Tracking Laȝamon's *Brut*[1]

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The modern study of Laȝamon's *Brut* would seem to have had a highly propitious start with the publication of Sir Frederic Madden's three volume edition of Laȝamon's work, for the Society of Antiquaries, in 1847.[2] Madden's edition, with its parallel text from the two extant manuscript copies of the *Brut*, its extensive notes, glossary, and running modernisation of the narrative at the foot of every page, made a work that had previously attracted only intermittent scholarly interest accessible to an audience of specialists and non-specialists alike.[3] After 1847, it would seem, Laȝamon's *Brut* was readable, literally, once more. Indeed one tangible effect of Madden's act of retrieval can be traced in the text of Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*: echoes of Laȝamon's version of Arthurian history (or rather of Madden's running gloss on Laȝamon's text) are woven into the sequence, particularly in the opening and closing frames where some archaic resonance is sought by Tennyson.[4] Madden's work may also have stimulated a rather more local effort to commemorate Laȝamon: in J. S. P. Tatlock's view, the inscription on the (older) base of the modern font at Areley Kings in Worcestershire which appears to refer to 'St Laȝamon' is a later nineteenth-century forgery which was designed to secure Laȝamon ('who was very little known before Madden's edition of 1847') as a local worthy.[5]

Yet, this propitious start has not resulted in Laȝamon's literary canonisation. The work of the 'best English poet before Chaucer' (according to Tatlock) now occupies, at best, a marginal place in the fair field of Middle English studies over which the figure of Chaucer towers and in which most professional power and prestige is located in studies of one kind or another of the 'father of English poetry' rather than the 'English Ennius', as Madden had characterised Laȝamon in 1847 (p. vii). I am not interested in weighing up the relative poetic merits of these writers, nor in advancing a case for the *Brut* as the foundation of some Great

Tradition, but I am interested in why Laȝamon scholarship since 1847 seems to have been so unconsolidated, and in whether, with the publication of a major new study of *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and Its Sources* by Françoise Le Saux, and a new translation and partial edition of the *Brut*, *Laȝamon's Arthur* by W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg, Laȝamon's time might be said to have come again.[6]

C. S. Lewis opened his essay on Laȝamon's *Brut* with a characteristically clear-cut assessment of the *Brut* 'problem': 'It is easy to explain why Laȝamon's *Brut* has few readers. The only text is almost unobtainable; the poem is long; much of its matter is dull'.[7] Lewis's judgement has the virtues of clarity and concision, but it is, of course, somewhat oversimplified. Accessibility to a full text of the *Brut* does remain a problem. Since Lewis wrote, two volumes of the new edition of the *Brut*, edited by G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie for the Early English Text Society, have now been published (1963, 1978), but Madden's edition remains the only one to supply an introduction, notes and glossary.[8] It is clear from the extensive bibliography to Françoise Le Saux's study that the *Brut* has had more than the 'few' readers which Lewis has claimed, or the 'handful' to which Barron and Weinberg have drawn attention in their preface (p. vii). But the lack of a central bibliographical reference point for modern studies of the *Brut* (which will now be filled by Le Saux's study) has certainly hampered the consolidation of work in this area. Many of the more modern writers on the *Brut* still convey the impression of being pioneers in the field, who are working in something of a scholarly vacuum, not in dialogue with one another, nor apparently in agreement even on the matter of how to represent Laȝamon's name (which may be encountered in the legitimate modern guise of 'Lawman', or in the more spurious form 'Layamon').[9] Lewis's point about literal accessibility of the text of the *Brut* remains valid, but his other comments on the quality and the quantity of this narrative raise much larger questions about its modern and medieval cultural contexts.

That the text of the *Brut* is long there is no doubt, and this fact alone has doubtless inhibited the institutionalisation of Laȝamon's work as a subject of academic study. Reproducing Laȝamon's text in long lines, as Brook and Leslie have chosen to do, rather than in the half line format favoured by Madden, cuts down on the number of pages occupied by the text (and thus has a certain ecological appeal), but it does not make the work any shorter.[10] That 'much of its matter is dull' is, however, more than just a matter of opinion, for such a judgement depends on some prior assessment by the modern reader of what kind of work is being read and what constitutes appropriate descriptive and evaluative criteria to apply to it. But

amongst modern readers of Laȝamon's *Brut* there is little sense of a consensus on these issues and in the critical studies of the *Brut* which have appeared over the last century or so there is considerable uncertainty about what kind of classification to give to this narrative (is it 'poetry', or distinctively 'English poetry', or an orally influenced composition, or even a text which has serious historiographical pretensions?). Michael Swanton acknowledges this classificatory problem when he identifies the *Brut* as a 'verse chronicle' – an 'unfamiliar and uncertain literary category' (presumably he is referring to its effect on a modern audience) which, according to Swanton, is one which compounds the distinction between historical fact and fiction.[11] But uncertainties about how to categorise the *Brut* extend beyond the issue of its generic form to its wider historical and cultural context. The varied and contradictory judgements on why Laȝamon's text should represent a 'landmark of English literary history' (Tatlock, *LHB*, p. 485) are inextricably linked to changing perceptions of the status of English literary culture in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and, indeed, to whether Laȝamon's work is being plotted on an axis of the history of English literature (between the Old and Middle English periods), or on an axis of the history of textual production in Britain at this time. A brief sketch of some of the most influential patterns of critical assessments of the *Brut* may be useful here, if only to provide a context for discussing the contribution of the most recent works on the *Brut* by Françoise Le Saux, W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg to the study of Laȝamon's work.[12]

The historical context in which Madden places the *Brut* is that of the history of the English language from its Anglo-Saxon origins. According to Madden, Laȝamon's work provides a rare illustration of the state of the language in the obscure, transitional period of 'Semi-Saxon' from 1100 to 1230, and still preserves 'the spirit and style of the earlier Anglo-Saxon writers' (p. xxiii). Madden's terms for linguistic periodisation did not gain currency, but there is some continuity between Madden's assessment of the *Brut* as a transitional work, which is orientated towards an earlier pre-Conquest poetic tradition, and the tenor of many of the later critical assessments of Laȝamon's work which place it within a distinctively 'English' poetic tradition.[13] Yet there is also some variation in critics' perceptions of the kind of older spirit preserved in the *Brut* which has resulted in some extremely divergent assessments of Laȝamon's literary status. For influential scholars such as J. S. P. Tatlock (in *LHB*) and Dorothy Everett, for example, the kind of poetic tradition which survives in the *Brut* is not that of the 'classical' Old English alliterative tradition, but rather that of a less rigorous, 'popular' tradition.[14] Their

impression that Laȝamon is using a lesser quality poetic medium, 'a poorer vehicle of expression than Old English "classical" metre', to use Everett's words (p. 28) affects their estimation of Laȝamon's place in the literary culture of his time.

While Madden could refer to Laȝamon as 'our English Ennius' and thus endow the *Brut* with a high-status, classical aura albeit eliding the question of its contemporary status, Tatlock and Everett see Laȝamon much more in terms of a 'native' writer, a conquered Englishman, who speaks in an indigenous if not local voice, which is utterly distinct from the prestigious and urbane voice of the French literary tradition which animates the work of Wace's *Roman de Brut*, his principal literary source. Notions of a decline in status of the metrical medium used by Laȝamon coalesce with judgements about the significance of the differences between the respective narrative styles of the *Roman de Brut* and the *Brut*; the result is that Laȝamon is presented as a writer who is speaking from a culturally subordinate status and whose work reflects less sophisticated ideals. Tatlock, for example, describes Laȝamon as having translated not only Wace's language and style 'but also his cultural background, from those expected among mid-twelfth century Normans to those of more primitive people; he seems in comparison, to a modern, simple-minded and culturally inexperienced . . . he has little of the chivalric and new-fashioned' (*LHB*, pp. 488-89). In Everett's discussion, to give another illustration, a brief characterisation of Wace's *Roman de Brut* (a work written to appeal to 'sophisticated and more or less cultured readers' in a literary language 'which would have been familiar to the Norman court in England and in France') is followed by a description of Laȝamon as a writer who 'was in many ways the antithesis of Wace. What he tells us of himself at the beginning of his poem implies a man living a simple life, remote from the world which Wace knew' (p. 33). In these essays, Wace and Laȝamon become figures who epitomise the social and cultural divisions and distinctions of post-Conquest England which are organised as a series of interlinked oppositions (between the social status of English and French as literary media, the social status of the respective writers and their audiences, their geographical locales – the provinces and the court).

Not all critics writing on the *Brut* have shared these ideas about the 'popular' nature of Laȝamon's verse form (a view which has now been revised substantially), but the impression that Wace and Laȝamon may be used as figureheads for distinctive forward-looking and backward-looking (albeit 'glorious') trends in the cultural history of twelfth- and thirteenth-century England has gained wider currency through the work of other influential and accessible essayists on Laȝamon, such as

C. S. Lewis, R. S. Loomis, and W. H. Schirmer.[15] Yet, to be fair, this generalised view of the respective positions of Wace and Laȝamon on the cultural map has not been consistently endorsed by those who have wished to see Laȝamon as a distinctively English poet. Some equivocation about the status of Laȝamon and his work is evident even in the work of both Tatlock and Everett, to return to these exemplary critics again. Although Tatlock begins his chapter on the *Brut* by developing a portrait of a man 'personally ignorant of the great world . . . a man little acquainted with the advance of civilisation' (*LHB*, p. 514), he concludes his chapter with speculations about Laȝamon's connection with, and patronage by, members of the Angevin royal family (*LHB*, p. 530). Similarly, although Everett suggests that Laȝmon's work is closer to oral, unlettered composition than that of Wace, she goes on to acknowledge that Laȝamon 'cannot have been completely provincial and inexperienced . . . If he had not read widely in French, he had at least, to judge by his understanding of Wace, a good knowledge of the language. There are even signs that he had some knowledge of the technique of poetic composition as understood by educated writers'.[16]

Reassessments both diachronic and synchronic of the metrical traditions in which the *Brut* is working (by Norman Blake and, most recently, by Angus MacIntosh) have certainly challenged the view that the English translator of the *Roman de Brut* was somehow a victim of the paucity of the linguistic and literary resources to hand.[17] Revisions of the received view of Laȝamon as an 'untutored' archaising writer have also been suggested by Eric Stanley's analysis of the lexis and grammar of the Caligula copy of the *Brut* which suggests that the archaic resonances of the narrative may have been consciously cultivated.[18] But what has been lacking in the field until now are easily accessible full scale studies of the *Brut* which might offer a substantial challenge to the dominant critical commonplaces which have accreted round the text.[19] One of the rare, relatively recent studies of Laȝamon's text and its sources by Herbert Pilch perhaps failed to make any impact on the mainly English-speaking critical scene, not only because of its linguistic medium (which is a sad reflection on the insularity of Laȝamon studies), but also because its central emphasis was on the overwhelming debt of the *Brut* to pre-existant Welsh sources, a thesis which cannot be convincingly sustained, as Françoise Le Saux has shown in some detail.[20]

The most radical of all the shorter studies of the *Brut* to appear in recent years, leaving aside Françoise Le Saux's study for the moment, is in Elizabeth Salter's posthumously published essay on 'Culture and Literature in earlier thirteenth-century

England: national and international'.[21] The re-orientation of the received literary images of Laȝamon and his work which Elizabeth Salter presents is directly related to her efforts to recast the literary history of early thirteenth-century England in terms of a synthetic cultural scene in which diverse literary influences, in Latin, French, Anglo-Norman, and English, may be in interaction rather than in opposition. Indeed Salter's reading of the literary medium employed in the *Brut* finds evidence of that synthetic culture in practice, on a micro-scale:

> . . . the important fact to stress is that the *Brut* bears witness to processes of metrical experimentation which are, in their own way, adventurous. No doubt, when making his choice of a suitable medium, Laȝamon was faced with many different alternatives and considerations. His serious historical intent in the *Brut* with its patriotic and heroic emphasis, must have been one important determining factor; we shall later seek to establish his knowledge of twelfth-century Latin verse . . . although complex Latin hexameters could hardly have provided him with a practical model. More practical in this role would have been heroic verse in the vernacular languages of both continental French and Anglo-Norman: he must have been familiar with the spacious decasyllabics and alexandrines of the *chansons de geste* . . . [Laȝamon's] compromise was the adoption of a loosely articulated unrhymed line, which could be wrought up for more elaborate purposes by recourse to a number of vernacular styles, some of nostalgic, antiquarian, and learned interest, perhaps, and some of more recent invention.[22]

The contrast between Elizabeth Salter's location of the *Brut* in a contemporary cultural context and that offered by such critics as Tatlock, or Loomis, or Lewis could not be greater. And yet the contrast I am pointing to here cannot be summed up as simply that between 'newer and better' and 'older and mistaken' views of Laȝamon's literary milieu. Although Salter's depiction of Laȝamon's literary context as a continuum breaks the mould of critical approaches which are structured around binary oppositions (between English and French; romance and epic; aristocratic and popular appeal, etc.), it is an account which remains highly speculative and which begs some questions about the significance of Laȝamon's act

of translation and the nature of the 'patriotic and heroic' sentiments, it apparently expresses. Moreover, because there is still so much we do not know about the production and reception of historical narratives in verse in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, let alone the construction of national identities at this time, some culturally stereotyped images may still be invoked to fill this vacuum. Impressions of Wace and Laȝamon as representatives of new and old, court and country, élite and popular literary trends still continue to haunt more recent *Brut* scholarship. Thus some longstanding commonplaces about the expressive limitations of Laȝamon's literary medium and the cultural limitations of his milieu appear again, for example, in Michael Swanton's otherwise stimulating discussion of the *Brut*. When Swanton turns to characterise the difference between the treatment of Arthurian history in the *Roman de Brut* and Laȝamon's *Brut*, he suggests that the 'courtois' temper of the former is the product of an individual writer responding to the aspirations of a prospective court audience, if not to the demands of a single royal patron (itself a highly questionable proposition). The *Brut*, in contrast, is read as representing the voice of the collective concerns and perceptions of English subjects under Norman rule:

> [in the *Brut*] neither Arthur nor any of his knights (although undeniably presented as strong and virtuous) display any of the chivalric qualities they assume for Wace – who presumably wished to satisfy the courtly expectations of his patron, Eleanor. Laȝamon has neither the vocabulary nor the mind to treat such sentiments as *curtesie*. The idiom of chivalry was as yet semantically and socially inaccessible to an English audience. The romantic fiction of knight-errantry by which the young squires of the Angevin court thought to measure their lives was differently perceived through English eyes; from the point of view of a subject people, the all too familiar mounted soldiery were unlikely to have appeared, in all respects the *chevalers* of courtly French romance.[23]

Here an account of the societies represented in the historical narratives by Wace and Laȝamon (which is, in itself, open to question) is used to characterise the respective social contexts in which these writers work: once again the *Roman de Brut* and the *Brut* become synecdoches of divided – and distinct – French and English, social and

literary, milieux which yet, paradoxically, share an interest in the ancient history of Britain.[24]

This sketch of Laȝamon studies is far from exhaustive, but it is detailed enough to illustrate both the diversity of ways in which the *Brut* has been interpreted by its modern readers and to reveal something of the tangled relationship between these views and the divergent perceptions of the larger literary-historical context of the work. Some sustained self-reflective discussion of the issues involved in providing a context for the *Brut* and hence of the process of making this narrative 'mean' for a modern audience would be welcome, as would any attempt to make the text literally more accessible: both of the most recent books to appear on the *Brut* by Françoise Le Saux, and by W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg make important contributions to the contemporary reception of the *Brut*; both are overdue.

When Françoise Le Saux embarked on her study of the sources of Laȝamon's *Brut* in the late 1970s, scholarly work on this area was, she claims with some justice, in a state of confusion (p. vii), even though the subject had attracted scholarly interest since the publication of Madden's edition in 1847 and even though some information about the making of the narrative is supplied in its own prologue (*Brut*, 1-35). Le Saux's way into this tangled subject is to reconsider the evidence for the dating of Laȝamon's work (which she takes to be more accurately represented by the copy of the narrative in British Library MS Cotton Caligula A ix and which, she concludes, was composed sometime before 1216) and then to discuss what conclusions may be drawn from its prologue. It is, as she notes, 'a paradox not unusual in medieval studies that some of the most puzzling source problems arise in connection with those works whose sources have been acknowledged by the author' (p. 14), and this is no less the case with the *Brut*.

Two fundamental issues about the 'making' of this text arise from its prologue (leaving aside all that we do not know about the identity and social status of its maker) and these are both covered by Le Saux's scrupulous appraisal of previous critical commentary on this section of Laȝamon's text. The first issue concerns the identity of the textual resources in Latin and English to which Laȝamon seems to acknowledge his debt (*Brut*, 16-18). The second and more general issue concerns the interpretation of the discrepancy between the process of compilation described in this prologue (the bringing together of material from books written in English, Latin and French by named writers) with that we may reconstruct (for it has been clear for a long time that the major textual debt of Laȝamon's *Brut* is to the third text mentioned in the prologue, Wace's *Roman de Brut*).[25] Does this discrepancy reveal

the 'sham' of Laȝamon's antiquarian learning, as Eric Stanley has suggested?[26] Or does it indicate that the function of the prologue is primarily to authorise the narrative which follows and, if so, what is the effect of the specific conjunction of textual resources which it invokes?

Once again the resolution of these issues depends to some extent on what kind of writer Laȝamon is judged to be. For Le Saux, it appears, Laȝamon aspires to write serious and factually accurate history: his act of compilation is in the interests of producing a work of 'soðere word' (*Brut*, 27) that is in Le Saux's view, 'a work of scientific pretensions' (p. 15). She concludes:

> . . . It is to his advantage to name well-known, verifiable authorities, rather than spurious or obscure works . . . it is therefore reasonable to assume that the Latin book by Albin and Austin must have existed, either as a now lost composite manuscript, or – more plausibly – as the explicit sub-text to a well-known authority (Bede). As such, [the Latin book] should probably be understood as a 'pedigree' to the work, rather than a source in the modern sense of the word. (p. 22)

It might be profitable to use the notion of a pedigree, rather than that of a bibliography, to discuss the function of the prologue as a whole: the opening section of the *Brut* does, after all, offer a genealogy for the work and its maker.[27] But, if so, larger questions arise about how the scientific pretensions which Le Saux attributes to Laȝamon's work (as a text of a literally truthful history) may be reconciled with the still evident discrepancy between the compositional process described in the prologue and that we may reconstruct. Why, if Laȝamon conceives of his work as being factually true, should he construct this possibly idealised account of its composition? Is this the most appropriate model of a historiographical enterprise (to construct a factually true account of events as they happened) to use of Laȝamon's work? Here, however, Le Saux does not address such general questions, but rather defers and to some extent deflects them by raising others: if we know that the major debt of the *Brut* is to Wace's narrative and that the other material in Laȝamon's text does not seem to derive from the other two works, then 'what were those unacknowledged sources of Laȝamon's?' and 'how far afield are we to search for these sources?' (p. 22).[28] These are the questions which form the basis for the chapters which follow in which Le Saux reconsiders the relationship between

the *Brut* and texts from four 'cultural fields' (*Laȝamon's Brut*, p. 23) of Anglo-Norman and French, Latin, Welsh and English to which Laȝamon may have had access.

With the publication of Le Saux's study, it should no longer be possible for many of the often contradictory critical commonplaces which have accreted around the *Brut* to be replicated without some further consideration of their basis and their implications. Every one of Le Saux's chapters offers some reassessment of the scope of cultural influences which might be identified in the *Brut* and of the specific kinds of intertextual debt which may be traced with any justice. General notions about Laȝamon's amplification of material drawn from Wace's text are considerably refined in the chapter on 'From Wace to Laȝamon', and the received impression that the *Brut* is a less 'courtois' text than the *Roman de Brut*, or 'anti-French' in its outlook, is substantially revised in the analysis of 'The French Connection' (with support from the work of A. C. Gibbs in this area, as Le Saux makes clear).[29] If, however, the 'accuracy with which Laȝamon did his work shows that he had all the competence necessary to understand and appreciate French works other than his main source' (p. 83), it is still very difficult to find any definite evidence of borrowings from any other French sources in the *Brut*. Although Le Saux concludes that Laȝamon 'appears to have been well informed of the literary achievements of his Anglo-Norman masters' and that the 'French influence on the *Brut* . . . is more pervasive than once was thought' (pp. 92-93), such conclusions are not really substantiated by the evidence that is offered. Laȝamon's reference to the French usage of the term 'dusze pers' (*Brut*, 813) is the foundation of Le Saux's claim (pp. 74-75, 83) that Laȝamon probably had some acquaintance with the *chanson de geste* genre; certain parallels in the narrative motifs found in the Tristan legend, particularly in the version attributed to Thomas, and those used in the development of a number of scenes in the *Brut*, notably those between Godlac and Delgan and later between Brian and his sister, provide the primary evidence for the 'more pervasive' French influence on Laȝamon's text. The parallels cited by Le Saux are interesting, but they could be more appropriately discussed in terms of analogues rather than as 'sources'. Indeed, if the discussion were to be opened up in this way, evidence of further analogues for narrative motifs in the *Brut* might well be considered. As Le Saux later notes in her section on the English sources of the *Brut*, 'it is a fact that the account of the birth of Ogier le Danois is remarkably similar to that of Arthur' (p. 200); such a similarity might have been discussed in the context of her chapter on 'The French Connection'.

Much more persuasive is Le Saux's analysis of the evidence for Laȝamon's use of material from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* in the *Brut*, which seems likely to have provided the cue for the development of King Arthur's departure for Avalon as well as for several other small-scale touches in the narrative (several of which relate to the depiction of Merlin). Evidence of Laȝamon's direct use of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* in the *Brut* (apart from the use of some material from the prophecies of Merlin sequence) remains scarce, and so it is this link between Laȝamon's text and the lesser known work by Geoffrey of Monmouth which can be used to challenge the suspicions of earlier critics that this 'provincial' writer may have been unable to read Latin (a suspicion which surfaces again in Barron and Weinberg's introduction to *Laȝamon's Arthur*, p. x).

Equally impressive, though less persuasive, is Le Saux's discussion of the possibility that Welsh material of some kind might have provided Laȝamon with some ideas about how to amplify his narrative at certain points. I am not convinced that there is any conclusive evidence of Welsh sources for the *Brut*, although there are certain analogies between the representation of the defeated Saxons as messengers of their own destruction in the *Armes Prydein* and in the *Brut* (9768-772, 10371-427).[30] I remain sceptical, too, of Le Saux's suggestion that Laȝamon had a tactful Welsh informant who underplayed the extent of the 'highly antagonistic feelings of the English pervading Welsh literature' when communicating with the 'kindly disposed and possibly admiring English scholar' (pp. 138-39, 140-41). But Le Saux's emphasis on the extent of Welsh/English/Norman political and cultural contacts offers a valuable corrective to some of the images of Laȝamon's provincial, rustic, and altogether out-of-the-way milieu which have prevailed in previous essays on this writer. Moreover her chapter on 'The Welsh Sources' opens with a sharp analysis of how the changing status of Celtic culture within a predominantly Anglophile scholarly milieu (within the last hundred or so years) has determined whether even the possibility of Welsh or even Irish influence (*pace* Tatlock) on the *Brut* has been considered by the post-Madden readers of Laȝamon's text. It is in this context that Le Saux provides a judicious appraisal of Herbert Pilch's attempt to investigate all the possible Welsh debts of the *Brut* and, indeed, sees the weight of interest in his study as symptomatic of 'a more widespread current towards the recognition of previously despised or ignored minority cultures, which found its political expression in an upsurge of the claims to recognition of many European minorities' (p. 133).

The organisational focus of Le Saux's study becomes rather more diffuse

when she turns to consider Laȝamon's debts to the 'cultural field' of older and contemporary English works in the final two chapters of her study, 'An preost wes on leoden', and 'An Intensely English poet'. Tracing some of the moral and religious attitudes expressed in the *Brut* is the broad concern of 'An preost was on leodon', and this chapter also includes some analysis of the possible influence of earlier hagiographic and homiletic material on Laȝamon's text (a topic which is picked up again in the following chapter).[31] Under this heading, too, Le Saux develops her discussion of some of the distinctive features of the post-Arthurian sections of the *Brut* which result in a reappraisal of the events and some of the personnel involved in the conversion of the Germanic settlers and their eventual consolidation of power over the central portion of the island. Here, however, the difficulty of accommodating this kind of discussion within the frame imposed by a 'source' study becomes evident. The problem is not only that material relevant to the more sympathetic representation of some of the antagonists of the British in the post-Arthurian sections of the *Brut* is dispersed across both this chapter and the next (*Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 162-75, 211-13, 223-27). But it is also that a broader contextual discussion is needed at this point, which would alert the reader to the controversial quality of the representation of the passage of dominion in the tradition of British historiography in which Laȝamon is working.

The challenge to the traditional contours of insular historiography offered by Geoffrey of Monmouth's vision of the British past in the *Historia Regum Britanniae* is not confined to the pre-Arthurian and Arthurian sections of his narrative alone. In the so-called Vulgate *Historia Regum Britanniae* the consolidation of Anglo-Saxon hegemony over the central part of the island is delayed and the account of the conversion of the Germanic peoples is portrayed from a markedly pro-British perspective, as W. R. Leckie has shown in his important study, *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodisation of Insular History in the Twelfth Century*.[32] Not only, according to Leckie, does Geoffrey of Monmouth deny 'the Anglo-Saxons pre-eminence until the tenth century', until, that is, the reign of Athelstan (p. 71), but he also presents Augustine's tussle with the British Church in an unflattering light: in the Vulgate version, Augustine appears a 'meddlesome prelate' (p. 106). In the subsequent reworkings of this historiographical tradition in the 'First Variant' version of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* and in Wace's *Roman de Brut* attempts are made to revise some of the most provocative features of this account of post-Arthurian British history with greater or lesser degrees of success and consistency. Any consideration of

Laȝamon's changes in this period needs to be seen within the context of the earlier revisionary efforts; such a discussion would help the modern audience of the *Brut* to appreciate what is at stake in this section of the narrative and to see why it is not a 'half-hearted' postscript to Arthur's adventures.[33]

A careful and thorough re-examination of Laȝamon's possible debts to an earlier Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition is reserved for Le Saux's final chapter which considers whether there is any justification for the characterisation of Laȝamon as 'an intensely English poet'. The phrase for this chapter heading is taken from Gwyn Jones's brief but widely read introduction to the work of Wace and Laȝamon and it is here that Le Saux offers some overview of the critical approaches to the *Brut* which have prevailed following Madden's edition.[34] Although many readers of the *Brut* have felt that the spirit of Old English poetry is somehow preserved in the *Brut*, she concludes, as A. C. Gibbs had done previously, that there is very little specific evidence to prove that Laȝamon was acquainted with, or indebted to, any earlier poetic tradition: 'in a total view of the *Brut*', she remarks, 'the "Old English" elements take a fairly minor place' (p. 205) and she concurs with Dorothy Everett's view that 'the specifically "English" atmosphere of the work . . . is produced by something more vague and tenuous than direct recollections of earlier literature'.[35] The challenge to the perceived 'Englishry' of the *Brut* (to use Gwyn Jones's term, p. xi) continues in Le Saux's discussion of the nationalist sympathies of the *Brut*: Laȝamon's apparent reappraisal of the degenerate image of the Welsh at the end of his narrative (in contrast to their image in the *Roman de Brut*) is the basis for a re-evaluation of his loyalties. In Le Saux's view 'the *Brut* may be read as an attempt to kindle a spirit of solidarity between the Welsh and the English, the legitimate inhabitants of Britain, against the invaders . . . More than Germanic, English or Anglo-Saxon, Laȝamon's outlook is already British, in the modern sense of the word' (p. 227). Although it may seem that here Le Saux is resisting the pressure to read the *Brut* as a distinctively English poem, her concluding remarks reflect the pull of the commonplace formulation of a 'popular' English versus Norman/French antagonism as the key to Laȝamon's narrative:

> The poem is focussed on the English people, written in the English language, eschewing excessively learned detail, making use of proverbs and local references (such as Milburga). Laȝamon gives them a more prestigious pedigree than 'standard histories' and provides them with an answer to the problem of

> legitimacy, in distinguishing them from those mere conquerors by the force of weapons, but also with regard to the Welsh, whose prior claims are subtly denied. Laȝamon's *Brut* reads as an attempt to create a new foundation myth, that could give his countrymen both moral justification and the incentive to survive.
>
> (p. 230)

In this reading (which is not characteristic of Le Saux's work as a whole) the outlook expressed in the *Brut* appears to be much less that of a British writer (in any sense of the word) and much more like that of an 'intensely English poet'. Clearly one of the urgent *desiderata* of Laȝamon studies is for a sustained analysis of the terminology used to designate 'imagined communities' in the *Brut*, its pattern of usage (which may not be as neat as some critics have suggested), and how that does or does not coincide with the terms used in modern *Brut* studies to describe Laȝamon's apparent sympathies.[36]

John Frankis concluded at the end of his important study of 'Laȝamon's English Sources' that 'Laȝamon is now emerging as a very much less simple sort of poet than used often to be thought' and this is the point which is amply confirmed by Françoise Le Saux's study.[37] *Laȝamon's Brut: the Poem and Its Sources* will be one of the principal resources for Laȝamon scholarship, but it is far from the last word on the subject of the *Brut*, nor should it be expected to be so. Le Saux's work provides the necessary consolidation of Laȝamon scholarship which will enable others to participate in the field and facilitate broader-based discussions which may be free from the constraints of necessarily being organised as source studies. It would be interesting, for example, to develop the discussion of Laȝamon's prologue in a context which allowed some opportunity to consider its polemical effect, rather than simply its literal content. Here some comparative work on the form and function of authorising passages in other vernacular exercises in historiography would be useful. Rudolph Imelmann's early thesis on the derivation of Laȝamon's *Brut* from some kind of lost Gaimar/Wace historical compilation, although thoroughly refuted since 1935, seems, nevertheless, to have inhibited further comparative work in this area.[38] If the extant fragments of the other Anglo-Norman/French translations of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which are not mentioned in Le Saux's study, were to be more widely available and discussed, the act of recasting a narrative about insular history in a different stylistic mode, as is the case in Laȝamon's *Brut*, might seem to be less of a massively 'erratic' action.[39]

There were, perhaps, more stylistic options open to the composers of historiographical works than is generally realised and a wider range of conceptions about the form and function of historiographical exercises in circulation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries than Le Saux acknowledges. Certainly one of the important assumptions which informs her study, which needs to be explored and justified in much greater detail, is that Laȝamon conceived of himself as producing a work with 'scientific pretensions', conforming to an ideal of factual veracity. This seems a limited model of historiographical activity in general and, in particular, to underestimate any contemporary awareness of the effect of narrative organisation and style on the production of historical narratives. If we accept Eric Stanley's argument and recognise that self-conscious archaism was a stylistic option, then it suggests that Laȝamon's *Brut* was produced in a context where there was a rather sophisticated grasp of how an idiom may be created in the present to mediate the history of the past.

Laȝamon's reworking of the *Roman de Brut* is one that aimed at 'dynamic equivalence' according to Françoise Le Saux: this, following Eugene A. Nida's definition, may be described as one 'concerning which a bilingual and bicultural person can justifiably say, "That is just the way we would say it" '.[40] This is not the kind of translation of Laȝamon's *Brut* which W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg have aspired to produce in *Laȝamon's Arthur*. Theirs is more akin to the 'formally equivalent' kind which, like Madden's, is designed to facilitate access to the Caligula version of the *Brut*: in *Laȝamon's Arthur*, an edited text of the *Brut* based on the Brook and Leslie edition (but with modern punctuation and some revisions) covering events from Uther Pendragon's open expression of desire for Ygerne at his London assembly to the departure of Arthur for Avalon (corresponding to 9229-14297 of Brook and Leslie's edition) is printed with a facing prose translation. Their aim, judging by their practice, is to produce a readable, modern English, parallel version of Laȝamon's narrative (and in this they succeed admirably) which attempts to reproduce some of the formulaic effects of Laȝamon's phrasal patterning (notably the personal epithets such as 'aðelest kingen' 'noblest of kings') and which sometimes retains a slightly alien word order (for example, 'Then arrived from Rome Gawain, Lot's eldest son', 11601). But they do not archaise through their choice of vocabulary, as Madden does in his almost word-for-word gloss on the text, or as Eugene Mason does in his prose translation of the Arthurian section (which opens at an earlier point in the narrative with the arrival of Constantine from Britanny).

Laȝamon's Arthur seems to have been designed to serve the demands of varied audiences and to respond to the unconsolidated nature of Laȝamon scholarship to date. Since the edition of Brook and Leslie may be difficult for some readers because it is not punctuated according to modern conventions and is, as yet, lacking notes and a glossary, Barron and Weinberg have answered some of these needs for the Arthurian section of the text by supplying a punctuated text, with textual notes, as well as background textual commentary. Since Barron and Weinberg recognise the absence of any up-to-date introductions to Laȝamon's work (p. vii), they have also tried to fill this lacuna with a comparatively long introduction (of some fifty densely packed pages) to the *Brut*, its cultural context, its sources and further bibliography. The result is a very substantial book on the most popular section of the *Brut*, which may, because of its substantial cost, be a resource confined to the library bookshelves, rather than one accessible to a wider market.

In my view any attempt to facilitate access to the *Brut* is welcome, and I appreciate Barron and Weinberg's efforts to lead readers to the text of the *Brut* rather than to allow their translation to stand in lieu of Laȝamon's narrative. But what is necessary and useful for readers who turn to *Laȝamon's Arthur* for help with Laȝamon's difficult text is some discussion of the principles behind the production of this translation in modern (or near-modern) English prose and what is gained (and inevitably lost) by this exercise. If there are self consciously archaising effects built into the narrative, as Eric Stanley has argued and as Barron and Weinburg suggest at one point in their introduction (p. xliii), then this textual effect is one that needs to be clearly addressed as an issue of translation practice, as, indeed, does that of translating just the Arthurian section of the text alone. Although the introductory section of *Laȝamon's Arthur* does offer a summary of the whole sweep of British history from which the Arthurian extract is taken (as part of the discussion of the *Historia Regum Britannie*), it would be more helpful if an explicit discussion of the effects of reading just the Arthurian section of the text were to be included in the introduction. Does this act of selection, for example, render a text which otherwise belongs to the 'uncertain and unfamiliar' literary category of the verse chronicle (*Laȝamon's Arthur*, p. li) into the more assimilable form of a narrative centred around King Arthur?

It is a pity that *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and Its Sources* and *Laȝamon's Arthur* should have appeared in the same year. The task of introducing Laȝamon's *Brut* and discussing its sources would have been easier for Barron and Weinberg if Le Saux's study had been available first. Her discussion would have helped them

resolve some of their equivocation about Laȝamon's Latinity, for example (*Laȝamon's Arthur*, pp. xxi, xvi, xxi-xxii) and, perhaps, tempered comments about Laȝamon paying only 'lip service' to the rare passages of *amour courtois* in the *Roman de Brut*. In fact many of the commonplace oppositions which have prevailed in critical discussions of the *Brut* (between court and provincial, French and English, literary culture) reappear in a muted form in the introduction to *Laȝamon's Arthur*. Laȝamon is still a 'backwoods cleric' (p. x, *pace* Everett?); 'a provincial parish priest' who was remote from the 'sphere of clerical learning in the service of courtly entertainment' (p. xvi): Wace, in contrast, is a familiar of the court (p. xxv) who brings a 'new courtliness' (p. xxvii) into the narrative of British history in which the reader is given 'fleeting glimpses of England as a land of romance' (p. xxviii), whereas Laȝamon 'has coloured the whole with the spirit, the atmosphere, some of the expressive means of Old English epic' (p. xxviii). Despite the claim that the *Brut* was produced in a period of 'cultural fusion' (p. li), it is difficult to imagine how copies of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and the *Roman de Brut*, might be accessible to a figure like Laȝamon on the basis of his description here. And yet the *Brut* has, apparently, an appeal for every man (*sic*) in England, if not Britain: Laȝamon's 'lively and inventive version of Geoffrey's unified history of the island made it a more vivid and effective focus for patriotism in which all races could associate themselves with the victorious British and identify the foreign invader, whatever his nationality, as the perennial enemy' (p. liv). It is, perhaps, the very ambitious aim of this introduction which gathers together very divergent attitudes towards the *Brut*, its sources, and the social and political shaping of post-Conquest English society, which undermines its effectiveness; more help in discriminating between the rather confusing views assimilated here is required by the reader (or this reader at least).[41] More time spent discussing the bases for reconstructions of Laȝamon's context and attending to the evident gaps and/or contradictions in those reconstructions would strengthen, not weaken, this introduction.

The question of who formed the audience for the *Brut* in the thirteenth century is not one which either Le Saux or Barron and Weinberg confront directly in their discussions of the *Brut*, although in both studies some views of the potential appeal and readership of Laȝamon's work are implied. Le Saux (p. 62) suggests that Laȝamon's limited use of French words may be 'the consequence of their not being comprehensible to the speakers of his brand of English' and later (p. 165) discusses the reference to 'Mildburȝe' (*Brut*, 15478) as evidence to suggest that Laȝamon was

writing for a local audience. Barron and Weinberg find it 'difficult to imagine what kind of patron can have supported such an ambitious enterprise in an age when English was barely the language of books at all' (*Laȝamon's Arthur*, p. xi). Later they suggest that in the Arthurian section, at least, the narrative 'appears to be divided into episodes of four hundred lines each, appropriate to an evening's recital to a listening audience or the attention span of a private reader' (p. xxxvii), but just who this audience or this reader might be is not defined, apart from their suggestion of the all racial appeal of Laȝamon's narrative (in the passage on p. liv which I have quoted above). Reconstructing the audience(s) for the *Brut* is a difficult problem. Yet openly acknowledging it as such might be a more constructive way of drawing attention to the blind spots in current Laȝamon studies. Should not, for example, Le Saux's impression of the local audience of the *Brut* (who had difficulties with French) be supplemented by the impression of the text's reception given by its manuscript context? In the mid-thirteenth-century Caligula manuscript the copy of the *Brut* has a number of marginal Latin glosses which form an integral part of the narrative (being written in the same hand(s) and rubricated as well) and which supply further details and dates about the events recorded in Laȝamon's text. The second part of this manuscript contains copies of Anglo-Norman and English verse texts and an Anglo-Norman prose chronicle, which provides a resumé of Saxon history and a fuller account of post-Conquest history up to the reign of Henry III.[42] If, as Neil Ker has argued, the second part of the manuscript 'belonged from the first with the "Hystoria brutonum" (Laȝamon)' and if, as Le Saux herself suggests, there seems to be some relationship between the English and Anglo-Norman chronicle ('for the prose chronicle takes over where Laȝamon stops, more or less' [p. 7]), then this copy of the *Brut*, at least, would seem to have been designed for a rather more lettered milieu than can be accommodated within either Le Saux's or Barron and Weinberg's notions of the audience for the *Brut*.[43]

The appearance of two major publications on Laȝamon's *Brut* in 1989, with the promise of further translations to come, suggests that some revival of interest in this narrative is underway.[44] This comes at a time when there has been a great upsurge in debate about the construction of national identities in Britain, past and present, and when there is renewed interest in the study of the 'negotiations with the past' that can be traced in medieval historical narratives.[45] This may be a propitious time for further studies on the *Brut* which explicitly discuss their methodological bases, in which it would no longer be possible to smile when reading the *Brut* 'as one might suppress a smile over the reflections of a growing boy' (Tatlock, *LHB*,

p. 515), and in which there could be further discussion of how both texts of the *Brut* contribute to the 'ideology of conquest' and the construction of imagined national communities in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries and (since Madden's edition) in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries too. As trackers of Laȝamon's *Brut* we need, in my view, to be widening our perspectives and to be critically aware of the implications of the vantage points from which we choose to speak. One of the *Brut*'s more illustrious twentieth-century readers, Jorge Luis Borges, wrote a short essay on Laȝamon as a forgotten lay-maker, who, in his view 'abhorred his Saxon heritage with Saxon vigour and who was the last Saxon poet and never knew it'.[46] Such a view of Laȝamon's work now seems to be of historical interest in its own right.

NOTES

[1] I am borrowing the image of 'tracking' from Tony Harrison's play, *The Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* (London, 1990).

[2] *Laȝamon's Brut or Chronicle of Britain; a Poetical semi-saxon Paraphrase of the Brut of Wace, now first published from the Cottonian Manuscripts in the British Museum, accompanied by a Literal Translation, Notes and a Grammatical Glossary*, 3 vols (London, 1847). All further references to Madden's edition and (including his Preface) will be cited by page number in my text.

[3] Rudolph Willard provides a useful survey of earlier *Brut* scholarship in 'Laȝamon in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Texas Studies in English*, 27 (1948), 239-78.

[4] See J. M. Gray, 'Tennyson and Layamon', *Notes and Queries*, 213 (1968), 176-78.

[5] For J. S. P. Tatlock's discussion and transcription of the inscription see *The Legendary History of Britain* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1950), p. 509. All subsequent references to this important study, hereafter *LHB*, will be cited by page number in my text.

[6] Françoise Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and Its Sources* (Cambridge, 1989); *Laȝamon's Arthur: The Arthurian Section of Laȝamon's Brut*, edited and translated by W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg (London, 1989). All further references to these two studies will be cited by page and/or line number in my text. A joint article by W. R. J. Barron and Françoise Le Saux on 'Two Aspects of Laȝamon's Narrative Art', *Arthurian Literature*, 10 (1989), 25-56, also appeared in the same year as their respective books.

[7] C. S. Lewis, 'The Genesis of a Medieval Book', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge, 1966), 18-40. This essay seems to have been overlooked in Le Saux's otherwise extensive bibliography of nineteenth- and twentieth-century critical studies of the *Brut*.

[8] *Laȝamon: Brut. Edited from the British Museum MS Cotton Caligula A ix and British Museum MS Cotton Otho C xiii*, EETS, os 250, 277, 2 vols (London, 1963, 1978). Quotations from the *Brut* will be taken from this edition and cited by line number in my text.

[9] The opening line of the text in London, British Library MS Cotton Otho C xiii (from Wanley's transcription) gives the composer's name as 'Laweman'. Tatlock argues that we should resolve the vacillation in the modern nomenclature of this medieval writer by using the acceptable modernisation of 'Lawman' (*LHB*, pp. 483-84), a point which John Frankis echoes in 'Laȝamon's English Sources', in *J. R. R. Tolkien, Scholar and Storyteller: Essays in Memoriam*, edited by Mary Salu and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca and London, 1979), pp. 64-75 (p. 75, n. 28). The form 'Laȝamon' seems to have undergone a revival in recent years and is used by both Le Saux and Barron and Weinburg. Unhappily Le Saux's publishers have not served her well by printing the form 'Layamon' on the spine and dustcover of her book.

[10] There remains some uncertainty about how best to represent the metrical structure of the

Brut. Tatlock thought that a new edition of the text should be printed in short lines 'since the couplet-form best fits the facts' (*LHB*, p. 487, n. 9). Le Saux reviews the development of critical analyses of Laȝamon's versification in *Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 192-94. In my view, Angus McIntosh provides the best and most helpful discussion of the metrical system of the *Brut* in his essay 'Early Middle English Alliterative Verse', in *Middle English Alliterative Verse*, edited by David Lawton (Woodbridge, 1982), pp. 20-33, a study which is not included in Le Saux's discussion. As McIntosh remarks 'if we say (as we habitually do) of the *Brut* as a whole that it is composed in alliterative verse, it should be (as it frequently is not) with the fullest awareness that this verse is in part exemplified or represented by thousands of lines which, quite intentionally and "legitimately", altogether lack alliteration' (pp. 20-21).

11 M. Swanton, *English Literature Before Chaucer* (London, 1987), pp. 175-92 (p. 175). Swanton's study is noted by Barron and Weinberg, but not by Le Saux.

12 Le Saux herself provides some useful contextual discussion on pp. 184-89 of her study.

13 In Le Saux's view, Madden's use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' to describe the tradition of poetry in which he places the *Brut*, 'is a neutral term which has the effect of defusing modern, nationalistic overtones of "English" ' (*Laȝamon's Brut*, p. 184). In my view Madden's discussion is not so neutral: the implications of his claim that Laȝamon is '*our* English Ennius' (my italics) cannot be ignored. That Madden saw some greater English interest at stake in the production of his edition is suggested by his response to the possibility that a Danish scholar might be the first to publish a transcription of the text (it would be a 'disgrace to England'). See Robert Ackerman, 'Sir Frederic Madden and Medieval Scholarship', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 73 (1972), 1-14 (p. 10). For the most emotive attempt to appropriate Laȝamon as a transhistorical epitome of the (male) English poet, see H. C. Wyld, 'Laȝamon as an English Poet', *Review of English Studies*, 6 (1930), 1-30: this essay should be read in conjunction with the plea for the inclusion of early British history in the English educational syllabus in G. Gordon's essay, 'The Trojans in Britain', *Essays and Studies*, 9 (1924), 9-30. The politics of later nineteenth- and twentieth-century Laȝamon scholarship deserves more attention than is given here.

14 For Dorothy Everett's important and influential study see 'Laȝamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Verse' in her *Essays on Middle English Literature*, edited by P. Kean (Oxford, 1955), pp. 23-45.

15 For Lewis's essay see n. 7 above; R. S. Loomis's most influential discussion appears as his chapter on 'Laȝamon's *Brut*' in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, edited by R. S. Loomis (London, 1959), pp. 104-11; W. H. Schirmer discusses the *Brut* in the context of his longer study, *Die frühen Darstellungen des Arthurstoffes*, Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, Geisteswissenschaften, 73 (Cologne and Opladen, 1957), pp. 54-82, and in 'Layamon's *Brut*', *Bulletin of the Modern Humanities Research Association*, 29 (1957), 15-27.

16 D. Everett, 'Laȝamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Verse', p. 33. Håkon Ringbom's *Studies in the Narrative Technique of Beowulf and Lawman's Brut* (Åbo, 1968) follows in the tradition of Tatlock and Everett in representing the verse form of the *Brut* as a popular one, but does not take up their other ideas on Laȝamon as a potentially learned poet too. Ringbom's study (influenced by the now refuted premise of formulaic poetry being oral poetry in some way) presents the *Brut* as a work 'representing an intermediate stage between oral and written traditions' (p. 63).

17 See N. Blake 'Rhythmical Alliteration', *Modern Philology*, 67 (1969), 118-24. For A. McIntosh's study see n. 10 above. H. Ringbom's study (see n. 16 above) presents Laȝamon as very much a victim of the literary culture of his time: Ringbom's understanding of the implications of the tradition of Laȝamon's verse form is substantially challenged by the work of Blake and McIntosh. For a much more refined analysis of the *Brut* using the methodology of formulaic analysis see Dennis Patrick Donahue, 'Thematic and Formulaic Composition in Lawman's *Brut*' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1976).

18 E. G. Stanley, 'Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments', *Medium Ævum*, 38 (1969), 23-37.

19 Such sustained studies of the *Brut* that have been undertaken in the last thirty years or so have taken the form of doctoral theses which have not been made available in published form. Further references to these are listed in Le Saux's extremely useful bibliography. One of the earlier and most stimulating doctoral theses was that written by A. C. Gibbs, 'The Literary Relationships of Laȝamon's *Brut*' (University of Cambridge, 1962), which, had it been published, undoubtedly would have had a major impact on the field. The work of both Le Saux and Elizabeth Salter owes much to Gibbs's study, as their acknowledgements demonstrate. His study is the first to challenge the commonplace assumption about the apparently 'anti-French', 'anti-courtois' qualities of Laȝamon's work and to consider how Laȝamon might be attempting to forge a parallel 'courtois' idiom drawing on the resources of English.

20 Herbert Pilch, *Layamon's Brut: Eine literarische Studie* (Heidelberg, 1960); *Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 132-54.

21 E. Salter, 'Culture and literature in earlier thirteenth-century England: national and international', in *English and International: Studies in the Literature, Art and Patronage of Medieval England*, edited by Derek Pearsall and Nicolette Zeeman (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 29-74 (especially pp. 48-70). Obviously this essay appeared too late to be included in Le Saux's study.

22 E. Salter, 'Culture and Literature', p. 59.

23 M. Swanton, *English Literature Before Chaucer*, p. 185.

24 Another more recent example of the replication of culturally stereotyped views of Wace and Laȝamon can be found in Martin B. Shichtman's essay, 'Gawain in Wace and Laȝamon: A Case of Metahistorical Evolution', in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, edited by Laurie Finke and

Martin Shichtman (Ithaca, 1987), pp. 103-19. Although this essay opens with a promising review of the implications of the current debates about the construction of historical discourse for our approaches to medieval historiography (which is an important issue), Shichtman moves on to polarise the relationship between the *Roman de Brut* and the *Brut* in an extremely unsatisfactory way. He claims that the *Brut* 'contains none of the celebration of courtly values so central to Wace's work, primarily because these values would have close associations with French (especially Norman) culture . . . Laȝamon was a priest to a vanquished people; he wrote to an audience that had to tolerate but never fully accepted the authority and enthusiasms of its French conquerors. He wrote in English, making his work accessible to those who persisted in rejecting French as the official language of their land' (p. 114). Little support is offered for these generalisations.

25 Madden's gloss on the word 'þrumde' (*Brut*, 28) as 'compressed' (see his edition, p. 3) has unduly influenced subsequent translations and interpretations of what Laȝamon claims to have done with these three books. Madden notes in his Glossary that the verb may mean 'compressed' or 'set together', but few subsequent translators of these lines have suggested any alternatives to 'compressed' which may (mistakenly) imply that Laȝamon claims to be reducing the three texts into one, rather than bringing together material for the purposes of constructing a single, fuller, version of early insular history.

26 E. G. Stanley, 'Laȝamon's Antiquarian Sentiments' (see n. 18 above), p. 32.

27 The use of English as a historiographical medium is itself given a pedigree in this introductory section of the *Brut*. Laȝamon is not alone, of course, in evoking a long-standing tradition of textual making and learning in English. This is also evoked (and its loss lamented) in the first *Worcester Fragment*. Nor is Laȝamon alone in recognising that sources for insular historiography could be found in English. William of Malmesbury, for example, draws attention to the existence of a chronicle in English in the preface to his *Gesta Regum Anglorum*; Gaimar cites historical narratives in English as his sources in his *Estoire des Engleis* (notably in the 'longer epilogue'); in the prologue to *Waldef* (which dates from the end of the twelfth century) the narrator suggests the 'Bruit' itself was first written in English. But there are no other citations of the *English* book of Bede, to my knowledge, apart from that in the *Brut*.

28 Le Saux later 'resolves' some of the contradictions between her notion of Laȝamon's historical project (to write the literal truth), his claims in the prologue, and the compositional process of the *Brut* which we can reconstruct by appealing to Ronald H. Bathgate's 'operational model of the translation process' (*Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 57-58). But this seems to be a rather evasive gesture.

29 Gibbs concludes from his analysis of the Uther/Ygerne scene that Laȝamon's version seems no less influenced by stylised models of representing heterosexual relationships than Wace. Modern readers may fail to perceive this, though, because 'the terms which eventually passed into our

language, and which we use today to talk about the convention, are French terms. Is this not the ultimate reason for our calling Laȝamon's treatment primitive and naive?' ('Literary Relationships', p. 216, cited by Le Saux in *Laȝamon's Brut*, p. 62). A sharper refutation of the 'anti-courtois' nature of the *Brut* is to be found in the article written jointly by W. R. J. Barron and Françoise Le Saux, 'Two Aspects of Laȝamon's Narrative Art' (see n. 6 above). As they point out (pp. 46-50), critics seem to have overemphasised the importance of the concept of 'curteisie' in the *Roman de Brut*. I would add that there has been a concomitant lack of critical interest in the historiographical aspects of Wace's narrative. Neither Le Saux nor Barron and Weinberg attempt to reconsider the received opinion of the *Roman de Brut* in their major studies, and in both Wace is referred to as 'Robert Wace' (a spuriously modern coinage). Clearly, further critical studies of the *Roman de Brut* could make a substantial contribution to reassessments of Laȝamon's work and one of the most stimulating to appear in recent years is Nancy Vine Durling's essay, 'Translation and Innovation in the *Roman de Brut*', in *Medieval Translators and Their Craft*, edited by Jeanette Beer (Kalamazoo, 1989), pp. 9-39.

30 See *Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 134-38. Charting the progress of the struggle for power between the British and Saxons in terms of the pre-, mid-, and post-battle speeches made by Uther and Arthur is one of the most important strategies used in the *Brut* to increase the profile and status of the Saxon campaigns (which are of subordinate interest to the Roman campaigns in the *Roman de Brut*) and, indeed, to enhance the motivation for some of the action which otherwise seems inexplicable and arbitrary. Later Le Saux counters the suggestion that the elaborate hunting images which distinguish Arthur's Saxon battle rhetoric indicate Laȝamon's use of another source at this point in his narrative (*Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 206-13). It would be useful, clearly, if the discussion of this issue were to be consolidated: the particular passages in the *Brut* which have parallels in the *Armes Prydein* need to be considered in terms of the larger patterning of heroic rhetoric in Laȝamon's narrative and in the context of other possible sources of influence or sources of parallel rhetorical ploys (such as in the *chanson de geste*, for example).

31 Le Saux's discussion of the prologue to the *Brut* (*Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 16-23) necessarily anticipates some of the issues developed in the final chapters on Laȝamon's English sources, but John Frankis's work on possible phrasal parallels between the *Brut* and Ælfric's homilies seems to be discounted rather too quickly by Le Saux on pp. 20-22; his evidence, presented in 'Laȝamon's English Sources', seems no more 'tenuous' than that considered by Le Saux in the chapters on other possible sources in French and Welsh.

32 R. William Leckie, Jr, *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodisation of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1981). This issue has implications for the discussion of the source relationships between the *Brut*, the *Roman de Brut* and the Vulgate and Variant versions of the *Historia Regum Britanniae*, but is not tackled in these

earlier chapters of *Laȝamon's Brut*. Leckie briefly discusses the handling of the periodisation issue in Laȝamon's *Brut* on pp. 117-19 of his study, but takes a rather dim view of Laȝamon's 'diminished awareness of fundamental historical issues' (p. 119). This is an issue which deserves more detailed study and discussion.

[33] Le Saux characterises some previous critical responses to the post-Arthurian section of the *Brut* in this way, *Laȝamon's Brut*, p. 229.

[34] For Gwyn Jones's introduction see the revised preface to the translation of the Arthurian sections of the *Roman de Brut* and the *Brut* by Eugene Mason in *Arthurian Chronicles* (London, 1976). Jones uses the phrase 'an intensely English poet' on p. xi. Mason's translation was originally published in 1912.

[35] D. Everett, 'Laȝamon and the Earliest Middle English Alliterative Poetry', p. 37.

[36] Ian Kirby has discussed some of the questionable assumptions behind the frequent criticism of Laȝamon's apparently confused patriotic 'English' stance in 'Angles and Saxons in Laȝamon's *Brut*', *Studia Neophilologica*, 36 (1964), 51-62. Kirby draws attention to Laȝamon's distinctive representation of the Angles in the *Brut* and argues that Laȝamon represents the Angles, not the Saxons, as the legitimate possessors of former British land, though the pattern of representation is not entirely consistent, as Kirby himself notes (pp. 60-61). See also Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 140-41. Some comparative discussion would be useful here from other historical narratives (including the *Roman de Brut*, and perhaps Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, and the so-called *Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*). There is some uncertainty, too, over the meaning and significance of the narrator's references to the 'Normans' (*Brut*, 3547) and the 'Frensca' (*Brut*, 1026). Le Saux discusses the interpretation of these lines on pp. 80-83, and later goes on to suggest some parallel between them and the anti-Norman animosity of the *Vita Merlini* (*Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 111-12). However, she does not follow through the implications of the identification of the 'Normans' in the *Vita* ('understood as a reference to the French troops of the invasions of Stephen's reign' [p. 112, n. 33]).

[37] 'Laȝamon's English Sources' (see n. 9 above), p. 31.

[38] Rudolph Imelmann, *Layamon. Versuch über siene Quellen* (Berlin, 1906); refuted by G. J. Visser, in *Laȝamon: An Attempt at Vindication* (Assen, 1935). J. S. P. Tatlock briefly discusses Imelmann's thesis in *LHB*, pp. 477-82, as does Le Saux, *Laȝamon's Brut*, pp. 121-23. The powerful mythifying effect of Laȝamon's prologue, for example, is emphasised when his generalised account of searching the land and bringing together sources in English, Latin, and French, is compared with the particularity of the nexus of book owning and borrowing relationships described in the longer epilogue to Gaimar's *Estoire des Engleis*, edited by Alexander Bell, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 14-16 (Oxford, 1960), lines 6430-526.

[39] J. S. P. Tatlock describes these fragments in *LHB*, pp. 451-62. I have updated and revised his account in my description of the five extant fragments in 'Commemorating the Past: A Critical

Study of the Shaping of British and Arthurian History in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Laȝamon's *Brut*, and the Alliterative *Morte Arthure*' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1990), pp. 117-21, 195-200. For an account of Laȝamon as a 'massive erratic in the history of English poetry' see Derek Pearsall, *Old and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977), pp. 108-13. Pearsall has reconsidered some of his views in 'The Alliterative Revival: Origins and Social Backgrounds', in *Middle English Alliterative Poetry* (cited above, n. 10), pp. 34-53.

40 See Laȝamon's Brut, p. 26; E. Nida, Towards a Science of Translating (Leiden, 1964), p. 166.

41 Sometimes the terms of reference of this synoptic introduction are rather too vague to be useful: on the significance of the Norman Conquest, for example, we are told '*Those who understood* such matters recognised that the Conquerer had some claim to the throne; *simpler men* regarded his victory at Hastings as God's judgement' *Laȝamon's Arthur*, p. xii (my italics). Sometimes the time schemes involved in the reconstruction are confusing: in relation to the situation of the post-Conquest use of English we learn, 'With the hindsight of our modern perspective, the future of English literature seems no more in doubt than that of the language' (p. xiv). The chronology of events is more literally confusing in the section of the introduction which outlines responses to the *Historia Regum Britannie* (p. xxiv): quoting William of Malmesbury's description of Arthur from his *Gesta Regum Anglorum* in this context suggests that his opinion on Arthur postdates, rather than precedes, the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's historical narrative. Some of the views expressed in Barron and Weinberg's introduction, especially on the 'courtois/non-courtois' quality of the *Roman de Brut* and the *Brut*, conflict with the views expressed in Barron and Le Saux's article (cited above n. 6). More explicit cross-referencing between their article and their respective books would help to alert readers to the revision of opinions on such topics.

42 The chronicle on fols 229v-232v of the Caligula MS has been edited by John Koch, *Le rei de Engleterre: ein anglo-normannischer Geschichtsauszug* (Berlin, 1886) and belongs to a larger group of short chronicles which have not, as yet, been studied in any detail. For further information about this chronicle 'tradition' and a text of one version see Diana Tyson, 'An Early French Prose History of the Kings of England', *Romania*, 96 (1975), 1-26.

43 See Neil Ker, *The Owl and the Nightingale. Reproduced in Facsimile from the surviving manuscripts Jesus College Oxford 29 and British Museum Cotton Caligula A ix*, EETS, os 251 (London, 1963), p. ix. See also John Frankis's discussion, 'The Social Context of Vernacular Writing in Thirteenth-Century England: the Evidence of the Manuscripts', in *Thirteenth Century England I*, edited by P. R. J. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge, 1986), pp. 175-84. We need to have plural models of audiences and the receptive contexts of the *Brut*. Laȝamon's work has at least

one recorded reader. The second recension of the *Chronicle* traditionally attributed to Robert of Gloucester makes some use of material from the pre-Arthurian sections of Laȝamon's *Brut* to supplement its abbreviated narrative of the early kings of Britain. W. A. Wright draws attention to these additions in the preface to his edition of *The Metrical Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester*, Rolls Series, 86 (London, 1887), pp. xxxiii-xxxviii, and reproduces the text of these additions in his Appendix to his second volume.

44 R. Allen has produced a verse translation of the *Brut* which is to be published by Dent; W. R. J. Barron and S. C. Weinberg are working on a translation of the full text of the *Brut*. Since completing this review, I have learnt of another translation by Donald Bzdyl, *Layamon's Brut* (Binghamton, 1989). Plans are also in progress for Ian Kirby and Françoise Le Saux to complete Volume III (introduction, notes, glossary) of Brook and Leslie's edition.

45 This is not the occasion to survey these developments. Recent relevant publications include the three volume series edited by Raphael Samuel on *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of the British National Identity* (London, 1989), which includes an essay by Rodney Hilton, 'Were the English English?'; Robin Frame, *The Political Development of the British Isles, 1100-1400* (Oxford, 1990); R. R. Davies, *Domination and Conquest. The Experience of Ireland, Scotland and Wales, 1100-1300* (Cambridge, 1990); Roger Ray, 'Medieval Historiography through the Twelfth Century: Problems and Progress of Research', *Viator*, 5 (1974), 33-59; Nancy Partner, 'Making Up Lost Time: Writing on the Writing of History', *Speculum*, 66 (1986), 90-117; Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: the Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Wisconsin, 1987). Daniel Donoghue's article, 'Laȝamon's Ambivalence', *Speculum*, 65 (1990), 537-63, which discusses Laȝamon's attitude towards the past, came to my attention after the completion of this article. I thank Thorlac Turville-Petre for this reference.

46 'The Sorrow of Layamon', in *Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952*, translated by Ruth L. C. Simms (London, 1973), pp. 158-62 (p. 162), originally published in *Otras inquisiciones*, 1937-52 (Buenos Aires, 1952).