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Source: *Arthuriana*, Vol. 10, No. 1, ESSAYS ON MERLIN (SPRING 2000), pp. 14-26

Published by: [Scriptorium Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869518>

Accessed: 09/06/2014 19:07

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Merlin as Historian in *Historia Regum Britannie*

KIMBERLY BELL

Geoffrey of Monmouth uses the figure of Merlin to reveal metafictional levels of meaning in the *HRB* in order to foreground the historian's role in shaping perceptions of history. (KB)

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* (*HRB*) stands as a unique testimony to the history of the British people. Because of its focus on the dim past of the British, the *HRB* made a considerable impression on Geoffrey's readers and attracted the attention of William of Newburgh, one of Geoffrey's contemporaries, who denounced the history as being made up of 'the old fictitious accounts of the British' (Walsh and Kennedy 41) ['*Britonum figmentis sumptas et ex proprio auctas*'] (13). While Gerald of Wales also dismissed Geoffrey's work in his *Itinerarium Kambriae*, most received the *HRB* enthusiastically and, as R. H. Fletcher points out in his work on the Arthurian tradition in medieval chronicles, Geoffrey's history 'was generally accepted as a basis for British history' (179) throughout the Middle Ages. Much of the *HRB*'s appeal lies in its intricate construction. Presenting a narrative history of the British people, Geoffrey enriches his text by weaving political, religious, and social themes into his tapestry of historical, legendary, and mythical British kings and heroes. Geoffrey also works metafictional levels into his history that enable him to explore the mechanics involved in the creation of texts. These levels reveal a concern with writing and, more significantly, expose the *HRB* as a fictional construct. To foreground these metafictional elements, Geoffrey creates the figure of Merlin, a character whose actions reflect both the role of the reader and the various functions of the historian. Ultimately, Merlin becomes a shaper of history himself, whose prophetic text mirrors Geoffrey's own historical narrative. In Merlin, Geoffrey thereby establishes an artistic relationship among his reader, his text, and his persona, the historian. The metafictional elements that come into play, moreover, draw attention to fictionality and textual constructs and point to Geoffrey's objectives in writing the *HRB* that exist beyond the creation of a national myth for the British. Underlying this

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purpose is the issue of historical veracity. In raising awareness of fictionality in a historical narrative, Geoffrey shows his readers how history is a fictional construct shaped by the historian who, therefore, not only manipulates the material of his text, but also readers' perceptions of history itself.

Medieval historians often blended fact and imaginative fiction in their narratives when truth and verisimilitude rested on *auctoritas* and the ability to tell a good story. As historical scholars and literary critics have demonstrated, medieval writers of history relied on the same literary and rhetorical devices used by writers of fiction. Nancy Partner maintains that this reliance on literary methods of composition stemmed from the lack of clearly defined rules of history writing in the *trivium*. As Ruth Morse notes, 'internal consistency and verisimilitude appeared to count among the highest criteria for subsequent readers and writers [of history], who only rarely had external validation to turn to' (7). Geoffrey of Monmouth based his history on rather loose conventions of medieval historical narrative: he presented it in chronological form, composed it in Latin prose, focussed on invasions and political intrigue, and included supernatural events. Most medieval audiences enjoyed and expected fictional elements in historical narratives and recognized them as such, but the presence of *fabula* in a historical document creates the potential for what Wayne Booth terms 'the fictive experience' (424). As he argues, such an experience that occurs in fiction writing is 'utterly missing from all historical narratives' (424). However, Booth does make an exception for those histories 'that deliberately and openly contradict what the authorial audience believes about historical fact—in short, those that become fictional' (425). The blending of fact and fiction allows writers of metafiction, including Geoffrey, to call into question the essential tenets of realism that an author seeks to establish in a text and that the audience tends to accept in the reading of that text. As a result, the author lays bare the text's underlying frame and thereby creates a tension in the narrative level that points to metafiction.¹

The tension that Geoffrey creates between fiction and history forms an essential paradox found in much metafiction, which often involves the breaking down of conventional rules of writing in order to draw attention to the structure of the narrative lying beneath those conventions. In the *HRB*, Geoffrey accomplishes this by offering a self-consciously fictional text as history. As Geoffrey's narrator asserts in the dedication, he composed the *HRB* when the Archdeacon of Oxford asked that he translate a book from the British language into Latin: 'Walterus Oxinefordensis archidiaconus, uir in oratoria arte atque in exoticis historiis eruditus, quendam Britannici

sermonis librum uetustissimum...proponebar' (1); ['Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the art of public speaking and well-informed about the history of foreign countries, presented me with a very certain ancient book written in the British language'] (51).² To corroborate his testimony, he refers to several authorities, including extensive references to Gildas, Bede, Lucan, Apuleius, the Bible, and oral traditions. Whether his principal source actually existed or whether Geoffrey simply employs the conventional old book *topos*, the narrator's reference to an unnamed source casts him in the role of translator, who simply transcribes an already documented history. By claiming to translate his source into the Latin, Geoffrey lends to his text a sense of truth and authority. As Kellie Robertson explains, 'Latin conveyed the authority of both the patristic and academic past; as the public discourse, it stood against an essentially private and parochial vernacular culture' (45). The incorporation of fictional material into his text, though, essentially undermines the historical narrative that Geoffrey presents to his readers.

In the *HRB*, Geoffrey sustains such metafictional tensions with the figure of Merlin, in whom the worlds of realism and outright fiction intersect. The sage appears in the middle of the text at a critical point in British history, when Vortigern's Saxon auxiliary army led by Hengest and Horsa turns on Vortigern and the Britons face the first real threat of barbarian invasion and total annihilation. Geoffrey, of course, borrowed the figure of Merlin from Celtic tradition, and probably drew from the pseudo-Nennian character Ambrosius in the *Historia Brittonum*. As in the ninth-century text, Merlin plays a role in the *HRB* that is fundamentally different from those of his heroic counterparts. While the other characters peopling the *HRB* and the *Historia Brittonum* include historical and mythical kings, leaders, and warriors, neither Ambrosius nor Merlin (also named Ambrosius) participates in the heroic action of the history. Instead, they are mystics who claim direct descent from a princess and a demon and who divine the meaning of a battle between two dragons; however, here the similarities between the two figures end. At the point in the pseudo-Nennian text when Ambrosius delivers his interpretation of the battle between the dragons, he disappears from the narrative. Geoffrey's character, though, takes on a much more significant role. In the *HRB*, Merlin delivers the future of Britain as seen by his guiding spirit, and he possesses drugs potent enough to allow Utherpendragon to trick Ygernia into believing that he is her husband Gorlois. Moreover, he remains in the background of the narrative and only appears at crucial moments to serve Vortigern, Aurelius Ambrosius, and Utherpendragon. In his capacities of prophet, architect, and advisor, Merlin fulfills certain artistic

functions that reflect the roles of Geoffrey's readers and his narrator, and in doing so, reveal the structure underlying Geoffrey's narrative.

Geoffrey initially introduces Merlin as a reader of signs with the sage's interpretation of the hidden text beneath Vortigern's mountain fortress in Wales. When the earth continually consumes the walls of his stronghold, Vortigern summons his *magi*, who had recommended the site, to explain the cause of the quake: 'consuluit iterum magos suos ut causam rei indicarent' (71); ['he consulted his magicians a second time, to give them a chance of explaining the reason for it'] (166). Vortigern expects an accurate reading from his *magi*: their reputation and privileged position as the king's counselors rest on their ability to interpret the equivocal meaning of signs. The *magi* suggest that Vortigern find a fatherless boy and sprinkle his blood on the foundations of the tower. Here, Vortigern's professional readers append a meaning to the signs on the mountain without considering potentially deeper meanings. Indeed, they base their misguided reading on the fear of incurring the king's displeasure and, worse, on the basest level of *auctoritas*—superstition. Their misreading necessitates the creation of a fiction, which leads them to tell an elaborate tale of a blood sacrifice that will still the shaking earth. In doing so, they prove themselves to be unreliable as readers, and their misreading draws attention to the act of reading itself.

In this passage, Geoffrey juxtaposes the way that the *magi* read signs with Merlin's more accurate reading. Merlin reveals the ineptitude of Vortigern's *magi* by telling the king that the true reason for the unstable foundations involves a subterranean pool. Proving that he understands the signs on the mountain, Merlin first commands the 'mendaces adultores' (73); ['lying flatterers'] (169), Vortigern's *magi*, to explain what lies within the pool before speaking of two dragons slumbering in hollow stones. Merlin goes on to divine the metaphorical meaning of the hidden text as signifying the defeat of the British at the hands of the Saxons. As with most of the passages concerning Merlin, this portion of the *HRB* develops the recurring motif of the marvels that medieval audiences expected, in that the reason for the shaking foundations is even more fantastic than the solution of the *magi* to the problem. More significantly, though, it reveals Geoffrey's interest in reading and interpreting signs. Merlin's understanding of the text shows his ability to read signs perceptively. Merlin exposes the fiction of the *magi* and thereby establishes himself as a superior reader of signs who discerns the text hidden beneath the historic action of the narrative. He proves his sophistication as a reader, thereby demonstrating to his audience, Vortigern and his *magi*, how they should have read the text on the mountain.

In taking on the role of the reader, Merlin also demonstrates the proper way to read for Geoffrey's audience. Through his actions, Merlin instructs Geoffrey's readers on how to understand his own prophecies and, in a larger sense, the *HRB* as a whole. Indeed, Geoffrey turns the interpretation of his text over to his audience when his own readers, Merlin and the narrator, fail to comment on Merlin's prophecies. After Merlin falls into a trance and utters his cryptic forebodings of Britain's future, he foretells Vortigern's impending violent end at the hands of the Saxons but does not decode his oral text for his listeners. Having already received instruction through the witnessing of the proper way to read a text, Merlin's audience should attempt an interpretation. After hearing Merlin's predictions, though, Vortigern and his magicians miss their cue to interpret his meaning; instead, they stand, 'ambiguitate uerborum suorum astantes in admirationem commouit' (84); ['with amazement by the equivocal meaning of his words'] (186). Significantly, Geoffrey's loquacious narrator also remains uncharacteristically silent and leaves Merlin's text unglossed. Through such silences, Geoffrey shifts the burden of interpretation to his readers, who, to gain an understanding of the prophecies, must repeatedly return to Merlin's text while reading the rest of the *HRB* to ascertain their validity. This act breaks the illusion of narrative (and historical) linearity and forces readers to participate actively in the construction of the text rather than passively receive information given to them by Merlin or the narrator.

While his subject matter concerns the history, downfall, and promised resurrection of the British people, Merlin speaks in ambivalent, poetic language that taxes the interpretive abilities of Geoffrey's readers. He speaks, among other things, of wars with the invaders, famine and pestilence, and the destruction of the land. Rather than using conventionally unambiguous speech associated with historical narrative, he describes these historic events in metaphors, including graphic descriptions of rivers of blood, serpents born of boiling seas, and dragons tearing one another to pieces. Although readers can interpret certain prophecies with relative ease, particularly the early passages that refer to Arthur, the slippery and polysemic nature of Merlin's language makes it impossible to reach a definitive interpretation so that accepting his text as an accurate account of history becomes problematic. As Howard Dobin explains in his examination of Merlinic prophecy,

Prophecy in the Merlinic tradition of obscurantist symbolic rhetoric forecloses the chance of ever recovering those signifieds and that single truth. More than any other text, prophecy makes explicit claim of absolute truth and authority; however, the peculiarities of prophetic style cancel the possibility of locating

definitive meaning. Prophetic content presumes transcendent meaning; prophetic form frustrates every effort to achieve even momentary meaning.
(22)

Merlin's dense language, then, defeats the purpose of language as a proper vehicle of historical meaning. However, as Dobin argues, the prophetic form of Merlin's text implies authority, and his prophecies nevertheless exhibit a certain veracity to the careful reader.³ Karen Moranski suggests that Geoffrey 'was aware of the possibility of multiple historical interpretations and of the powerful human impulse to particularize the universal' (61). Julia Crick notes that with Merlin, Geoffrey employs a well-known literary device of 'masking history as prophecy'; thus, Merlin's 'mysterious prophecies gain validity within the [*HRB*]' (221).

In acting as a reader and interpreter of historical events, Merlin reflects not only the role of a reader, but he also assumes the essential functions of Geoffrey's narrator. At Mount Erith, Merlin reads for Vortigern and his *magi* much in the same way that Geoffrey's narrator reads for his audience. Importantly, both prove their reliability as narrators (Booth 158); that is, their accurate readings create a convincing illusion of Geoffrey's text as an authoritative representation of historic reality. Geoffrey's creation of a character who assumes readerly and narratorial functions is not unusual in historical or literary narratives that are textured with metafictional elements. Such characters expose the mechanics that lie beneath the surface of the text. That Merlin acts as a reader and reflects both Geoffrey's narrator and his reading audience makes Geoffrey's readers more aware of their participatory roles in the construction of his text.

Geoffrey underscores this artistic resemblance between Merlin and the narrator with the nature of Merlin's prophetic power. The sage begins to utter his prophecies, the narrator notes that 'Mox ille in fletum prorumpens spiritum hausit prophetic' (74); ['Immediately bursting into tears, Merlin went into a prophetic trance'],⁴ implying that Merlin serves as a conduit to a greater being. Later, Merlin provides Geoffrey's readers with the specific source of his prophetic power. When Aurelius Ambrosius queries Merlin on his own destiny, Merlin responds by saying

Non sunt reuelanda huiusmodi mysteria nisi cum summa necessitas incubuerit.
Nam si ea in derisionem siue uanitatem proferrem, taceret spiritus qui me
docet et, cum opus superueniret, taceret. (90)

[Mysteries of that sort cannot be revealed except where there is most urgent need for them. If I were to utter them as an entertainment, or where there was no need at all, then the spirit which controls me would forsake me in the moment of need.] (196)

Merlin's function as the mouthpiece through which his guiding spirit speaks reflects the role that Geoffrey's narrator serves in the text as the authorial persona.

Ultimately, though, Geoffrey attributes to Merlin the metafictional characteristics of the historian with Merlin's construction of Stonehenge. On the advice of Tremorinus, Archbishop of the ancient Roman city of Legions, Aurelius Ambrosius calls on Merlin to construct a monument suitable to commemorate the British soldiers treacherously slain by Hengest and his men. Merlin conceives of the idea for the marker, a massive ring of megaliths in Ireland, and suggests transporting it to Britain. As he tells Aurelius:

Si perpetuo opere sepulturam uirorum decorare uolueris, mitte pro chorea gigantum que est in Killarao monte Hybernie. Est etenim ibi structura lapidum quam nemo huius etatis construeret nisi ingenium artem subuectaret. Grandes sunt lapides nec est aliquis cuius uirtuti cedant. Qui si eo modo [Salisbury Plain] quo ibidem positi sunt circa plateam locabuntur, stabunt in eternum. (90-91)

[Send for the Giants' Dance which is on Mount Killaraus in Ireland. In that place there is a stone construction which no man of this period could ever erect, unless he combined great skill and artistry. The stones are enormous and there is no one alive strong enough to move them. If they are placed in position around this site [Salisbury Plain], in the way in which they are erected over there, they will stand forever'] (196)

Here, Geoffrey foregrounds the role of the artist. Once landed, Merlin challenges Utherpendragon and his men to tear down the Giants' Ring, saying, 'Utimini uiribus uestris, iuuenes, ut in deponendo lapides istos sciatis utrum ingenium uirtuti an uirtus ingenio cedat' (91); ['try your strength, young men...and see whether skill can do more than brute strength, or strength more than skill when it comes to dismantling these stones!'] (197). Finding that they cannot move a single piece of the structure, Merlin dismantles the stones with ease: 'Denique, cum queque necessaria apposuisset, leuius quam credi potest lapides deposuit' (92); ['He placed in position all the gear which he considered necessary and dismantled the stones more easily than you could ever believe'] (198). Merlin thereby proves the superiority of art:

At ille preceptis eius obediens eodem modo quo in Killarao monte Hybernie positi fuerant erexit illos circa sepulturas ingeniumque uirtuti preualere comprobauit. (92)

[Merlin obeyed the king's orders and put the stones up in a circle round the sepulchre, in exactly the same way as they had been arranged on Mount Killaraus in Ireland, thus proving that his artistry was worth more than any brute strength.] (198)

Merlin's approach to the task involves skill and artistry over the strength of Utherpendragon and his men, who fail to move the megaliths. His emphasis on the need for skill rather than strength brings the artist's role to the front of a historical document otherwise centered on the lives of heroes. Merlin's architectural insight makes the move possible, and he orchestrates the transportation of the stones. In this way, his actions mimic those of the historian, for both Merlin and Geoffrey construct monuments, one in stone, the other in ink and parchment, 'in memoriam tantorum uirorum in eum constaret' (90); [to 'stand for ever in memory of such distinguished men'] (195).

In using Stonehenge as a memorial to the slain heroes, Merlin takes an extant construct of an ancient culture and transports it to his own country for another purpose. As Merlin tells Aurelius, a race of giants moved the stones to Ireland for a specific, medicinal reason: 'Mistici sunt lapides et ad diuersa medicamenta salubres...Erat autem causa ut balnea infra ipsos conficerent, cum infirmitate grauarentur' (91); ['These stones are connected with certain secret religious rites and they have various properties which are medicinally important...Their plan was that, whenever they felt ill, baths should be prepared at the foot of the stones'] (196). The giants, then, moved the stones from Africa and erected them in Ireland as a center for healing. Aurelius, though, commissions Merlin to dismantle Stonehenge and relocate it to Britain not for its healing properties but to stand as a monument to the dead. Merlin achieves what the giants had done centuries before, namely the moving of the stones from one locale to another; however, in erecting the stones on Salisbury Plain exactly as they had been arranged in Ireland, he retains their original design, thereby transforming the significance of the object of one culture into a symbol of his own.

Merlin's re-invention of Stonehenge to suit the needs of his own nation becomes a paradigm for the creation of fiction. As Merlin borrows material from one culture to construct a monument dedicated to the heroes of his own people, his actions metaphorically represent Geoffrey's borrowing of the legends and tales from other, older civilizations to form the foundation of his own history. While the *translatio studii et imperii* topos was a conventional device in medieval histories, Geoffrey's use of *translatio* in the shaping of his history and with Merlin's reconstruction of Stonehenge underscores metafictional concerns with creating narrative constructs. As Merlin uses artistry in moving and transforming Stonehenge, Geoffrey reshapes older material through his craft. Geoffrey's narrator opens the *HRB* with an idyllic description of Britain, 'insularum optima' (1); ['the best of

islands'] (51), and goes on to recount the tale of Brutus, the eponymous founder of Britain, whose great-grandfather Aeneas carried his household gods from Troy and re-established his Trojan culture in Italy. Therewith, Geoffrey establishes a connection between Virgil's legendary Troy, the great republic of Rome, and the British Isles at the beginning of the *HRB* through Brutus' blood relationship with the classical hero Aeneas. Geoffrey reinforces the link between Rome and Britain with Brutus's naming his capital city 'Troia Noua' (73): 'Condidit itaque ciuitatem ibidem eamque Troiam Nouam uocauit' (14); ['There then he built his city and called it Troia Nova'] (73) in memory of his ancestral homeland. By drawing on the ancient cultures of Troy and Rome, Geoffrey creates the illusion of a cultural continuance between Britain and the Trojan and Roman civilizations: he consequently gives the British a history worthy of Rome and the legendary Troy.

Geoffrey reinforces the link between Merlin and the historian by creating structural similarities between the prefaces to the prophecies of Merlin and the *HRB* proper. Following Merlin's discovery of the dragons beneath Vortigern's stronghold, the narrator interrupts the history with a dedicatory epistle to the Norman Bishop Alexander of Lincoln. As he tells his readers,

Nondum autem ad hunc locum historie perueneram, cum de Merlino diuulgato rumore compellebant undique contemporanei mei prophetias ipsius edere: maxime autem Alexander Lincolniensis episcopus, uir summe religionis et prudentie. (73)

[I had not yet reached this point in my story when Merlin began to be talked about very much, and from all sorts of places people of my own generation kept urging me to publish his prophecies. Outstanding among these people was Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln.] (170)

With this dedication, the narrator's interruption in the middle of his history mirrors the beginning of the *HRB* itself. The *HRB*'s opens with Geoffrey's narrator discussing its genesis according to the conventions of history writing and dedicating his work to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and Waleran, Count of Meulan. Further, he emphasizes his role as translator over that of author. In this way, the prefaces of both the *HRB* and Merlin's prophecies serve as introductions to each storyteller's text; that is, in the first dedication, Geoffrey's narrator prepares his readers for his subject matter, the past history of Britain, while in the second preface he introduces the readers to Merlin's text, the past, present, and future history of Britain. As Curley maintains, the section devoted to Merlin's prophecies 'stands apart from the main narrative both formally and substantively as a kind of meditation on history itself' ('Animal Symbolism' 152). By interjecting a whole book devoted to

the prophecies of Merlin in the middle of his history, Geoffrey constructs a microcosmic text reflecting his own *Historia Regum Britannie*. In essence, then, Geoffrey creates a historical account embedded within his own fictionalized chronicle.

With the conception of Arthur, though, Merlin transcends his role as a messenger of history to manipulate the very events that he foretells. When Utherpendragon unsuccessfully initiates a war against his vassal Gorlois in an attempt to gain access to Gorlois's wife Ygernna, he calls on Merlin, who assists the king in his seduction of Ygernna by metamorphosing him into the semblance of her husband. Gaining easy access into Tintagel castle, Utherpendragon spends the night with Ygernna who conceives Arthur. Having metaphorically spoken of Arthur as the Boar of Cornwall and his expulsion of the invaders earlier in his prophecies, Merlin uses his art to aid in the fruition of the history he foretold by transforming Utherpendragon's appearance through drugs: as he tells Utherpendragon, 'Scio medicaminibus meis dare figuram Gorlois ita ut per omnia ipse uidearis' (97); ['By my drugs I know how to give you the precise appearance of Gorlois'] (206–207). Whether his drugs are a product of magic, as Robert Hanning suggests (154), or simply *φάρμακα* (cosmetics or drugs) (Tatlock 363), Merlin creates a disguise around the king, thereby shaping Utherpendragon's appearance into a fiction, a tool with which he and the king can effectively deceive Ygernna. While Tatlock's claim that the 'respected sage[s]' motives are 'kindly' (363) may be problematic, Merlin's transformation of Utherpendragon's appearance nevertheless sets the scene for the conception of Arthur, one of the key figures in Geoffrey's text whom the narrator hails as 'celeberrimum uirum illum' (98); ['the most famous of men'] (207). Through deceiving Ygernna, Merlin shapes history, namely, the birth of Arthur. As Hanning argues, Merlin's use of special powers 'puts him temporarily in control of national progress' (154). Moreover, extending his reach beyond the immediate history of Britain, he proves to play a fundamental part in the genesis of a legend, manipulating his material to create the subject matter for future historians and poets. As Merlin goes on to form history as defined by the parameters of the *HRB*, he becomes, in Hanning's words, 'Geoffrey's symbol for the artist-historian, whose insight into predetermined history gives him some control over the historical process' (154).

In attributing readerly, narratorial, and authorial functions to Merlin, Geoffrey repeatedly signals the fictive nature of his history to his readers, thereby sending the message that his history is, ultimately, a fictional text. This deconstruction of the textual 'reality' of history calls all history writing

into question. In doing so, Geoffrey indicates that both written and oral history-telling can only be artificially constructed. Therefore, the reality that history purports to represent can only be that particular reality chosen by the historian. In the *HRB*, Geoffrey's fictions enable him to glorify the British, as several scholars, including Martin Shichtman and Laurie Finke and Michael Curley, have argued. As Curley maintains, 'Anglo-Norman historians were interested in promulgating the view that their new possessions in England had a dignified and ancient past reaching far behind the Saxon plantation' (*Geoffrey* 50), and Geoffrey helped to provide the Normans with a sense of having conquered an ancient and noble race. However, Geoffrey undercuts even this narrative-level sense of a dignified past with his narrator's comments in the beginning of the *HRB*:

Postremo quinque inhabitatur populis: Normannis uidelicet atque Britannis, Saxonibus, Pictis et Scotis. Ex quibus Britones olim ante ceteros a mari usque ad mare insederunt doned ultione diuina propter ipsorum superueniente superbiam Pictis et Saxonibus cesserunt. Qualiter uero et unde applicuerunt restat nunc parare ut in subsequentibus explicabitur. (2)

[Finally, Britain is inhabited by five races of people, the Norman-French, the Britons, the Saxons, the Picts, and the Scots. Of these the Britons once occupied the land from sea to sea, before the others came. Then the vengeance of God overtook them because of their arrogance and they submitted to the Picts and the Saxons. It now remains for me to tell how they came and from where.] (54)

His alleged purpose in translating the history, then, is not to highlight the glory of a race but to explain the origins of the British people and to relate how they came to inhabit the island.

At the same time, though, Geoffrey shapes a story for a people who in essence had no past, and what remains beneath the multiple layers of fact and fiction is the story-writing process. Through revealing the mechanics involved in the construction of his text, Geoffrey raises a new level of readerly awareness in the history-writing genre. At the same time, the figure of Merlin enables him to bring themes relevant to metafiction into his text, whereby he underscores the important relationship between the artist, the text, and the reader. In providing the British with a past, Geoffrey illustrates the importance of storytelling as well as mythmaking.

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NOTES

I wish to thank Professors Suntlee Gertz, Mary Ramsey, Bradford Fletcher, and Paul Schmidt for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this essay.

- 1 Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction* (London: Methuen, 1981) and Robert Scholes's *Fabulation and Metafiction* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1979) have been particularly useful to my understanding of the *HRB*.
- 2 All citations from Geoffrey of Monmouth are from Neil Wright's edition of the *Historia Regum Britannie* (*The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS. 568*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from Lewis Thorpe's edition (*The History of the Kings of Britain*. Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1966).
- 3 Michael Curley provides a compelling reading of the prophecies in his *Geoffrey of Monmouth* (48–74).
- 4 Thanks to ARTHURIANA's anonymous reader, who suggested this more accurate translation. Thorpe translates it as 'Merlin immediately burst into tears. He went into a prophetic trance' (171).

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