.
He ferde ouer Scotte water mid alle his wæl-kempan,
And mid bisie ifihte Brutlond heo wolden iwinnen.

[Together came in full trust those two remaining brothers, Locrinus and Kamber, and all their loyal men,/ With each of the knights they could summon to fight/ They marched towards Humber in such heavy strength/ That Humber was utterly enraged: the land to him was all engaged;/ He crosses the Scottish Water with his deadly warriors;/ by battling intensely they wanted to win Britain.][6]

According to Layamon, loyalty and strength are as much proof of British righteousness as Humber's anger is of the illegitimacy of

his claim. The two armies traveled across the land that both hope to control in order to fight for possession. With Albanac dead, the remaining brothers came together and the people of Britain unified against an enraged Humber. With the defeat of Humber, the substantial British army proved their ownership of Britain and avenged the death of one of Brutus' sons. The island and people of Britain are united as they had not been since Brutus divided them. In *England the Nation*, Thorlac Turville-Petre argues that invasion, "outside attack," and civil war fosters the development of national identity. Aggressive self-identification should allow the British to differentiate themselves from their attackers and, in times of "internal strife," to appeal to the good and strength of national unity.[7] While the violence of war and invasion brings with it crisis and the possibility of destabilization, it can also enable, as this invasion does, the construction of a clearly delineated identity and the strengthening of British entitlement to the land. Layamon uses Humber's invasion to portray the British as the foil of Humber and to show how invasion unifies the island. His dramatization of the unifying effect of Humber's attack on the British stems from the questions surrounding how and why the British originally took control of Albion.

Layamon's efforts at turning this into an early moment of British solidarity can be understood as a response to the parallels Geoffrey and Wace construct between Humber's invasion and the earlier invasion of Brutus, who purged Albion of the giants who originally inhabited it. The category of invader and what constitutes an invasion is unstable in British historiography; people and groups move fluidly from being invaders to being possessors and defenders. The mark of the successful invader becomes how they perform and affirm their new role. Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon question the quality of British "civilization" and entitlement to the land by tracking the dissolution of British control; as the narrative concludes, the British have been replaced as rulers of the island by invading Saxons. At the close of these histories, Britain has been ruled by a series of invaders, a cycle that suggests the tenacity of any group's hold on the land and how critical control of the actual land is to rulers and their

communities. This initial cycle began as the British sailed towards and landed on Albion. Although Brutus received a prophecy that he would found a second Troy, giants already inhabited Albion. The British, then, are invaders who must destroy the native giants; their transformation from invaders to possessors and finally to defenders is completed in their defeat of Humber, but they will not be able to maintain their hold on the island. Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon emphasize the tenuous and cyclical nature of power and possession by paralleling how the British announced their transformation and victory over both Humber and the giants and how Gwendolyn rid Britain of Estrildis and proclaimed her control. The island of Britain constantly changed hands; these historiographers investigate how successful invaders announce their arrival and, in this episode, how a queen can use these mechanisms as well as any group of warriors.

Much as Locrinus and his brothers were unwilling to hand over their home to Humber, the giants resisted British settlement by attacking while the British celebrated their arrival. A fight ensued, and men and giants were killed; the British finally persevered and captured the powerful Gogmagog. With Brutus as spectator, Corineus and Gogmagog fought until Corineus threw Gogmagog over a cliff. The victory and the dedication of the cliff as "Gogmagog's Leap" link British possession of the land not to the conclusion of a battle, but to a staged fight between a monster and a human. With the dedication of the cliff, the history of the giants enters the narrative of British history and the landscape of the island; the cliff functions as a nominal reference to a pre-time that British imperialistic desire destroys in order to cleanse and claim the island as its own. By naming the cliff after a vanquished foe, the British perform their ownership of the land, asserting the defeat of the giants with a gesture that both acknowledges their existence and the role they played in British colonialism.

Using this example to discuss the preoccupation with naming in these histories, Michelle Warren argues that the act of naming encodes the honorees into the physical land and, by extension, the communal memory of the British.[8] In British historiography, invasions and changes in leadership are reflected

in the names of locations, borders, and rivers. Geoffrey uses names and language to chart control of the land: in Wace and Layamon, British history can be chronicled through the shifting names of the different rivers and towns. Habren and Humber enter British history as defeated invaders by giving their names to critical rivers, the Severn and the Humber; in doing so, they join the ranks of Gogmagog and his challenge of British entitlement. These rivers and location represent not only British possession, but also introduce watery boundaries that divide the island.[9] The formation of borders in Britain begins early; these dividing lines are in flux, causing as much trouble as clarity. The Humber, located at the southern border of Albania in the north and in the middle of Loegria, is redeployed throughout the narratives to delineate kingdoms. The Severn separates Wales from Loegria, institutionalizing the gulf between Wales and the rest of the country.[10] One of the clear virtues of Gwendolyn's rule is the breadth of the land she controls. Like the British men before her, Gwendolyn asserted her control of the land through naming, but she also inscribed a warning about the possibility of feminine invasion into the land just as the cliff Gogmagog refers to the monstrous history and possibility of the island. In this act, Gwendolyn put Habren on par with Gogmagog and Humber. Estrildis does not donate her name to the earth that she inhabited or to the narration of British history as her half-British daughter would. The choice of child instead of mother as memorialized enemy is significant: Estrildis is less dangerous than her half-Saxon child with a claim to a British throne. Invasion can take the form of battle or pregnancy, but its success is always determined by control of the land. In these histories, Gwendolyn and Estrildis both invaded Britain, and Gwendolyn's success is acknowledged when Habren's name fixes her as a flowing river.

Locrinus managed to defeat Humber, cementing the transformation of the British from invaders to defenders by fighting for Britain and naming a river after an invader. He faltered as a ruler and a unifier, however, when he fell in love with Estrildis.[11] Although Humber failed, his deserted boats contained war booty that threatened British peace and stability. Ironically,

Locrinus' passion to seduce and marry Estrildis, thus entering her into the web of connections and opportunities made possible by royal kinship, is made possible by his successful defeat of Humber and Humber's defeat of Estrildis' father.

Estrildis never speaks nor are we given access to her motives. She is overtly passive in her immediate past and current personal history as a spoil of war; however, she is far from impotent. Her power lurks in her body: both her beauty and her ability to bear children make her a foe to Gwendolyn. Estrildis' apparent inaccessibility seems to join with her real charms to render her irresistible to Locrinus: "amore itaque illius Locrinus captus voluit cubilia ejus inire ipsamque sibi maritali taeda copulare." [Locrinus was overcome with passion for her. He was determined to make love with her, and he went so far to suggest that she might marry him.][12] Geoffrey relies on romance-like tropes to describe Estrildis: "erat tantae pulchritudinis quod non leviter reperiebatur quae ei conferri poterat: candorem carnus ejus nec inclytum ebur, nec nix recenter cadens, nec lilia ulla vincebant." [She was of such beauty that it would be difficult to find a young lady worthy to be compared with her. No precious ivory, no recently fallen snow, no lilies could even surpass the whiteness of her skin.][13] Although Geoffrey briefly aligns us with Locrinus, his failure as a king trumps his potential as a sympathetic character. Locrinus' failure is not his attraction to Estrildis, which Geoffrey separates from the desire to marry, but his interest in formalizing their affair through marriage, which would render Estrildis a queen. Sexuality and marriage occupy two distinct spaces for Geoffrey; while he forgives Locrinus his seduction, he is unsympathetic to his nuptial plans. Estrildis' beauty prevents Locrinus from recognizing the danger an outsider could cause to the British community through royal marriage. Estrildis' seductive silent body and its possibility of illegitimate, half-British/half-Saxon children with royal entitlement genders her invasion in classically feminine terms.

When Locrinus built an underground cave for Estrildis, his efforts to hide their affair fortified her hold over him and the British. She eluded masculine efforts at physical containment or

compartmentalization: “nec tamen Estrildis amoris oblitus est, sed, facto infra urbem Trinovantum subterraneo, inclusit eam in ipso familiaribusque suis honorifice servandam tradidit.” [For all that, he could not forget the love which he felt for Estrildis. He had a cave dug beneath the town of Trinovantum and there he shut Estrildis up, putting her in the care of his servants with orders that she should be treated with all honor.][14] While Wace moves through this section quickly to focus on the consequences of Locrinus’ choices, Layamon develops the details of the underground home, drawing attention to it and making it less of a tomb and more of:

> [. . .] an eorð-hus, eadi and feier,
> þe walles of stone, þe duren of whales bone
> and þat inne swiðe feire stude from socne þes folkes;
> and dude þerinne muchel col and claðes inowe.
> pælles and purpras and guldene ponewæs,
> muchel win, muchel wex, muchel wunsum þing.
>
> [an earth-house, attractive and fine:/ The walls made of stone, the doors of whale-bone,/ And make it in a pleasant place, away from people’s prying./ And put inside plenty of coal and sufficient clothing:/ coverlets and purple cloths and plenty of golden coins,/ plenty of wine, plenty of wax and plenty of welcome things.][15]

Despite these efforts in home-decorating, which appear both to dignify the interment and testify to Locrinus’ sincerity, Estrildis stayed enclosed for seven years. At stake in this episode is more than whether the audience sides with the lovers or the wronged wife, Geoffrey and his translators delve into the implications of this housing arrangement for their British ancestors. Underneath Brutus’ capital, Estrildis is not rejected or banished, but hidden from view in the British earth (literally) where the problems posed by exogamy can germinate. Control of the physical land, expressed through the ability to name it or the right to defend it or the control of parts of it, is the goal of all invaders. While Gwendolyn, Humber, and the British fight their battles above ground, Estrildis wages her attack from below ground where the earth provides her with a convenient cover. In essence, Locrinus

plants Estrildis in the ground of Britain, where her pregnancy will cement her hold over Locrinus and, by extension, his people.

From her earth-house, Estrildis penetrated the actual earth of the island, becoming a living part of the actual landscape; her physical invasion is as land-oriented as Humber's was or Gwendolyn's will be.[16] As a below-ground invader, Estrildis distracted the king, ended the royal marriage that unified Loegria and Cornwall, and introduced a child of foreign genealogy who has a right to the throne. She incited violence between Corineus and Locrinus and subsequently between Locrinus and his queen, undermining the bonds created through marriage. The subtle quality of Estrildis' invasion and the ripple effect it has suggests both the danger of her invasion and how ill-equipped the British, in particular Locrinus, are to deal with a threat that is not explicitly military or masculine. Femininity, as performed by Estrildis, is a transgressive and dangerous sexuality; when paired with ethnic difference, it disrupts British political stability. If Humber's invasion enables the construction of a group identity, Estrildis' invasion suggests how permeable that land and its men are, how tenuous their bonds are, and how easily the unified British will turn on each other.

All female invaders, however, do not deploy the same means to possess Britain; Gwendolyn lashed back at Locrinus' infidelity by invading his land with an army. As Locrinus' wife and Corineus' daughter, Gwendolyn played the double roles of invader and civil war leader. Ultimately, this double identity allowed Gwendolyn to take control of the land successfully, to be a successful invader who transformed into a defender of her land. By invading Loegria, Gwendolyn both settled a personal vendetta and achieved a political aim; in doing so, she took on the role of queen who is female, military leader, guardian of Britain and British identity, and outsider. Although queens receive considerably less attention than kings do in British historiography, their influence on the British is considerable and their avenues of influence multiple. As this episode demonstrates, queens shape the succession of the royal line, act as regents with demonstrable power, persuade and seduce their husbands and

the men around them, and tap into paternal political networks. Gwendolyn highlights how queens can be politically savvy, violent actors and how that use of violence reflects the gender plasticity necessary in a ruler. Estrildis demonstrates how anxiety surrounds royal children and the susceptibility of the king to seduction and distraction, bringing more violence through intermarriage. The personal lives of queens have repercussions for the public good. All three historiographers represent the queen as a potentially powerful and influential figure who must be selected with care; again and again, evil queens lead to the dissolution of British security. Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon take advantage of the ways in which Gwendolyn and Estrildis deploy and cause violence to assess what distinguishes the valuable queens from the destructive. While Estrildis passively provoked violence among those around her, Gwendolyn actively deployed violence in the forms of military invasions and murder in order to right the wrongs done by Locrinus.

Historiographical representations of queens group them into two distinct categories that highlight how closely queenship is intertwined with violence: those who diminish the threat of violence through peace weaving, regency, and motherhood and those who incite war and invasion by manipulating their feminine sexuality.[17] Despite the leverage queens maintained through reproduction, seduction, and outside political connections, historians and literary critics argue that queens experienced a decrease in power over the course of the Middle Ages. John Carmi Parsons writes:

> a queen-consort of England after 1066 rarely, if ever, exercised in her own right either of the central royal functions of warrior or lawgiver. Her role in the life of the realm was thus represented, or constructed, chiefly through such formalized ritual displays as her coronation, childbearing, intercession, pious exercises, or her reception by ecclesiastical or civic dignitaries.[18]

Parsons' description of the solely formal function of English queens is also confirmed by research on continental queens.[19] In his study of medieval queenship, Armin Wolf concludes that European queens frequently functioned as regents, but rarely as rulers in their own right who inherited their position

rather than marrying into it.[20] Lois Huneycutt concurs that in twelfth-century England women were acceptable as "regents or transmitters of power," but not as queens in their own right.[21] This should come as no surprise. Matilda was the only English queen in the Middle Ages; she ruled for part of 1141 during which time she never received the official title *regina*. Pauline Stafford finds many examples of female regency through the late tenth century in Europe, but she also tracks a reduction in this trend that she links to the Gregorian reforms and finds evidence for in contemporary historiography.[22]

The representation of queens in British historiography, however, suggests that royal women yielded significant power if not always through solo rule or the official position of *regina*. Paul Strohm articulates a useful way of thinking about the relationship between "fictional" and "real" queens when he writes that literary representations of queens reveal "contemporary expectations of queenships" rather than insight into their day to day function.[23] If Strohm is right in guiding us to read literary queens as reflective figures, then these accounts reveal concern about the potential which queens and other royal women have to shape court relations, political relationships, changes in ethnic identities, kinship practice, and to attack and bring violence to their own land. In her study of the letters to and from medieval women, Joan Ferrante uses her database of letters to prove that women exercised ample power if not always in the most institutionally acknowledged ways.[24] This claim is born out in the historiographies in which queens rarely rule alone, but are often identified as regents and sources of influence and power that determine the outcome and shape of major events. As abbesses or regents, medieval women made use of their gender to negotiate politically in ways that men could not; such tactics could give them powerful positions, especially when woman acted as regents and "combine birth, wealth, connections, and experience with skill and a willingness to negotiate or compromise in ways that might be awkward for a man who has to protect his honor."[25]

Despite the loss of practical power queens experienced in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Geoffrey, Wace,

and Layamon use Gwendolyn and Estrildis to depict queens as potentially powerful and dangerous figures; these representations highlight how intertwined the definition of ideal queenship was with violence: queens, as peace weavers, regents, and producers of heirs, were intended to prevent violence and chaos from upsetting their kingdoms. Gwendolyn provides an extreme portrait of a queen who uses violence to protect her kingdom by invading it and taking advantage of her position as insider and outsider to Locrinus' kingdom. Both queen and invader, Gwendolyn becomes the savior of Britain, but her use of violence and the multiple registers of her identity confirm the power that royal women had and could use for good or ill.

When Gwendolyn was banished to Cornwall, she entered a different region of Britain, outside of Locrinus' control where she could make use of her patrilineal connections, the sort of subversive power structure that Ferrante identifies as a perk of being female. Layamon describes her as "at hame" in Cornwall, gathering friends and mercenaries in order to march into "þisse londe/ to wreken hire tenoa of þon kinge and of þer queen." [this land [. . .] to avenge the wrongs done her by the king and the queen.][26] She and Locrinus met and fought at the river Stour, which divided Loegria from Cornwall; from there, she marched into her new kingdom: "Guendolien ki venqui/ La terre prist tute e saisi." [In victory, [Gwendolyn] took and seized the whole country.][27] Although the relationships a foreign queen has with her own people can complicate her allegiance, a local queen can also deploy her original connections. As Gwendolyn moves across southern Britain, she is transformed from queen to outcast to invader to righteous ruler; in doing so, she demonstrates how fractured Britain is—she is a civil war leader who can invade her own people from the neighboring kingdom.

Both Wace and Layamon praise Gwendolyn as a leader; they emphasize how her victory gives her the control over the land that Humber actively sought. For Wace, control of land and the power that accompanies it are the best indicators of virtue. He writes that "Guendolien fu mult fere/ E merveilluse justisiere" [[Gwendolyn] was very proud, and a great dispenser of justice.].[28]

Layamon expands Wace's position by describing in detail the skillfulness and geographical extent of her rule; according to Layamon, even her order to drown Habren and Estrildis is evidence of exemplary leadership. Gwendolyn

> wesswiðe strong for al Brutenne wes on hire hond; and heo was swa swiðe wel biþouht þat ælche monne heo dude riht. Ælch mon mihte faren 3end hire lond þaih he bere ræd gold. / [. . .] / al Brutaine heo wuste wel mid þon beste inne griðe and in friðe—wun wes on folke.
>
> [was very strong, now she had all Britain in her hand,/ And she was very well advised, and to each man she gave his rights;/ Right through her land each man could travel even were he carrying gold. [. . .] All Britain she ruled as well as the best,/ In peace and in plenty: there was joy in the people.][29]

Gwendolyn becomes an iconic ruler. Layamon underscores the quality of her rule by emphasizing the ability of her people to move freely, much as she moved between kingdoms that she united; control of the land is a mark of a good leader. Gwendolyn takes what was divided and unites it through the unlikely device of civil war. The happiness of her people seems to stem from their rights and the ways in which the country flourishes in peace and under one ruler. In his use of the totalizing geographical categories "al Brutenne," and "al Brutaine," Layamon dwells on the totality of her rule. After defeating Humber, Locrinus controlled Loegria and Albania, and had claims on Cornwall, adjacent to Loegria in the south and separated from it by the long arm of the Severn, through his future marriage to Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn operated in both Cornwall and Loegria because of her patrilineal and married connections; she lived and ruled in both kingdoms, turning them against each other and reuniting them under her regency and her son's rule. Once Gwendolyn handed Locrinus' land over to Madden; she returned to rule Cornwall whose people "weoren þebliðere" [were the more content].[30] As a ruler, she did what Locrinus failed to do; she identified an outsider who threatened British stability. By killing Estrildis and her child, Gwendolyn confirmed her position as queen and rightful insider and ruler who could assess and kill invaders.

The British will invade lands and suffer other military invaders besides Humber; the overt nature of these attacks provides a helpful clarity that feminine invasion lacks. Estrildis is both a casualty of invasion and an invader; her own invasion of Britain is as radically gendered as Humber's and suggests how women can use seduction and the kinship system to disrupt homo-social alliances and create civil war. Estrildis and Humber are both indisputable outsiders to the British community (one a Saxon, the other a Hun), but Gwendolyn is not. Gwendolyn invades successfully because she can use her position as queen to bolster her transformation from invader to civil war leader to queen. She justifiably uses violence to achieve her ends; all three chroniclers, even Geoffrey no matter how begrudgingly, acknowledge how her actions restore much needed order to the community. Gwendolyn's military invasion and regency reoriented the British, cleansing the island of outside "pollution" and affirming that at least the second generation of British rulers would descend from "pure" Roman stock. As this episode demonstrates in full, queens shape the succession of the royal line, act as powerful regents, and tap into paternal political networks. At the conclusion of this brief episode, political order is restored and outsiders are destroyed, but doubt has been cast upon the permanence of that peace, and women, both British and other, have gained the dubious distinction of being both the source and resolution of the violence to which the British are susceptible. Now that feminine invasion has been identified as both a source of disruption and order, Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon address the ambiguous, paradoxical role women play in the success and dissolution of the British.

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End Notes

1. Geoffrey's "history" is constructed out of small stories that trace the ups and downs of the British; he develops anecdotes that serve his purpose and interest him. This particular story seems to interest Geoffrey and his translators, but has received scant critical attention. All references to the original Latin text come from: Edmond Faral*, La Legende Arthurienne, Etudes et Documents*, vol.

3, 3 vols. (Paris: H. Champion, 1929). All English translations will come from: Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, trans. Lewis Thorpe (London: Penguin Books, 1966). See Michelle Warren for a discussion of why Faral allows us to "attribute the strongest possible author function to Galfridus Monemutensis." Michelle R. Warren, *History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300*, Medieval Cultures; vol. 22 (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 2000), p. 26.

2. Geoffrey, Wace, and Layamon spell the names of the characters differently. For clarity, I have made the spelling consistent: Gwendolyn, Estrildis, and Locrinus.

3. There are over two hundred extant manuscripts of Geoffrey, approximately thirty-two complete manuscripts of Wace, and two manuscripts of Layamon. Neil Wright argues that Wace used the shorter, First Variant version of Geoffrey's text as his base. See Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Historia Regnum Britanniae: The First Variant Version*, ed. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1988), vol. 2, 5 vols., pp. xi-cxiv. In his prologue, Layamon cites Wace, amongst others, as a source.

4. Geoffrey, Wace and Layamon all self-consciously situate their narratives within the context of British history and its translation. Geoffrey wrote in Latin prose in a period of vast civil unrest as Stephen and Matilda fought for control of the English throne. His patron, Robert of Gloucester, was the illegitimate son of Henry I and thus a noncontender for the throne. Born in Jersey, Wace writes for the court of Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine; by translating Geoffrey into octosyllabic Anglo-Norman verses, he appropriates British history for his ruling French patrons, allowing them to incorporate themselves into his glorious history of a people who once had imperial claims. Finally, Layamon, about whom little is known, writes from Arley in the diocese of Worcester. He writes in a relatively archaic Middle English that makes use of a SouthWest Midlands dialect and the traditional Old English alliterative verse form to re-situate the history of Britain within an English speaking context.

5. All translations come from: Layamon, *Brut*, trans. Rosamund Allen (London: J. M. Dent, 1992). References to the original come from: Layamon, *Brut or Hystoria Brutonum*, trans. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg, ed. W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (Essex: Longman Group, 1995), ll. 1071-2; 1073-77.

6. Layamon, *Brut*; Layamon, *Brut or Hystoria Brutonum*, ll. 1091-7.

7. Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 4.

8. Warren, *History on the Edge*, p. 37.

9. See Warren, *History on the Edge*, pp.229-31.

10. The Thames is the other significant river that provides borders.

11. J. S. P. Tatlock locates the sources for Geoffrey's Estrildis in William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Pontificum* and the *Acta Sanctorum*. In chapter 259 of the *Gesta Pontificum*, English Aelfidis is seized during a Danish and Norwegian

raid. She is raped by a count who dies and then is taken by the king of Norway (the future Saint Olaf) who also rapes her, but with whom she conceives a child and enjoys a mutually pleasurable relationship. During their affair, she hides with a bishop; when the king dies, she flees with her son to a remote section of Norway where they are discovered and her son dies. Promising not to eat meat or greasy food, she escapes to England and lives happily until she falters and touches a piece of meat; her sin results in three years of paralysis that a visit to the shrine of Aldhelm reverses. A contemporary audience would recognize the connections between Geoffrey's Estrildis and Elfidis or Alfhildr/ Alfhildia, an English maiden who both suffers and flourishes at the hands of her captors.

12. Faral, *La Legende Arthurienne,* p. 94; Monmouth, *Kings of Britain*, p. 76.

13. Faral, *La Legende Arthurienne,* p. 94; Monmouth, *Kings of Britain*, p. 76.

14. Faral, *La Legende Arthurienne,* p. 94; Monmouth, *Kings of Britain*, p. 77.

15. Layamon, *Brut*; Layamon*, Brut or Hystoria Brutonum*. ll. 1181-6.

16. See Warren, *History on the Edge*., p. 37, also Monika Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 1996), p. 70.

17. J. S. P. Tatlock counts four queens who rule alone in the *Historia*: Gwendolyn, Cordelia, Marcia, and Helena; of the four, only Cordelia and Marcia receive the title *regina*. Cordelia rules her father's and husband's lands until her evil sisters' sons capture her during battle. Tanwen, mother of Brennius and Belinus, reunites her warring sons by pleading with them as their mother and baring her breasts. Genvissa, a traditional peace weaver exchanged between Roman Claudius and Arvirargus, acts as a successful mediator between the two leaders when she rides out on the battlefield. Marcia is a learned translator of laws who acts as a regent for her son. Helena, the mother of Constantine and a peace weaver herself, is responsible for finding the True Cross. These women act in support of the British, preventing further violence from entering the island or affecting its people. Queens also prove quite capable of threatening the stability and integrity of the people: Judon kills Porreus, the son she favors least and the slayer of his brother, Ferreus, and begins a full-fledged British civil war. Renwein's marriage to Vortigern allows the Saxons full entry into Britain and leads to inter-marriage between the British "natives" and the Saxon interlopers. Guinevere's adulterous liaison with Mordred leads to civil war, the fragmentation of Britain, and a less-than-idyllic end to Arthur's rule.

18. John Carmi Parsons, "'Never Was a Body Buried in England with Such Solemnity and Honour': The Burials and Posthumous Commemorations of English Queens to 1500," in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe: Proceedings of a Conference held at King's College London, April 1995*, Anne J. Duggan, ed. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), pp. 317-37; p. 317.

19. Paul Strohm agrees with Parsons and Lois L. Huneycutt that queens experience a loss of real power at the end of the twelfth century. His study of the literary representation of fourteenth-century queens like Anne of

Bohemia suggest how queens exist in the space of these texts which is "the ill-defined zone between imagination and social practice." In this space, they acted as counselors (like Esther), intercessors (like the virgin), authorities, and companions. See Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: the Social Imagination of Fourteenth-century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), p. 96 and Lois L. Huneycutt, "Female Succession and the Language of Power in the Writings of Twelfth-Century Churchmen," in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's, 1998), pp. 189-02.
20. Armin Wolf, "Reigning Queens in Medieval Europe: When, Where, and Why" in Parsons, ed., *Medieval Queenship*, pp. 169-89.
21. Huneycutt, "Female Succession," p. 1.
22. Pauline Stafford, "The Portrayal of Royal Women in England, Mid-Tenth to Mid-Twelfth Centuries" in Parsons, ed., *Medieval Queenship*, pp. 143-69, esp. pp. 151-8.
23. Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, pp. 95-119.
24. Joan M. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997).
25. Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex*, p.12.
26. Layamon, *Brut*, Layamon, *Brut or Hystoria Brutonum*, ll.1233-4.
27. Wace, *Wace's Roman de Brut: a History of the British: Text and Translation*, trans. Judith Weiss (Exeter: U Exeter P, 1999), ll.1429-30.
28. Wace, *Roman de Brut*, ll.1441-2.
29. Layamon*, Brut,* Layamon; *Brut or Hystoria Brutonum*, ll.1256-8 and 1260-1.
30. Layamon, *Brut*, Layamon; *Brut or Hystoria Brutonum*, ll.1264.