Argante of Areley Kings: Regional Definitions of National Identity in Laȝamon's *Brut*

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ABSTRACT

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Argante of Areley Kings: Regional Definitions of National Identity in Laȝamon's *Brut*

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In his *Brut*, Laȝamon links Arthur with pre-Conquest England and emphasizes Arthur's prophesied return, expressing a desire for the native English to regain their cultural and political supremacy in England. Instrumental to Arthur's return is Argante, the queen of Avalon, who receives Arthur's mortally wounded body and will restore him to health so he can return to Britain. Laȝamon's association of Argante with local healing-well traditions and naming practices link her with the local Worcestershire region, while his rejection of non-local literary and linguistic influences and his association of her with other figures who represent native English national identity reinforce Argante's nationalistic role. Laȝamon's redefinition of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgen as Argante reasserts the region's important role in maintaining and restoring native English cultural and political supremacy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

Figures

INTRODUCTION

England's shifting political and cultural identity in the twelfth century prompted authors and politicians to grapple with the question of English identity. The Norman Conquest in 1066 overthrew English linguistic supremacy in England until the re-popularization of the English vernacular in the fourteenth century, and the rule of England by monarchs who had significant properties and interests on the European continent divided their interests and continued until the line of English kings lost their continental holdings in the Hundred Years War. The split loyalties during the civil war between King Stephen and the Empress Matilda fueled the pre-existing tension surrounding England's national identity. In response, English kings who were descended from William the Conqueror and Henry Plantagenet, along with the imported Norman nobility, scrambled to establish their legitimacy by tracing their ancestry to figures associated with legitimate English identity, such as King Alfred, Edward the Confessor, and the legendary King Arthur.

The rise in popularity of King Arthur in Anglo-Norman romances and chronicles after the Norman Conquest suggests that the ruling elite identified him as a nationalistic English figure and sought to associate themselves with him. Laȝamon's *Brut* is the third in a series of three twelfth-century versions of British history that spend a disproportionate amount of time on Arthur's reign. Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote the earliest of the three, his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, sometime in the first half of the twelfth century. Geoffrey begins his history with Aeneas, anchoring English history in Classical tradition, and continues until the end of Arthur's reign and the Saxon

domination of Britain. By writing the history in Latin and rooting British identity in classical tradition, Geoffrey legitimizes English history. He dedicated different copies of his history to various figures, including King Stephen of Blois and Robert, Earl of Gloucester and Matilda's illegitimate half-brother. Geoffrey's dedications to key figures on either side of the debate for royal legitimacy suggest that his loyalty was opportunistic. The high number of surviving manuscripts indicates that Geoffrey's *Historia* was very popular.

In approximately the middle of the twelfth century, Wace rewrote Geoffrey's history as the *Roman de Brut*. Wace transformed Geoffrey's Latin prose into Norman French verse and significantly lengthened descriptions of characters and events. His linguistic and stylistic choices in effect colonize English history for the Anglo-Norman monarchy and ruling elite. His dedication to Eleanor of Aquitaine suggests that he was attempting to gain royal favor or patronage, and his use of Geoffrey's history indicates he wanted to benefit from the popularity of Geoffrey's earlier work. Wace's subsequent commission to write the *Roman de Rou* indicates the Anglo-Norman court received his *Roman de Brut* well.

Sometime in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century Laȝamon sought to reclaim English history by rewriting Wace's *Roman de Brut*. By choosing to rewrite the history of Britain in Anglo-Saxon language and literary style, he identified Anglo-Saxon culture as English cultural identity. Though the figure of King Arthur dominates the narrative of all three histories, Laȝamon asserts more than his predecessors do that Arthur will return and reclaim the English throne. According to all three historians, Arthur's

mortally wounded body was carried away to Avalon, where his wounds would be treated. Laȝamon elaborates on Geoffrey's and Wace's brief accounts, narrating Arthur's last words and emphasizing Arthur's promise to return to England. Laȝamon's expansion of the section dealing with Arthur's passing suggests a desire for the return of Anglo-Saxon supremacy in England. Laȝamon's version of British history does not appear to have been popular in Anglo-Norman courts.

Significantly, Laȝamon adds Argante, Queen of Avalon, who heals Arthur after his last battle. Argante appears twice in the *Brut*; once when Merlin prophesies Arthur's fate, and once when Arthur is mortally wounded in his last battle and Argante's women ferry him to Avalon. According to Laȝamon, Argante will restore Arthur to health so he can return to England and take back the crown. As Laȝamon presents Arthur as an embodiment of pre-Conquest English national identity, Argante's association with Arthur establishes her as the restorer of English national identity.

Through Argante, Laȝamon subtly manages to claim that his region in Worchester is protecting and nurturing true English identity and is perhaps also offering the chance for English culture to reemerge from his region to a position of cultural supremacy in England. Argante's character reflects Celtic, Roman, Christian, and Anglo-Saxon influences, the same cultural influences that affected the Anglo-centric cultural center of Worcester near where Laȝamon wrote. Laȝamon constructs Argante as parallel to the cultural makeup of Worcestershire. Her identification with Worcester suggests a similarity between her role as Arthur's healer and Worcester's role in preserving and reviving Anglo-Saxon literary culture. Argante's mirroring of the cultural makeup of

Worchester and the similarity between her role with Arthur and the focus at Worcester Cathedral of maintaining Anglo-Saxon literary and ecclesiastical traditions connects her with that region.

The Manuscript Tradition

Laȝamon's *Brut* survives in two manuscript copies. The manuscript that has received most of the Laȝamon scholarship within the past two centuries is British Library Manuscript Cotton Caligula A.ix (Caligula MS). The other manuscript is the British Library Manuscript Cotton Otho C.xiii (Otho MS). The Caligula MS uses more antiquated spellings and vocabulary, is more complete, and is in better condition than the version in the Otho MS, partially because the Otho MS suffered some damage in the 1731 Ashburnum House fire, which resulted in the degradation of some of the later pages. Scholars originally thought that the Otho MS was copied much later than the Caligula MS because it contains spellings and vocabulary that were contemporary to that in use when it was written, while the Caligula MS preserves older Middle English. Frederic Madden, the first scholar to create a translated edition of Laȝamon's *Brut,* placed the Otho MS two or three generations after the Caligula MS because of the linguistic differences between them. Some scholars today, such as Elizabeth Bryan, argue that the difference is more ideological than truly linguistic and place both manuscripts within the same generation. The version of Laȝamon's *Brut* in the Otho MS is written in what was then modern Middle English, while the version in the Caligula MS, while written fairly close to the date the Otho MS was written, eschews French-derived words, and contains archaistic English vocabulary and tenses. However, the archaic language of the *Brut* in

the Caligula MS is not always accurate, and the syntax is contemporary with the time it was copied, suggesting that the author (or copyist) created his own forms to age his literary work artificially (Roberts 5).

Academic estimates regarding the copy dates for the manuscripts have also changed; while scholars once assumed the manuscripts were copied in the early to mid-thirteenth century, they have slowly pushed the dates forward to the latter thirteenth century/early fourteenth century (4-5). The Otho MS also lacks approximately 3,000 verse lines that are present in the Caligula version, though scholars are still debating whether a scribe eliminated these lines in the Otho or added them to the Caligula. The version of the *Brut* in the Otho MS encountered a brief period of popularity with a group of scholars in London in the fifteenth century, and many of the marginal notes and glosses present in this text date from that period. The Caligula MS enjoys more scholastic attention now, however, as the *Brut* in the Caligula is more complete and longer, and scholars have long assumed that it was the older and more authoritative version of the two texts.

Editions and Translations

Madden assembled the first critical edition and translation of Laȝamon's *Brut*. The Society of Antiquaries of London published his three-volume edition in 1847. Madden worked on his edition during his tenure as the keeper of manuscripts at the British Museum. His edition places the text from the Caligula and the Otho next to each other and provides a prose translation beneath the Caligula and Otho columns. Madden attempted to place the matching (or nearly matching) lines from the Caligula and Otho

versions side by side, which means that when the Caligula contains sections that the Otho does not, he inserted blank lines into the Otho text until the two versions rejoined. He also inserted a series of dots as placeholders to mark the sections of text in the Otho where the manuscript is damaged and the text illegible. He also included a glossary, notes, and a critical preface that attempted to place the work within a linguistic and historical context. As restoration efforts have covered up or rendered illegible some sections of the manuscripts, scholars constructing modern translations often refer to Madden's text or his handwritten notes (which he donated to the British Library upon his death) to recover the now lost words or lines.

G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie prepared the next major edition of the text for the Early English Text Society in 1963. Brook and Leslie relied on Madden's text and occasionally referenced the Caligula and Otho MSS in the British Library. Their edition is two volumes, and they do not provide a modern English translation. Unlike Madden, Brook and Leslie recorded only the lines in the Caligula MS, though they note discrepancies from the Otho MS in footnotes. They also restored Laȝamon's full line divided by the caesura, which Madden had obscured when he placed each half line on its own line so he could fit both the Caligula and Otho MSS version side by side on the same page. Brook and Leslie's different decisions regarding Laȝamon's line breaks results in line numbers that do not correspond with the line numbers in Madden's version.

Rosamund Allen's 1992 translation of Laȝamon's *Brut* is currently the most popular modern translation. Allen worked primarily from the 1963 Brook and Leslie edition, though she did reference the Caligula and the Otho MSS as well. Her translation

focuses mostly on the Caligula version, as she, along with most scholars, deems it the more authoritative version. Unlike Madden, who provided a rough translation and emphasized the Middle English texts, Allen provides a more polished verse translation without including the accompanying transcription of the Middle English. She also includes a small bibliography and extensive notes. There are currently no translations or editions that primarily focus on the version found in the Otho MS, though Bryan, in her book *Collaborative Meaning in Medieval Scribal Culture: The Otho Laȝamon*, explores the collective scribal and scholastic efforts and functions of medieval and renaissance manuscripts by examining the creation and use of the Otho MS.

Scholarship

Most scholarship that addresses the chronicles of British history by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Laȝamon focuses on Geoffrey of Monmouth or Wace. Existing scholarship generally falls into the following categories: linguistics and poetics; paleographic studies; and history, identity, and the law. Few scholars have applied modern literary theories or addressed symbolic or thematic issues within the *Brut*. Laȝamon's *Brut* provides rich possibilities for scholarship on twelfth-century representations of gender. The text depicts figures such as the treacherously powerful Rowenna, recurring politically savvy queen regents, as well as blunt discussions of the fate of peasants and women in battle and defining depictions of masculinity.

Recent scholarship has investigated Laȝamon's seemingly conflicting attitudes towards Anglo-Saxons and Englishness. Daniel Donoghue suggested in his 1990 article "Laȝamon's Ambivalence" that Laȝamon neither embraced nor rejected his Anglo-Saxon

heritage, so removing nationalism as a driving force of Laȝamon's *Brut*. James Noble responded to Donoghue's claim in his essay "Laȝamon's 'Ambivalence' Reconsidered" in 1994 by claiming that Laȝamon linked the treacherous Saxons with the newly arrived Normans but distinguished between the Saxon invaders and the later Angle immigrants. Scott Kleinman offered a new interpretation in his 2004 article "The Aeþelen of Engle: Constructing Ethnic and Regional Identities in Laȝamon's Brut." In his article, Kleinman proposes that Laȝamon viewed national identity in terms of adoption and adherence to the legal and cultural traditions preserved in the land of England, not by ethnic or even linguistic identity. Instead of interpreting the cultural identities present in Laȝamon's *Brut* on a nationalistic level, Kleinman refocuses the debate through a regional lens, revealing economic and legal similarities and differences between the western midlands where Laȝamon's *Brut* was composed and the eastern region of England, which was heavily influenced culturally and legally by its many years of Danish rule.

Though Kleinman argues that Laȝamon based English identity on the cultural values of his region, his analysis remains focused on a unified legal tradition. Laȝamon's unified regional identity, however, was itself a complicated layering of Celtic, Christian, Scandinavian, and Anglo-Saxon elements. Most scholars ignore Laȝamon's complicated cultural heritage and only examine Argante's Anglo-Saxon aspect as revealed in Laȝamon's use of the term *aluen* when he describes her. Beyond linguistic interest, few scholars investigate Argante's origin or role within the text. Francoise Le Saux briefly explores Argante's similarity to Geoffrey of Monmouth's character Morgen in his work

the *Vita Merlini*. However, she does not explore Argante's role within Laȝamon's text, and her comparison of Argante to Morgen is superficial.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter One compares the varying accounts of Arthur's departure from Britain in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Brittaniae*, Wace's *Roman de Brut*, and Laȝamon's *Brut*. The chapter then examines possible sources for Argante in Geoffrey's and Wace's earlier histories and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* which he wrote after he completed the *Historia Regum Brittaniae*. The differences between the Morgen character in *Vita Merlini* and Argante in Laȝamon's *Brut* suggest that Laȝamon did not have access to Geoffrey's *Vita Merlini*, and that he and Geoffrey created Argante and Morgen independently of one another. Laȝamon's independent creation of Argante strengthens the argument that he created her as a way of emphasizing Worcester's role in preserving English identity.

Chapter Two explores the Celtic aspect of Argante's character. Eleventh- and twelfth-century literature in Ireland and Wales maintained Irish and Welsh mythology and iconic figures, and the Norman and French incorporation of Breton material into their romances preserved the tropes and characters of the Breton Celts. Argante's Celtic elements, however, differ from the examples in Irish, Welsh, and Breton literature, suggesting that Laȝamon did not refer to these literary traditions when constructing Argante. Instead, Argante's Celtic elements mirror the healing goddess traditions present in Celtic Britain. Many of these traditions survived, in varying guises, through the twelfth century. Laȝamon's use of the healing goddess tradition suggests that he derived the

Celtic aspects of Argante from cultural elements that had long been incorporated as part of Worcestershire's regional identity.

Chapter Three investigates Argante's connections with Anglo-Saxon language and concepts. Laȝamon follows the precedent of Anglo-Saxon monks by defining a Celtic figure according to Anglo-Saxon concepts and language. Though the language and concepts are rooted in Scandinavian and Germanic culture, Laȝamon uses distinctly Anglo-Saxon patterns that match the language and concepts present in the English midlands. Laȝamon also uses these Anglo-Saxon concepts to reaffirm Argante's link with legitimate English kingship. Laȝamon's derivations from regional cultural practice again link Argante with Worcestershire, and his use of these concepts to link her with legitimate English kinship underscore his efforts to identify Worcestershire with legitimate English national identity.

Chapter Four examines presentations of healing and healing women in twelfth-century romances and their possible influences in Argante's character. The lack of similarity between Argante's healing and healing as presented in romance literature confirms the interpretation of Argante as a Celtic healing goddess separate from twelfth-century literary traditions regarding healing women.

CHAPTER ONE

MORGEN, ARGANTE, AND ARTHUR: LAȝAMON'S ADDITION TO THE MYTH OF ARTHUR'S RETURN

Scholars currently accept that Laȝamon modeled Argante on Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgen character in his work the *Vita Merlini*. In her book *Laȝamon's Brut: The Poem and its Sources*, Françoise LeSaux posits that the name Argante comes from a corrupted version of Morgen. However, LeSaux does not examine Argante's name in detail, and neither she nor other scholars have compared Argante and Morgen's roles and descriptions satisfactorily. The dissimilarity between Argante and Morgen's names and the difference between their healing methods suggests that Laȝamon rejected Geoffrey's Morgen in favor of a character who reflected his regional identity. Argante's independence from Geoffrey's Morgen and Geoffrey and Wace's descriptions of Arthur's passing argues that Laȝamon altered the myth of Arthur's return to assert Worcestershire's role in preserving and restoring Anglo-Saxon cultural and political identity.

Comparison of Arthur's Return

Laȝamon's version of Arthur's passing and his treatment of Arthur's return varies significantly from the versions in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*. In his *Historia*, Geoffrey writes "Sed et inclitus ille rex Arturus letaliter uulneratus est; qui illinc ad sananda uulnera sua in insulam Auallonis euectus Constantino cognate suo et filio Cadoris ducis Cornubiae diadema Britanniae concessit anno ab incarnatione Domini DXLII" (Geoffrey 501).[1] Though he does not

[1] "Arthur himself, our renowned King, was mortally wounded and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to. He handed the crown of Britain over to his cousin Constantine, the

declare Arthur dead, he describes his wounds as "letaliter" and does not suggest that Arthur will return to Britain. Instead, Geoffrey establishes Constantine's legitimacy by indicating his consanguineous relationship with Arthur and Arthur's official declaration of Constantine as his heir. Geoffrey's naming of Arthur's heir Constantine ties English kingship to Classical tradition, which further legitimizes English history.

In the *Roman de Brut*, Wace refers to the myth of Arthur's return but separates himself from that belief. Like Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace describes Arthur's wounds as "mortelment" and claims that "En Avalon se fist porter / Pur ses plaies mediciner" (Wace lines 13276, 13277-78).[2] Neither Wace nor Geoffrey mentions any sort of healing figure associated with Avalon. Unlike Geoffrey's *Historia*, however, Wace then mentions the myth of Arthur's return by saying "De la vendra, encore puet vivre" (13281).[3] Still, Wace immediately disowns the theory by claiming that he "Ne volt plus dire de sa fin / Qu'en dist li prophetes Merlin; / Merlin dist d'Arthur, si ot dreit, / Que sa mort dutuse serreit. / Li prophetes dist verite" (13282-86).[4] Wace affirms only that the Britons[5] talk of his possible return and that no one can confirm Arthur's death. He also attributes the theory to the Britons rather than Merlin, who might give the myth of Arthur's return some legitimacy. Wace then includes Arthur's naming of Constantine as his heir, but describes it as a temporary loan. According to Wace, Arthur "livra sun regne si li dist / Qu'il fust

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son of Cador Duke of Cornwall: this in the year 542 after our Lord's Incarnation" (Geoffrey, Trans. Thorpe, 261).

[2] "And borne away to Avalon / to have his wounds attended to" (Wace, Trans. Arthur Wayne Glowka, lines 13277-78).

[3] "From there he'll come / He's still alive" (Wace, Trans. Arthur Wayne Glowka, lines 13281).

[4] "Wants not to say more of his end / Then Merlin said--and he was right, / That Arthur's death would be in doubt / The prophet said the very truth" (Wace, Trans. Arthur Wayne Glowka, lines 13282-86).

[5] Wace's spelling here is "Bretons," but as it is often translated as "Britons," it is unclear if he meant people in Brittany or in Britain.

reis tant qu'il revenist" (13297-98).[6] Wace thus weakens Constantine's claim to the throne by implying that he acts as a steward rather than an heir. By destabilizing the legitimacy of the line of British (and English) kings, Wace opens a space for the Plantagenet kings to assert their legitimacy as rulers.

Laȝamon significantly expands Wace's description of Arthur's passing, drawing more attention to Arthur's prophesied return and promoting Anglo-Saxon political and cultural interests. Laȝamon gives much more description of Avalon than Geoffrey and Wace do, and he introduces Argante as the one who will heal Arthur when he arrives in Avalon. He also changes Merlin's prophecy about Arthur's return. Unlike Wace's Merlin, who only claimed that Arthur's death would be in doubt, Laȝamon's Merlin predicts "þat an Arður sculde ȝete / cum Anglen to fulste" (Laȝamon lines 28650-51).[7] Laȝamon's revision of Merlin's prophecy changes the interpretation of the prophecy significantly. Unlike Wace's Merlin, who never claims that Arthur will return, Laȝamon's Merlin prophecies that he will. Laȝamon's Merlin also claims that Arthur will come to help the English, which implies that the English will be threatened and need Arthur's aid. Laȝamon might have had one of several political events in mind, as during the past hundred and fifty years before he wrote, England had experienced the Norman Conquest (and the chaotic aftermath) and the Anarchy, both times of political, economic, and social upheaval. Laȝamon's version of Merlin's prophecy thus calls for the return of a great English king, or (as Laȝamon portrays Arthur as Anglo-Saxon) the return of an Anglo-Saxon national identity.

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[6] "He gave his realm and said to him / That he'd be king when he returned" (Wace, Trans. Arthur Wayne Glowka, lines 13297-98).

[7] "that an Arthur should yet come to help the English" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 146)

Laȝamon also manages to both legitimize Constantine's rule over England and present Arthur as the rightful ruler of Britain who will return to reclaim his throne. Laȝamon thus balances the legitimacy of historical English kings with potential future Anglo-Saxon kings unrelated to Edward the Confessor. Unlike Geoffrey and Wace, he includes Arthur's speech that grants his kingdom to Constantine. By recording Arthur's exact words granting Constantine control over England, Laȝamon emphasizes Constantine's legitimacy. However, Laȝamon preserves Arthur's right to the throne, having Arthur say "ich þe bitache here / mine kineriche / and wite mine Bruttes / a to þines lifes" (28602-05).[8] Arthur thus gives Constantine his kingdom to protect, instead of naming Constantine king. Arthur also claims that he will return to the Britons and live with them again. Laȝamon's ambiguous wording when he describes Arthur's charge to Constantine to protect the kingdom allows him to reconcile Constantine's legitimacy with the expectation of Arthur's return. Reconciling these two factors allows Laȝamon to emphasize the legitimacy of English kings who reigned after Arthur while still defining Arthur's return as legitimate. By legitimizing Arthur's return, Laȝamon allows the possibility of the return of Anglo-Saxon political and cultural supremacy in England.

Argante in Laȝamon's *Brut*

Laȝamon's placement of Argante as Arthur's healer link her with his goal to assert Anglo-Saxon cultural and political supremacy in England. As Arthur's healer, Argante rescues Arthur from death and enables him to return to claim his role as England's king. Laȝamon mentions Argante twice in Laȝamon's *Brut*; once in Merlin's prophecy about

[8] "I give thee here my kingdom, and defend thou my Britons ever in thy life" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 144).

Arthur's departure from Britain, and once when the prophecy comes to pass. The passages that mention Argante are almost identical. The first passage is Merlin's prophecy about the end of Arthur. Merlin prophesies that Arthur

> ... uaren wolde.
>
> into Aualune.
>
> in-to þan æit-londe.
>
> to Argante þere hende.
>
> for heo sculde mid haleweie.
>
> helen his wunden.
>
> and þenne he weore al hal.
>
> he wolde sone. come heom. (23077-84)[9]

The second passage records Arthur speaking to his appointed heir, Constantine, as Arthur lies dying. Arthur tells Constantine:

> And ich wulle uaren to Aualun.
>
> to uairest alre maidene.
>
> to Argante þere queen.
>
> aluen swiðe sceone.
>
> ȝ heo s[c]al mine wunden.
>
> makien alle isunde.
>
> al hal me makien.
>
> mid haleweiȝe drenchen. (28610-17)[10]

[9] "would fare into Avalon, into the island, to Argante the fair; for she should with balm heal his wounds; and when he were all whole, he would soon come to them" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 2, 546).

After Arthur relates this plan to Constantine (and the reader), a magically propelled boat arrives containing two women, who take Arthur and lay him softly down in the boat before sailing back to Avalon, where Queen Argante will heal King Arthur's wounds with *haleweiȝe*, a potion or liquid, before Arthur returns home to the Britons. Laȝamon's creation and addition of Argante's character to the myth of Arthur's return imply she has a role in the text unique to Laȝamon's interpretation of English national identity. By specifying that Argante will heal Arthur and detailing how she will heal him, Laȝamon makes Arthur's recovery more concrete and thus more plausible.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's Morgen

Though neither Geoffrey of Monmouth nor Wace includes a healing figure associated with Avalon in their respective chronicles, in Geoffrey's later work the *Vita Merlini*, he does describe Morgen, a woman who heals Arthur. In the *Vita Merlini*, Geoffrey moves into his discussion of Avalon and Morgen during Merlin's description of exotic and fantastical locations. He describes Avalon as the "Insula pomorum que Fortunata vocatur" and claims that nine sisters[11] rule the island (Geoffrey, *Merlini* lines 908, 915).[12] Of these nine sisters, Morgen, the first among them, "est fit doctor arte medendi" and she "didici[t] quid utilitatis / gramina cuncta ferant ut languida corpora curet" (918, 920-21).[13] In addition to knowledge of herbal medicine, "ars quoque nota

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[10] "I will fare to Avalun, to the fairest of all maidens, to Argante the queen, an elf most fair, and she shall make my wounds all sound, make me all whole with healing draughts" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 144)

[11] Though Geoffrey of Monmouth claims there are nine sisters ("novem...sorores"), he only provides names for eight of them (including Morgen), unless there are two named Thiten ("Thiten cithara notissima Thiten") (ll. 916, 928).

[12] "The Island of Apples...Fortunate Island" (Geoffrey, *Vita Merlini*, Trans. Basil Clarke, 101).

[13] "has a greater skill in healing" and "has learned the uses of all plants in curing the ills of the body" (Geoffrey, *Vita Merlini*, Trans. Basil Clarke, 101).

sibi qua scit mutare figuram / et resecare novis quasi Dedalus aera pennis" and "mathematicam dicunt didicisse sorores" (922-23, 926).

Once he describes Morgen, Geoffrey's Merlin discusses how he brought Arthur to her for her to heal him. Merlin says that when he and a group of knights brought Arthur to her

> nos quo decuit Morgen suscepit honore,
> inque suis talamis posuit super aurea regem
> fulcra manuque sibi detexit vulnus honesta
> inspexitque diu, tandemque redire salute
> posse sibi dixit, si secum tempore longo
> esset et ipsius vellet medicamine fungi (933-38)[14]

His description of Arthur's coming to Morgen for healing substantially expands on his account in his *Historia* but does not suggest that Arthur will return to Britain. In the section of the *Vita Merlini* immediately following Merlin's account of leaving Arthur with Morgen, Geoffrey addresses the myth of Arthur's return. Taliesin, Merlin's companion, suggests that they send a boat to Avalon to fetch Arthur so he can "solitis ut viribus hostes / arceat et cives antiqua pace reformet" (956-57).[15] Merlin, however, says "Non...non sic gens illa recedet," thus immediately deflating the myth of Arthur's return (958).[16]

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[14] "Morgen received us with due honor. She put the king in her chamber in a golden bed, uncovered his wound and looked long at it. At length she said he could be cured only if he stayed with her a long while and accepted her treatment." (Geoffrey, *Vita Merlini*, Trans. Basil Clarke, 103)

[15] "exercise his old vigour to fend off the enemy and re-establish the nation in its old state of peace" (Geoffrey, *Vita Merlini*, Trans. Basil Clarke, 103)

[16] "No...this is not the way the invader will leave" (Geoffrey, *Vita Merlini*, Trans. Basil Clarke, 103).

Though Geoffrey of Monmouth probably knew Welsh and incorporated elements of Welsh literature into his *Historia* and his *Vita Merlini*, his portrayal of Morgen and her eight sisters owe more to Classical mythology and twelfth-century romance traditions than to Welsh literature. Geoffrey's use of Classical mythology continues his legitimization of English identity through its relation to Classical tradition that he established in his *Historia*. The only Welsh example of a group of nine women who live on an island and possess supernatural powers appears in the medieval Welsh story of Peredur in the *Mabinogi*. In the *Mabinogi*, Peredur is attacked by, then trained by, and then kills the Nine Witches of Gloucester, supernaturally powerful women who can tell the future (Green, *Druids* 100). The nine women in Geoffrey′s revised Avalon mirror the Nine Witches in their number and supernatural status, but the similarities end there. His nine women are unusually beautiful and live beyond the male-dominated social structure present in the rest of the *Historia* but the text never refers to them as witches; they have no connection to war or weapons and are never anyone′s adversaries.

Geoffrey's nine women of Avalon compare more favorably with the Classical concept of the nine muses, which further grounds his version of British history in Classical tradition. Like the nine muses, Geoffrey's women of Avalon are nine sisters who are beautiful and live in a paradisiacal, supernatural location. One of the nine sisters in Avalon is associated with the cithara, which is a type of lyre. The Classical muses are all associated with music and the arts, and Classical mythology and art often depicted them with lyres. Though it is unclear exactly how much knowledge of the Classical Geoffrey had, his references in other sections of the *Vita Merlini* to the muses suggest

that he was familiar with some concept of them. Geoffrey opens his *Vita Merlini* by referring to the Muses:

> Ergo te cuperem complecti carmine digno
> sed non sufficio, licet Orpheus et Camerinus
> et Macer et Marius magnique Rabirius oris
> ore meo canerent Musis comitantibus omnes.
> At vos consuete mecum cantare Camene
> propositum cantemus opus cytharamque sonate. (13-18).[17]

Geoffrey's invocation of the muses demonstrates his familiarity with their role in Classical literature, though it is unclear exactly which sources he accessed. His incorporation of more Classical elements roots British history more deeply in Classical sources, which increases the legitimacy of British history in the larger arena of European literary and historical tradition.

Morgen vs. Argante

Le Saux asserts that Laȝamon had access to the *Vita Merlini* and based Argante on Geoffrey's Morgen figure. As evidence, Le Saux points to Morgen and Argante's status as queens of Avalon, their emphasized beauty, and their healing function. Though Geoffrey never specifically defines Morgen as a queen, he does claim that she is the first among her sisters and that she and her sisters rule Avalon. He also describes her hands as royal. Both Geoffrey and Laȝamon assert that the women are beautiful; Geoffrey claims

[17] "But I am not the man for it: no, not even if Orpheus and Camerinus and Macer and Marius and Rabirius of the great voice were all to sing through my mouth and the Muses were my accompanists. But, Sisters, you are used to singing with me; so let us to the song before us. Sound the lyre!" (Geoffrey, *Vita Merlini*, Trans. Basil Clarke, 53).

Morgen has a shapely form, and Laȝamon describes Argante as the fairest of all maidens. As Le Saux points out, both Morgen and Argante receive Arthur's wounded body and intend to heal him.

Despite these similarities, the significant differences between the two figures suggest Laȝamon did not use Geoffrey's Morgen as a model for Argante and instead defined her in terms of Worcestershire's cultural identity to assert Worcestershire's role in preserving Anglo-Saxon culture. The most obvious difference between Morgen and Argante is their different names. Argante comes from the Latin word for silver, *argent*, while Morgen is probably related to Celtic mother goddesses named Modron or Matrona. While Laȝamon takes liberties with the spelling of names, changing Morgen to Argante would be a significant name switch. The only similar elements of their names are *-rgen* and *-rgan-*. Though these two phonemes are similar (the only difference is the shorter vowel in *-rgan-*), the surrounding elements make an actual connection between these two names highly unlikely. The loss of the *M* and addition of the *-te* do not make sense, as these phonemes are not frequently dropped or added.

The difference between Morgen's and Argante's healing practices indicates that Laȝamon departed from Geoffrey's Morgen when he created Argante. Laȝamon's Argante heals with *haleweiȝe*, a sort of sacred water or liquid, which helps to establish Argante′s connection with British Celtic healing spring deities. Morgen, however, heals through her expert knowledge of plants and herbs, a far more mundane medical practice. Argante also remains mystically obscure throughout Laȝamon's *Brut*, while Geoffrey's knights bring the wounded Arthur to Morgen′s golden bed and speak with her directly, as

they would to a human woman. Geoffrey further circumscribes Morgen′s otherworldly nature by denying her and her companions the prophetic and other supernatural powers that the *Mabinogi* attributes to the Nine Witches of Gloucester. Though Laȝamon's Argante and Geoffrey′s Morgen are similar, Laȝamon draws much more heavily on his Celtic source material by tying Argante so closely to Celtic healing deities, while Geoffrey of Monmouth only vaguely references the Nine Witches of Gloucester with Morgen and her eight companions and relies on Classical sources more than he does on Celtic ones.

The essential differences between Argante and Morgen indicate that Laȝamon rejected Morgen as a model for a healing figure, deciding instead to create a figure that reflected his English regional identity. Laȝamon's decision to Anglicize Argante rather than follow Geoffrey's Classical and Welsh Morgen demonstrates his desire to reclaim Arthur for the Anglo-Saxon English. His added emphasis on Arthur's return indicates his strong rejection of the Norman conquerors and hope for the resurgence of English cultural and political supremacy in England. Laȝamon's purpose in retelling British history thus differs from Wace's attempts to colonize Arthur for the Norman ruling elite and Geoffrey's goal to legitimize British history by connecting it with Classical sources.

CHAPTER TWO

HEALING WELL WITH HEALING-WELLS: ARGANTE'S CELTIC BACKGROUND

Laȝamon's Argante is, in essence, a Celtic figure. However, a close analysis of Argante's character reveals few similarities with the Celtic figures present in the Breton-influenced twelfth century literature imported to England by the Normans, or with medieval Irish and Welsh literature. Though Argante does share with her Breton, Irish, and Welsh counterparts associations with liminality and water, her role as a healer and lack of a role as a sexual figure separates her from other Celtic supernatural women. Argante's role in the *Brut* closely parallels the Celtic traditions surrounding healing springs and wells rather than the fairy lover or sovereignty goddess traditions. Only hints of this tradition remain in twelfth century literature, but archeological evidence suggests that Christianity absorbed many of the beliefs surrounding Celtic healing water, thus preserving elements of the tradition through the twelfth century and, in some cases, to the present day. The Celtic traditions upon which Laȝamon draws are thus probably British Celtic traditions from the Worcester region that had survived into the twelfth century as either lived practice or remembered history. Laȝamon's use of regional traditions connects Argante with his regional Worcestershire cultural identity.

Women in Irish, Welsh, and Breton Literature

The few points of connection between Argante and other Celtic figures suggest that Laȝamon did not draw from the twelfth-century Celtic literary traditions from outside England. The Celtic figures in Breton, Welsh, and Irish literature fall into three general

categories: witch, sovereignty goddess, and fairy mistress.[18] Sources describe witches as physically grotesque and possessing magical abilities. They are often able to shapeshift into the form of a beautiful young woman or into animals, and they usually present some sort of challenge or quest. Examples of witches in Celtic literature before the thirteenth century include the *Mabinogi's* Nine Witches of Gloucester as well as a brief appearance in Chrétien de Troyes' "Percival." The Nine Witches first train the hero Peredur in aristocratic and martial skills and later attempt to kill him. In Percival, the hag figure appears in King Arthur's court and issues a challenge, starting Percival's quest.

Many female figures in Irish, Welsh, and Breton Celtic literature function as sovereignty goddesses, supernatural female figures who represent a particular territory. They choose a male consort, to whom they grant the right of kingship over their territory. The sexual relationship between the sovereignty goddess and the king (her chosen lover) symbolizes the relationship between the king and his kingdom. Queen Medb in the *Tain Bo Cuailnge* and Rhiannon in the *Mabinogi* are both examples of Celtic sovereignty goddesses. Like sovereignty goddesses, fairy mistresses have sexual relationships with the male hero. Unlike sovereignty goddesses, however, fairy mistresses do not grant their lovers kingship over a particular territory, and in Celtic myth they usually have the dominant role in the relationship. Examples of fairy mistresses include the Irish Fand in "The Only Jealousy of Emer" and the fairy queen in Marie de France's "Lanval." Fand, a sea goddess and wife of the sea god Manannan, falls in love with Cuchulainn and takes him to the Otherworld to be her consort. Their affair lasts for one year; then Cuchulainn's

[18] Two of these categories, hag/witch and fairy mistress, are also present in Germanic and Scandinavian literature.

wife, Emer, marches with a troop of women to demand that Fand return her husband. Cuchulainn returns to Emer, and Fand gives the three of them a potion that makes them forget the past year. In "Lanval," a fairy appears to Lanval and informs him that she has accepted him as her lover. She sets the terms of their relationship and eventually carries him back to fairyland, where he will presumably remain as her consort.

Laȝamon's Argante does not fit either of these patterns. Like the Celtic witches, she possesses supernatural powers. The text describes her, however, as the "uairest alre maiden," and she does not prompt a quest or act malevolently towards Arthur, the hero (Laȝamon lines 28611). Her beauty and total benevolence exclude her from the witches in Celtic literature. Though her association with Arthur connects her with concepts of kingship, Arthur's association with her does not legitimize his kingship, and his connection with her does not give him any claim to the territory she governs. Laȝamon never hints that Argante and Arthur have a sexual relationship, so separating Argante from both the tradition of sovereignty goddesses and fairy mistresses. Instead, Argante and Arthur's relationship revolves around her healing function. Arthur goes to Avalon so that Argante can heal his wounds with her healing water. Laȝamon assures the reader that once healed, Arthur will leave Avalon and Argante and return to England and his rightful place as king.

Celtic Healing Goddesses

Argante's method of healing with water bears a remarkable similarity to the Celtic tradition of healing deities associated with springs and wells, traditions that communities preserved in local traditional practices but did not often preserve in literature. In pre-

Roman Britain, healing cults were often centered around water, usually around the start of a natural well or spring; Miranda Green claims that "watery places were especially sacred to the Celts" (Green, *Goddesses* 89). Several strong healing goddess traditions existed in Celtic Britain, including Sulis at Bath, Coventina at Carrawburgh, and Arnemetia at Buxton (93, 99, 90). The healing cults were located at the site of natural springs or wells. Devotees believed the water possessed healing properties and usually associated a female deity or supernatural being with the site. Celts associated water and women with ideas of a life force, and there are "strong conceptual connections between fertility and procreation...and healing and regeneration" (80, 91).

Archaeological evidence such as foundations of temples and recovered votive objects gives some indication of the practices associated with these sacred healing sites and proves that the rituals associated with these sites continued without interruption from pre-Roman Britain through the present day. The high number of votive artifacts deposited in or near the sacred water in places such as Bath suggests that people would petition the goddess for healing by throwing symbolic gift items into the water as payment. The Roman baths built around the pre-existing temple to the Celtic goddess Sulis indicates that people occasionally bathed in the sacred water to effect healing. Soaking in the mineral springs at Bath would also increase the water's reputation for healing, as the water at Bath helps to cure ailments like gout and arthritis (Green *Druids* 112). Thus Argante′s connection with a watery location (an island) and her practice of healing with water link her with earlier Celtic healing-deity figures.

Argante and Healing Wells

Laʒamon links Argante with these healing-well traditions through his descriptions of her as a supernatural figure who heals with magical water. According to the *Brut*, Argante will heal Arthur's wounds by "drenchen" him "mid haleweiʒe" (Laʒamon lines 28617). According to the Middle English Dictionary, *haleweiʒe* translates to "a sweet healing liquid, used either as potion or lotion" ("haleweiʒe" def. 1(a)). *Haleweiʒe* derives from the Old English noun *halewaege*, which can mean either "a holy cup" or "sacred water" ("haleweiʒe" def. 1(a)). The Old Icelandic cognate *heilivagr*, a compound of *heili* ('holy') and *vagr* ('water'), suggests that "sacred water" may be the more accurate definition. The concept of sacred water's possessing healing properties parallels the Celtic traditions surrounding healing springs and wells.

The way that Argante will administer the sacred water also parallels these Celtic traditions. The MED lists several possible senses for *drenchen*. The primary sense, which Laʒamon uses elsewhere in the *Brut*, is "to drown" or "to kill by drowning" ("drenchen" def. 1). Though this sense of *drenchen* seems to be the most popular, the immediate context of *drenchen* in this section of the *Brut* suggests that it should be understood here as "to soak," "to immerse," or "to make (a medicine) penetrate (into the body)" ("drenchen" def. 3). This understanding of *drenchen* as soaking, immersing, or permeating with medicine connects Argante's water with the therapeutic springs that the Celts associated with healing deities, like the healing springs at Bath.

Argante's remoteness and secrecy define her nature as a supernatural being, like the healing goddesses associated with the wells and springs. Though the *Brut* mentions

her twice, she never actually appears. Instead, two women appear in a boat and take Arthur's body, thus fulfilling Merlin's prophecy:

> þat wes an sceort bat liðen.
>
> sceouen mid vðen.
>
> and twa wimmen þer-inne.
>
> wunderliche idihte.
>
> and heo nomen Arður anan.
>
> and aneouste hine uereden.
>
> and softe hine adun leiden.
>
> ȝ forð gunnen liðen.
>
> Þ awes hit iwurðen.
>
> þat Merlin seide whilen.
>
> þat weore uni-mete care.
>
> of Arðures forð-fare.[19] (Laȝamon lines 28624-35)

The two women seem to function in some serving capacity to Argante, as they ferry Arthur to her to be healed. If Argante is a manifestation of a healing spirit, then these "twa wimmen...wonderliche idihte" are her devotees who have come to guide Arthur to Argante so she can heal him. Argante′s absence from the text places her beyond human characters, insisting on her supernatural nature. Argante's association with water

[19] "there was a short boat, floating with the waves; and two women therein, wondrously formed; and they took Arthur anon, and bare him quickly [to the boat], and laid him softly down, and forth they gan depart. Then it was accomplished that Merlin whilom said, that mickle care (sorrow) should be of [after] Arthur's departure" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 144-45).

and liminal sacred space and her connection to healing reinforce her identity as a medieval interpretation of a Celtic deity associated with a healing well.

Laȝamon's Access to Healing-Well Traditions

Though Laȝamon lived and wrote the *Brut* in the twelfth century, many Celtic traditions surrounding healing springs and wells have survived through the twentieth century. Laȝamon's description of Stonehenge indicates some level of familiarity with the Celtic association of water with healing and the supernatural. In the *Brut*, Merlin claims that if people "wasceð þene stan / & þe mide baðieð heore ban / umbe lutle stunde / heo wurðeð al isunde" (17187-91).[20] Laȝamon probably copied the healing practice directly from Wace, who is thought to have taken his information straight from Geoffrey of Monmouth. Though scholars throughout the years have developed several explanations of Stonehenge's purpose, current archaeologists accept Geoffrey Wainwright's theory. According to Wainwright, British Celts recognized Stonehenge as a healing center. As evidence, Wainwright identifies stones decorated with symbols associated with life and vitality near nearby natural springs. Though the Celts did not associate a central healing figure with Stonehenge, the twelfth-century association of the location with Celtic healing traditions indicates that these healing practices survived at least in part in cultural memory.

The Celtic traditions connecting water with healing and a supernatural figure survived after the Christianization of Britain because the local people incorporated them into the Christian tradition of saints. Although Christianity denies all deities except for

[20] "wash the stones, and therewith bathe their bones; after a little while they become all sound" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 2, 296).

the Christian god, the healing traditions surrounding many wells and springs persisted. As Celtic traditions and Christian theology blended, local people often re-attributed the springs to Mary, Christ, or a popular saint or explained them through the use of Christian lore. As Miranda Green observes, "the multiplicity of Celtic gods and goddesses was gradually replaced by one God, but the vacuum left by these multifarious spirits was, to an extent, filled by the numerous saints of the early Church" (Green *Goddesses* 188). Sometimes the local deity became Christianized and transformed into a local saint, as was probably the case with Ireland′s patron St. Bridget. Other times legends and traditions surrounding the local deity became confused with the life and lore of a historical person perhaps already on the way to being canonized.

The parallels between the Celtic tradition of a powerful mother goddess and Mary, the Christian mother figure, helped the popularity of Mary grow throughout Celtic regions and preserved many traditions associating particular healing wells with supernatural female figures. Most sacred places, including healing-wells, were re-attributed to Mary, the most prominent female figure within the Christian church, especially throughout the Celtic regions of Ireland, Wales, and southwestern England. Thanks to the Christianization of local deities, healing-spring and healing-well traditions still survive in many parts of Britain and Ireland. For example, a holy well credited with healing powers in Penrhys in Glamorgan, Wales, is currently dedicated to Mary, but Green says the tradition surrounding the well has its roots in pre-Roman Wales (189).

Laȝamon may have drawn on Celtic-influenced Catholic Marian traditions to create Argante. Though formal Marian traditions did not take root within the upper

echelons of the Catholic Church until after the seventh and eighth centuries, the Celtic-influenced church in southern England had been celebrating feast days for Mary before the year 600 (Elder xxiii). This sort of local grassroots Marian devotion may have been adopted from pre-existing traditions surrounding Celtic and Roman female deities. Just as worship switched from Celtic to Roman (or Romano-Celtic) deities under Roman rule, Mary may have replaced the Roman/Romano-Celtic deities as the countryside became Christianized. Therefore, when Laȝamon drew on local traditions surrounding holy women, water, and healing, he could have also drawn from Christian traditions that had their roots in pagan practices. The dedication of the cathedral church at Worcester to Mary and the fact that the monks of St. Mary's Priory directed the cathedral indicate that people had actively celebrated Marian traditions in Worcester since at least 680, when the cathedral was first founded. The first earliest recorded church in Worcestershire is St. Helen's, located near the cathedral in Worcester. Archaeologists have dated St. Helen's to the early fifth century. Though there is no evidence of healing cults associated with either the church or St. Helen's or the original cathedral, neither has been thoroughly investigated by archaeologists, so it is impossible to make an accurate assessment regarding possible associations with healing at those locations.

Archaeological Evidence of Celtic Presence in Worcestershire

Though there is no conclusive evidence that the Celts regarded Worcester as a healing center, Worcester appears to have had importance of a religious site since before Roman rule, a fact which implies a connection between Worcester and a sense of sacredness. Despite Worcester's important bridge crossing the Severn, it was only a

Roman military stronghold for a few years. The Romans used cities such as Viroconium (modern Wroxeter) and Gloucester as their military strongholds instead. The area seems to have had continuous religious significance, as "the original Roman defenses surround the area which currently contains the Worcester Cathedral" and a number of smaller churches, including St. Helen's (*Deansway* 16-17). Most of the evidence supporting the understanding of Worcester as an ecclesiastical center appears during the post-Roman period. As the economy revolved around the ecclesiastical hub, the archaeological team working at Deansway found that "Worcester seems to have remained an important ecclesiastical center" (47). Despite Worcester's strategic placement on the Severn, its important bridge, and proximity to the saltworks at Droitwich, the archaeological team working on the Deansway excavation says the predominance of local agriculture and scarcity of non-local trade goods suggest that it did not become a large center for trade (47). The archaeological team says that instead of trade, "livestock farming continued to be an important aspect of the settlement's economy into the mid-4th century," and areas previously used for a small ironworking industry were converted into stockyards, indicating that the area was self-sustaining (51, 54). The election of Worcester rather than larger, more economically and politically prosperous cities of Gloucester and Winchcombe as the bishopric seat when the diocese of the Hwicce was formally created in the seventh century indicates that Worcester held religious importance. The relatively early creation of the diocese and the early date for St. Helen's Church suggests that the Celtic Christian church influenced the area before the Anglo-Saxons converted to Christianity.

Laȝamon's incorporation of residual British Celtic traditions rather than borrowings from Irish, Welsh, or Breton Celtic traditions further connects Argante with his regional Worcestershire identity. The absence of representations of Celtic healing goddesses in twelfth-century literature suggests that non-literary traditions preserved the healing-goddess traditions in cultural memory. The survival of the healing-goddess traditions through actual local practices rather than literary motifs suggests that Laȝamon may have learned about the Celtic healing-goddess traditions through regional traditions rather than contact with literary sources. Though no concrete evidence associates Worcester with a healing goddess cult, Worcester's importance as a religious center since pre-Roman Britain and the fact that the earliest recorded church and the Cathedral are both dedicated to women (St. Helen and Mary, respectively) suggest possible connections to healing goddess traditions. Laȝamon's rejection of more popular Breton depictions of supernatural women in favor of local tradition supports his preference for associating King Arthur and English national identity with the cultural patterning of Worcestershire.

CHAPTER THREE

ALUEN VS. *ALFIN*: LINGUISTIC AND DESCRIPTIVE LINKS BETWEEN ARGANTE, ENGLISH SAINTS, AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Though Argante has decidedly Celtic analogues, Laȝamon connects Argante with Anglo-Saxon culture by calling her an elf and connecting her with the traditionally elfin qualities of whiteness and beauty. By defining Argante as an elf, Laȝamon demonstrates the Anglo-Saxon tradition of renaming Celtic figures in English, thus producing an English hybrid instead of directly importing a Germanic or Scandinavian figure. The descriptions of nature spirits in the *South English Legendary*, which was most likely written somewhere in Gloucester, show that this naming practice occurred in and around Worcester. Laȝamon also Anglicized Argante's name by adding the Old English feminizing *–e* to the Latin word for silver (*argent*). In addition to defining Argante as an English supernatural being rather than a purely Celtic or Scandinavian being, the whiteness and brightness associated with elves and present in the elements of her name also link her with the English saints Alban, Edward the Confessor, and Wulfstan. These three saints, all of whom are associated with these traditionally elfin qualities of whiteness or brightness, also represent English national identity.

Bede connects St. Alban with English national identity by writing England's conversion history onto the figure of St. Alban, perhaps choosing St. Alban because of the similarity between his name and the early name for England, Albion. Edward the Confessor and St. Wulfstan functioned in the twelfth century as figures of pre-Conquest English identity, Edward because he was the last Anglo-Saxon king before the Conquest,

and Wulfstan because he was one of the few Anglo-Saxon bishops to keep his appointment as bishop after the Norman invasion. Though the elements in Edward and Wulfstan's names do not reflect the concept of whiteness or brightness that Alban's and Argante's do, the twelfth-century versions of their lives describe them as assuming these qualities after death. Laȝamon uses these concepts associated with elves to connect Argante with pre-Conquest definitions of English national identity.

Germanic and Scandinavian Elves

Though the concept of elves and the language used to name them stems from Germanic and Scandinavian tradition, Laȝamon did not probably borrow directly from Scandinavian or Germanic lore when creating Argante, as she differs considerably from Scandinavian and Germanic elves. In Scandinavian tradition, elves number among the following non-human entities: *æsir*, *dísir*, *norn*, *valkyrja*, *þursar*, *vanir*, *álfr*, *jotnar*, and *dvergar*. Of these, *dísir*, *norn*, and *valkyrja* are three closely related (and possibly three terms for the same) female beings, a sort of Norse version of the Roman Fates. *Þursar* and *jotnar* are closely related, and *vanir* may actually be just another term for *álfar* (36). The álfr may have been associated with the god Freyr, and some literary references (such as the saga of Arrow-Odd) indicate that people may have worshipped them through sacrifices or offerings, but there is not much evidence, and what does exist is circumstantial (Hall 31, Jakobsson 231). Hall divides the common supernatural beings within Scandinavian lore according to his semantic map below, associating the *álfr* with the *æsir* as non-monstrous beings but separating them from humans because of their supernatural attributes (Hall 32).

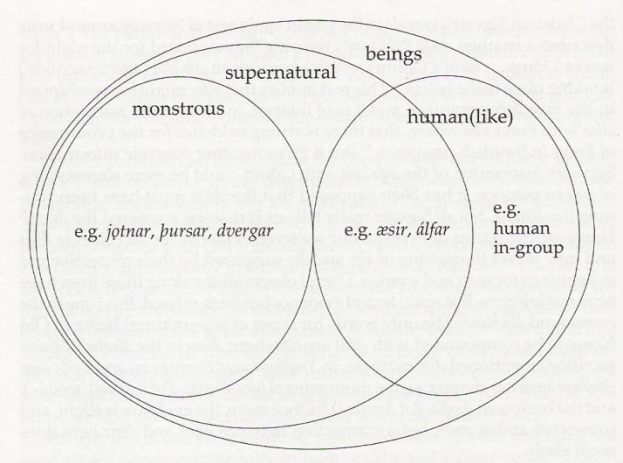

Figure 1: Hall's Semantic Map

Like English elves, Scandinavian *álfar* represent a supernatural Other to the human Self. Unlike the *æsir*, who are much more powerful than and usually exist in a separate realm from humans, and giants, who personify the overwhelming natural forces such as extremes of eating, strength, etc., *álfar* are human-sized, and their otherness manifests itself in their supernatural powers. For example, in the *Volundarkviða*, the *álfr* Volundar shows his Otherness through his supernatural abilities (he flies at the end of the work) and through his extreme emotions (Jakobsson 242).

The closest link between Argante's function in the *Brut* and supernatural women in Scandinavian myth is the *valkyrja*. In Scandinavian mythology, *valkyrja* are female spirits who collect the souls of the bravest warriors during battle and take them to Valhalla, the realm of the gods, to fight on the side of Odin during Ragnarok, the Last Battle. To be carried off by a *valkyrja*, the warrior must die, but his death is viewed as a triumph, as his heroic prowess wins him the status to fight on the side of the gods. Both Argante and *valkyrja* carry off warriors. However, Argante comes to take away Arthur's

wounded but still-living body so she can ferry him to Avalon and heal him, while the *valkyrja* can only take the souls of dead warriors, and they have no healing function. While Laȝamon could easily have been acquainted with legends surrounding *valkyrja*, he seems to have drawn much more heavily from Celtic and Christian traditions when defining Argante's role and to have depended on his Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian roots for his linguistic and poetic borrowings.

English Elves

Laȝamon used the English linguistic derivative of Scandinavian and Germanic elves, which differed from the Scandinavian and Germanic versions of elves. When Scandinavian and Germanic tribes settled in Britain, they brought their languages and cultures with them. As Scandinavian and Celtic traditions mingled, Anglo-Saxon *alfe* grew distinct from their Scandinavian cousins. Like many pre-Christian elements, *alfe* became demonized with the arrival of Christianity (Hall 73). The *Southern English Legendary* defines *alfe* as angels who supported neither God nor Satan and thus occupied an indefinite middle space between angels and demons (75). However, the most significant change was the switch from only male *álfar* to usually female *alfe.*[21] Scandinavian literature sometimes ascribed supposedly "feminine" qualities to male *álfar*. Volundar, for example, is described as "hvítan háls Volundar" (the white neck of Volundar). Scandinavian tradition treated white necks as feminine attributes, and Hall argues that Volundar's white neck implies "a lack of masculinity" (43, 55). Over time, the Anglo-Saxon tradition strengthened the association between gender and sex; literature increasingly applied masculine attributes only to men, and feminine attributes only to

[21] *alfe* is a plural form of *alf* (Hall 4)

women. Over time, the feminine *álfar* became the female *alf* (46). Anglo-Saxon *alfe* kept their association with elf shots, beauty, and malevolence, but because of their new gender and interaction with Christianizing forces, Hall says they gained a reputation as seductresses (76).

Monks attempting to identify and categorize the British Celtic supernatural women who inhabited the landscape through folklore also adopted the term *alfe* for them. As a result, the monks defined a whole new set of beings by using compound words to describe different kinds of non-human entities. This change produced water-elves, sea-elves, wood-elves, etc. (79). As Hall points out, the Old English marginalia in copies of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* gloss nymphs as "Nimphae aelfinni" (qtd. Hall 78). Though none of the extant glosses define a Celtic healing deity as an *alf* (or any linguistic variant of the term) Isidore's text's definition of nymphs as "nymphas deas aquarum putant" presents a goddess associated with water and glossed as an *alf* (qtd. Hall 78).[22] The practice of using the Anglo-Saxon term to define a supernatural woman was decidedly common when Laȝamon was writing his *Brut*. Given this naming practice and Laȝamon's dedication to composing the *Brut* in Anglo-Saxon, his decision to call Argante an *aluen* is not surprising. By using the Anglo-Saxon word for elf, Laȝamon further defines Argante as an English supernatural being.

Most Anglo-Saxon texts perpetuate the Scandinavian concepts of the "elf shot," magic spears or darts thrown by elves that causes various pains, diseases, and mishaps. However, Laȝamon's association of Argante with surviving Celtic traditions of healing springs reflects a possible elven tradition specific to Worcester. An eleventh-century

[22] "They reckon *nymphae* to be goddesses of water" (qtd. in Hall, Trans. Hall, 78)

manuscript copy of the *Canons of Edgar* records a reference that tenuously associates elves with the Celtic healing spring tradition. The manuscript, copied in Worcester, exhorts priests to “borbeode wyllweorðunga” and performing sacred acts “on ellenum” (qtd. in Hall 152).[23] A scribe then glossed *ellenum* as *eluene*, changing the meaning from performing sacred acts among elder-trees to performing them among elves. Though this passage and gloss do not conclusively link elves with the Celtic figures associated with healing spring traditions, it does suggest an association between the healing spring tradition and belief in elves. Laȝamon seems to have drawn on this generalized link in Worcester between healing springs and elves when he created Argante.

Laȝamon's use of Anglo-Saxon terminology and concepts for Argante, an essentially Celtic figure, reflects the linguistic hybrids produced by the pre-Conquest overlap of Celtic and Germanic/Scandinavian cultures in the Worcester region. Laȝamon classifies Argante as an *aluen*, the direct ancestor of Modern English *elf*. English elves originated in Scandinavian and Germanic traditions. The word *aluen* comes from the proto-Germanic **alb*, which became *álfr* in Old Norse, *alp* in Middle High German, *alf* or *elf* in medieval Frisian, and *ælf* in Old English (Shippey 216, Hall 5). *Aluen* is Laȝamon’s version of *ælf* or *alf*, though his use of *aluen* rather than *alfe* or *alfa* is strange. William Cooke and Alaric Hall both examine the odd *-en* ending while attempting to trace Laȝamon's use of it. Cooke interprets *aluen* as a "weak plural developed in ME for the originally strong masculine noun *aelf/alf,* for which southern and southwest Midland ME texts afford abundant parallels" (Cooke 3).

[23] "forbid the worship of springs" and "among elder trees" (*Canons of Edgar*, Trans. Hall, 152).

Aluen could derive from the nominative form of the Old English word for female elf (*alfen, aelfen*), but Hall rejects this theory, suggesting instead that Laȝamon's use of *aluen* to describe Argante makes the *–en* ending a weak dative singular. Hall thus translates Laȝamon's passage "To Argante þere quene, aluen swiðe sceone" as "To the queen Argante, a very beautiful elf" (Hall 80). Hall then suggests that *aelfen* functions as a nonce-word, the *-en* feminizing the masculine noun *aelf*, just as in Old English *gyden* feminizes *god* and *mennen* feminizes *mann* (Hall 80-81). Hall associates this particular nonce-word with the *ælfen* glosses in a copy of Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* found in Worcester. The presence of these glosses in a Worcester manuscript suggests that the form *ælfen* was a regional variant, and Laȝamon's use of *ælfen* links Argante with the Worcestershire region. Laȝamon's use of *aluen* thus links Argante with Worcestershire literary culture.

Argante, Whiteness, and English Identity

The associations of whiteness present in Argante's identity as an elf recur in her name and emphasized by her beauty. These associations further link her to concepts of Englishness through the term *Albion*, an early name for England used by Bede, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Wace. Laȝamon himself uses *Albion* early in the *Brut*, following the precedents set by Geoffrey and Wace. The name Argante contains the Latin element *argent* (silver), which is similar to the Old English element *alb* (white) present in *Albion*. Linking Argante with *Albion* binds together Argante's and England's identities. Argante becomes a personification or embodiment of the land of England itself. Argante's beauty also links her with whiteness, which then reaffirms her connections with England.

According to Sarah-Grace Heller, in the thirteenth century "beauty required the possession of light" (Heller 934). Though Heller's scholarship examines connections between beauty, light, and whiteness in the thirteenth century, descriptions of beauty in twelfth-century literature indicates the existence of these concepts before the thirteenth century. For example, the Scandinavian tale "Bosi and Herraud" describes a princess as "beautiful" and her hair "was as fair as polished straw or threads of gold" (*Seven Viking Romance*s 213). In this example, proof of the woman's beauty rests in the bright, reflective quality of her hair. This example parallels the examples Heller finds in the thirteenth-century *Romance of the Rose*. Naming practices throughout medieval literature reflect connections between blond hair and whiteness; people were often named according to their hair color, and the appellation "the white" often referred to people with light-colored (not necessarily white) hair. Heller suggests a connection between light and holiness as well, claiming "the source and domain of truest radiance was the highest heaven" (Heller 946). Laȝamon attests to Argante's beauty by calling her an "aluen swiðe sceone," and the "uairest alre maidene" (Laȝamon lines 28613, 28611).[24] Laȝamon's use of *sceone* plays with the connection between beauty and light, as the word can indicate both beauty, as indicated by its modern German cognate *schön*, and light, as shown by its relation to the Old English word *scinan* (shine) ("shine" etym.).

Though the concepts of silverness and whiteness are close, Laȝamon's decision to form Argante's name from the Latin word for silver rather than the English word for white may reflect either a desire to legitimize Argante by using Latin or an unwillingness to associate Argante with Albany, a region of England distinctly different from

[24] "an elf most fair" and "to the fairest of all maidens" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 144).

Worcester. The name Argante is most similar to the Latin *argent*, with the Old English feminine ending (*-e*) tacked on. That the *alb-* element means white in both Old English and Latin provides a nice way to blend Latin legitimacy with Anglo-Saxon identity. However, adding the Latin feminine ending would make it *alba*, which also provides the Anglo-Saxon vernacular form of *alb* or *alba*, a priest's white garment worn during mass. Adding the Latin feminine ending would make it *alba*, again the priest's white robe, and masculinize her. Naming Argante after a priest's robes would Christianize her much more than Laȝamon apparently wanted to. Another alternative would have been to use a feminized form of *Alban*, the masculine name derived from *alb-*. *Alban* could have been feminized as *Albana* or *Albane*, potentially linking Argante with Albany.

Laȝamon, however, does not give Albany much attention in the text, apparently suggesting that he does not consider the area important. He follows Geoffrey's and Wace's versions by attributing the name of Albany to Albanac, the youngest of Brutus's three sons. According to Laȝamon, Albanac inherited land in the north of Britain, which "nu ure leodene Scotlond clepiað / ah Albanac on his daȝe Albanie hit clepede" (Laȝamon lines 2129-32).[25] Laȝamon's claims that Albanac and his two brothers "hefden þis lond / þa luueden heom þeos leoden" until Humber invaded and killed Albanac (2137-38).[26] Laȝamon does not demonstrate any particular interest in Albany or Albanac, though, as after mentioning Albanac's existence, inheritance, and death, the chronicle follows Locrin's story of infidelity and quite abandons Albanac and Albany.

[25] "now our people call Scotland, but Albanac in his day called it Albanie." (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 1, 90).
[26] "had this land, they loved them this people" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 1, 90)

Laʒamon often deviates from Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace's other uses of Albany, instead naming it Scotland. When relating the history of King Leir, Geoffrey of Monmouth records Goneril's marriage to Maglarus, Duke of Albany (Geoffrey, *Historia* 83). Wace, however, replaces Albany with Scotland, naming Gornorille's husband "Manglanus, li reis d'Escoce" (Wace, line 1838).[27] Laʒamon follows Wace's lead and changes *Albany* to *Scotland*, writing that Leir "ʒef Gornoille / Scotlondes kinge / he hahte Maglaunus" (Laʒamon, lines 3239-41).[28] During the most elaborate celebration of Arthur's court, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Laʒamon all list a number of Arthur's supporters. Geoffrey of Monmouth lists "Auguselus" as king of Albany but then mentions that Albany is now known as Scotland (Geoffrey 227). Wace eliminates the king's name entirely, writing just "Duna Escoce" (Wace line 13191). Laʒamon's decision to name him "Angel / King of Scotlonde" suggests that he had access to both Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace's versions and inserted a name when he had access to one in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* (Laʒamon lines 24324-25). His constant re-appellation of Albany as Scotland sets Albany as a region distinct from England and suggests that he did not want to establish a link between Albany and English national identity.

The form *alb-* also appears in the Geoffrey of Monmouth-Wace-Laʒamon chronicle triad in reference to Alba Longa, the city founded in Italy by Aeneas's son Ascanius. However, nothing else about Argante's character suggests a connection between her and Alba Longa, so the *alb-* in the Italian city and the silver-ness suggested by Argante's name is probably a coincidence.

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[27] "Manglanus, the king of Scotland" (Wace, translation mine)
[28] "gave Gornoille to Scotland's king--he hight Maglaunus" (Laʒamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 1 137).

St. Alban

The elements of whiteness or brightness present in Argante's identity as an elf and her name possibly link her with St. Alban and, through St. Alban, to an embodiment of England. Laȝamon's association among Argante, a geographic region, and a sense of English identity finds an analogue in Bede's description of the martyrdom of St. Alban. Of all Laȝamon's known sources, Bede's account of Albion and Alban seems most to have influenced his construction of Argante. Bede identifies Britain as Albion. Though Bede then refers to Britain as Britain and drops the name Albion, he seems to play with *Albion* in his discussion of St. Alban by writing Britain's conversion onto Alban's character. Alban's sheltering of a priest parallels the arrival of Christian missionaries in Britain. The priest's ensuing conversion of Alban echoes the missionaries' conversion of British Celts. Alban's conversion of the executioner possibly symbolizes the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, who invaded England and reinstated a non-Christian faith before being converted to Christianity. When another executioner martyrs Alban, the people from the area convert to Christianity, building a church near the site of his martyrdom. The mass conversion parallels the successful Christianization of England after the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.

Laȝamon's Argante reflects Bede's St. Alban in three ways. First, Laȝamon's association of Argante with healing powers and *haleweiȝe* parallels Bede's account of St. Alban's creation of a healing spring and the healing powers attributed to St. Alban's church: Bede records that "Alban asked God to give him water, and at once a perennial spring bubbled up at his feet" (Bede 53). Bede also claims that "sick folk are healed" at

St. Alban's church "to this day" (54). As the church was supposedly built on the site where St. Alban was martyred, and the site where he was martyred is the same place where his spring appeared, the church and the spring should be either in the same place or very close by. The association of St. Alban and healing miracles with the proximity of a sacred spring on a hill mirrors the same Celtic healing traditions present in Laȝamon's construction of Argante. Second, Argante and St. Alban both metaphorically represent a geographic area: Argante represents the Worcester region while St. Alban stands in for England. Third, St. Alban and Argante have the similar elements of *alb-* and *arg-* in their names. This idea of whiteness or silverness is also associated with elves, further linking Argante to Alban.

St. Edward

The repeated descriptions in sources of Edward the Confessor and Wulfstan of Worcester as white and shining suggests a connection between English lives and Laȝamon's depiction of Argante. For both Edward and Wulfstan, the white and shining appearance of their bodies and in visions attests to their holiness. Both of these cases suggest a survival and Christianization of the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian association of whiteness or shining with otherworldly creatures, particularly elves. According to Aelred of Rievaulx, Edward appeared as shining and white after his death. Aelred claims that as soon as Edward died, his body began "shining with a snowy whiteness" (Aelred 211). He also asserts that at the first translation of Edward's body, the king's flesh was "purer than glass and whiter than snow," and he describes his beard as "snowy in blessed white hair" (227). Aelred also describes Edward as appearing suffused with light in a

number of visions. In the vision of a blind monk Edward appeared "in the splendor of...shimmering light" (219). William of Malmesbury also describes Edward in terms of whiteness, claiming that Edward's "beard and hair [became] milk-white" after he died (William of Malmesbury 247). The fact that both William and Aelred describe Edward's whiteness indicates that it was an important element of the cult of Edward.

The traditions surrounding Edward also connect him to pre-Conquest English identity and the idea of legitimacy for English kings. As Edward had no children, later English kings had to be creative when they claimed connections with Edward. Both Harold Godwinson and William the Conqueror claimed that Edward had chosen them to be his successor and used this claim to prove their own legitimate right to the English crown. The struggle for legitimacy through Edward resulted in the tradition begun by William the Conqueror of crowning English kings in Westminster Abbey, and according to Marsha Dutton, “his regalia [has been] presented to each new monarch during coronation as a sign of regnal continuity” (Dutton 72).

The miracle involving Wulfstan’s staff and Edward’s tomb illustrates Edward’s status as a touchstone for English legitimacy. According to Aelred, Lanfranc (the Norman-appointed Archbishop of Canturbury) tried to remove Wulfstan from his position of Bishop of Worcester. To defend his appointment, Wulfstan claims that his appointment came from God through King Edward, plunging his staff into Edward’s tomb and saying “receive it my lord king, and deliver it to someone who pleases you” (Aelred 222). Wulfstan claims that Edward’s acceptance into heaven proved his accession to God’s will, and that this proof places his authority higher than the current

(Norman) king or the Archbishop of Canturbury. The fact that the staff remained stuck fast in Edward's tomb until Wulfstan retrieved it strengthens Wulfstan's claim of Edward's legitimacy. By connecting Argante to Edward through the shared concept of whiteness and radiance, Laȝamon associates Argante with the idea of legitimate English kingship and pre-Conquest identity.

St. Wulfstan

Argante's associations with brightness and whiteness and her connection in the *Brut* to English kingship also link her with St. Wulfstan of Worcester. Like Edward the Confessor, Wulfstan becomes white and radiant after his death. His close friend, Robert of Hereford, claimed that in his vision of Wulfstan at the time of the Worcester bishop's death he "shone with light" (Mason 259). An anchorite also recorded a vision of Wulfstan where his "body radiated a brilliant light" (265). Immediately after his death, his body seemed "bright like a jewel, pure and white as milk" and his nose "grew white" (qtd. in Mason 257, 257). The association of Wulfstan with radiance and whiteness after his death and as evidence of his holiness links these descriptions with the supernatural.

Wulfstan's role as protector and patron of Anglo-Saxon culture and political power in the years immediately following the Norman Conquest ties him more closely with Argante and her role in Laȝamon's *Brut*. Worcestershire was one of the few counties in England to maintain strong Anglo-Saxon leadership after the Norman Conquest, mostly because of Wulfstan's political power derived from the vast landholdings of the cathedral church and his strategic support of William the Conqueror's claim to the throne. Wulfstan phrased his support of William in terms of the legitimacy of divine kingship,

thus asserting God's power and his own right to remain in power as bishop. The miracle of Wulfstan's staff discussed above illustrates his use of connections between kingship and God's will to justify his own appointment as bishop. His support of divine right and the monarchy led King John to arrange to be buried next to Wulfstan in the Cathedral at Worcester.

Wulfstan's alliance with William the Conqueror and with seven Anglo-Saxon houses beyond Worcester Cathedral (Evesham, Chertsey, Bath, Pershore, Winchcombe, Gloucester, and a second house in Worcester) gave him enough political power to enable him to promote Anglo-Saxon interests and traditions in Worcestershire. Throughout his time as bishop of Worcester, Wulfstan cultivated an English chronicle tradition, provided places in ecclesiastical houses for children of the displaced Anglo-Saxon elite (including some of King Harold Godwinson's children by his second wife, Edith), and preserved many of the Anglo-Saxon liturgical traditions. Despite Wulfstan's agreement to build a new cathedral in the Norman style, Emma Mason says that "he rebuilt it in a Norman style modified to suit Anglo-Saxon liturgical needs" (Mason 203). According to Emma Mason, Wulfstan also "continued to observe pre-Conquest musical traditions" during mass, though he did conform to the new format of the liturgy (204). Worcester and Evesham also maintained their pre-Conquest traditions by continuing to celebrate the feast days of insular saints. The monastic order of St. Mary's Priory centered at Worcester Cathedral, of which Wulfstan was the head during his life, continued to encourage and preserve Anglo-Saxon literature, language, and traditions after his death.

Despite Wulfstan's public support of the new Norman kings, the displacement of Anglo-Saxon power by the new Norman elite generated general resentment, which Wulfstan seems to have shared. The Norman family of Urse acquired several hides, fiefs, and properties from the bishopric seat of Worcester, though they did not acquire enough to undermine the overall position of the Church at Worcester (*Victoria* 264). They did, however, build a Norman castle that encroached upon some of the burial grounds of St. Mary's Priory, the monastic section of the Worcester cathedral. The *Vita Wulfstani* records Wulfstan's particular distaste for this disruption by the Urses'. A few charters that have survived from this period record Wulfstan's legal support of the Urses' Anglo-Saxon opponents in disputes involving land rights, further indicating his dislike of the Norman presence in Worcester.

Wulfstan's close ties with English kings and support of Anglo-Saxon culture and political power suggest that Laȝamon drew on his knowledge of Wulfstan when creating Argante's character. The growing popularity of Wulfstan's cult centered at the Worcester Cathedral and Laȝamon's appointment as a clerk in Areley Kings, Worcestershire, suggest that Laȝamon was probably familiar with Wulfstan's life and general influence. Laȝamon associated Argante, like Wulfstan, with English kingship and English identity. Wulfstan's position as the head of St. Mary's Priory links him with the veneration of a powerful supernatural woman reinforces his connection with Argante. Wulfstan's reputation for healing and for preserving and promoting Anglo-Saxon culture and interests probably influenced Laȝamon's creation of Argante.

However, Laȝamon probably did not model Argante entirely on Wulfstan, though Argante and Wulfstan have several points of connection. Argante's identity as a woman suggests a closer parallel with Marian traditions rooted in beliefs surrounding Celtic healing springs than with a male saint. Further, Laȝamon's decision to make Argante a non-Christian figure prevents her from being associated with a particular Christian saint. Ultimately, the parallels between Argante and figures such as Alban, Edward, and Wulfstan, as well as her identity as an elf, connect her character with concepts of supernatural power and English national identity. The fact that none of these parallels fit her character perfectly suggests that Laȝamon created her as a new character rather than as a copy of a pre-existing person. Argante's independence and abstractness prevents readers from fixing her to a specific place and time and suggests a continuity of her role in preserving English identity. By suggesting this continuity, Laȝamon makes Argante's role in preserving pre-Conquest English identity become possible beyond an individual lifespan and suggests a larger, more general movement.

CHAPTER FOUR

JUST SAY NO: LAȝAMON'S REJECTION OF HEALING HERBS AND CONTINENTAL CONQUEST

Twelfth-century continental romances by authors such as Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, and Beroul, and English hagiographies such as the *Vita Wulfstani* and Aelred of Rievaulx's *Life of Saint Edward, King and Confessor*, contain descriptions of women healers and healing water. Despite the presence of these elements in Laȝamon's descriptions of Argante, Laȝamon probably did not draw from the continental romances and borrowed only certain aspects from the hagiographies. The similarities between Laȝamon's Argante and healing episodes in the continental romances are mostly superficial, and an in-depth examination of the texts reveals several key differences between the romances and Laȝamon's *Brut*. Similar comparisons of the healing miracles in the lives of Wulfstan and Edward reveal enough parallels to suggest that Laȝamon drew from the English hagiographic tradition, but crucial differences indicate that the hagiographic tradition influences only certain aspects of the Argante section. The pronounced departures from healing accounts in the continental romances support the interpretation of Argante as an English figure, an interpretation that rejects the Continental influence as a way of rejecting post-Conquest Norman lordship over England, while the incorporation of some elements from the English hagiographic tradition suggests that Laȝamon favored English literary tropes and traditions.

Healing in Romances

Most discussions of healing in twelfth-century romances associate healing with herbs rather than mystically endowed water. The most direct example of healing through potent herbs is in Marie de France's "Eliduc." In Eliduc, a pair of weasels reveal to Eliduc's first wife a red flower that has such potent healing properties that it can bring the dead (in the case of the weasel) and the presumed dead (in the case of Eliduc's lover and second wife) back to life or consciousness. Though the healing herb in "Eliduc" does not require any sort of preparation, this example is unusual. Most examples of healing with herbs in twelfth-century romances require someone skilled in herbal medicine to mix the plants into a different form, such as a drink, potion, or plaster, before the healing properties are unlocked. For example, in Marie de France's lai "Les Deus Amanz," the lady's aunt concocts an herbal potion that will reinvigorate and strengthen whoever drinks it. Though the potion is a liquid, its potency derives from the properties of herbs. The liquid merely serves as a conduit to transfer the healing power of the plants to the patient's body. The aunt's medical skill results from her knowledge of herbs and roots rather than from purely mystical power, and her residence in Salerno associates her with the medical universities there.

Chrétien's descriptions of medical practices in his romance "Cliges" also rely heavily on herbs, and although the medical figure is associated with magical arts (unlike the aunt in "Les Deus Amanz" who derives her power from medical knowledge), the description primarily reflects a trained medical knowledge of herbs. In "Cliges," Thessala, Fenice's nurse, uses herbal lore to give the emperor a drugged sleep, induce a

temporary coma-like state in Fenice, and heal Fenice after the physicians torture her comatose body. Thessala's knowledge comes from her association with her birthplace in Thessaly, which, according to Chrétien, is "where devilish charms are taught and wrought; for the women of that country perform many a charm and mystic rite" (Chrétien 130). Despite this association of Thessaly with supernatural practices, Thessala's medicine more accurately reflects the teaching of university-trained physicians. She claims that she is "so expert in examining the urine and the pulse that [Fenice] need consult no other physician" (130). Uroscopy and diagnoses based on the patient's pulse reflect twelfth-century medical treatises and suggest that Thessala's healing ability stems from medical training rather than supernatural power.

In Beroul's "Tristan," Iseut's mother creates the love potion, which Tristan and Iseut inadvertently drink, through her knowledge of plants.[29] Though the section where Tristan and Iseut drink the potion does not exist in the only manuscript to preserve Beroul's version of the Tristan story (only a fragment of the manuscript remains), the text that does survive frequently mentions the love potion. Beroul describes the potion as "li lovendrins, li vin herbez," and "le lovendrant," and he specifies that Iseut's mother intended the love potion to last three years (Beroul lines 2138, 2159).[30] The potion's powers are fantastic; the potion's potency drives Tristan and Iseut to adultery several times, but three years after they drank the potion its effects dissipate instantaneously. Beroul's fantastic attributions to the potion define it as magical. However, his association

[29] Other versions of Tristan and Yseut emphasize Yseut's skill as a healer, but as these versions are later than the twelfth-century, I have not included them.

[30] "the love potion, the herbed wine" and "the love potion" (Beroul, Trans. Stewart Gregory, lines 2137, 2160)

of the potion with herbs and wine connect the love-draught with medical practices and herbal healing. Beroul thus roots the supernatural element of the magic potion in Tristan and Iseut in beliefs about the supernatural power of herbal medicine rather than in traditions of Celtic healing goddesses.

Other twelfth-century romances emphasize the necessity of proper hygiene, rest, and an appropriate diet. Chrétien seems more concerned with these elements than does Marie, as he includes more descriptions of wounded or ailing knights and ladies receiving comfortable and lengthy periods of sleep and appropriate (to the theory of the four humors) food and drink. In "Erec et Enide," Chrétien specifies that when wounded, Erec drank “wine mixed with water; for unmixed it is too strong and heating” and that, while recovering from his wounds, Erec ate “no garlic or pepper” as these would, like the unmixed wine, be too heating (Chrétien 67-68). Chrétien also emphasizes the importance of rest, noting that Erec was “laid in a bed alone” and “rested comfortably and slept all night” (56, 67). Various women bathe his wounds and change his bandages, and after he recovers slightly “they give him baths” (68). The two women who attend his wounds resemble surgeons or nurses more than supernatural figures. They “remov[e] the dead flesh, then applied plaster and lint…like women who knew their business well. Again and again they washed his wounds and applied the plaster” (68). Though female healing figures are using water to heal Erec, they are not similar to Argante. Unlike Argante, who uses water endowed with supernatural healing properties, they use non-magical water to clean his wounds before they apply plaster and re-bandage them.

The description in “Erec et Enide” is also much more technical than Laȝamon’s description, which emphasizes the more mundane and earthly elements of healing in Chrétien’s romances. Interestingly, the single example of an elision of magical and mundane healing practices in “Erec et Enide” involves Morgan, Arthur’s sister. In “Erec et Enide,” Arthur treats Erec with “a plaster, which Morgan had given to Arthur, [and which] was of such sovereign virtue that no wound, whether on a nerve or joint, provided it were treated with the plaster once a day, could fail to be completely cured and healed within a week” (55). Though this plaster is supernatural and associated with Morgan, the magical properties of this plaster place it only slightly ahead of the descriptions of non-supernatural plasters, making it a more mundane version of a magical medicine. Morgan too, though she certainly is associated with beyond normal healing abilities, is not as supernatural as she is in other works.

Marie de France's lai "Guigemar" contains the healing story in twelfth-century romances most similar to Argante’s healing encounter with Arthur. In "Guigemar," the eponymous knight kills a white hind that gives him a curious wound that only a woman can heal. Wounded, Guigemar makes his way to a coast where he discovers a mystical boat. He boards the ship, which carries him to a tower where the lord of that land, who was old and afraid of being cuckolded, kept his wife imprisoned. The wife, described as possessing a "fairylike beauty," finds Guigemar and heals him, and they become lovers (Marie, “Guigemar” lines 704). When the lady's husband discovers them, Guigemar returns to his own country on the mystical boat, on which the lady later escapes. They reunite in yet another country, and Guigemar eventually "led away his mistress with great

rejoicing" (881). "Guigemar" and Arthur's passage to Argante follow the same narrative pattern; the hero travels via mystical boat to an otherworldly place where a woman heals him with water so he can return to his own country fully healed and restored.

Crucial differences suggest that "Guigemar" did not influence Laȝamon's Argante. The difference between Guigemar's and Arthur's wounds indicate a substantial difference between the two tales. Guigemar's wound represents a wound of love, and the lady's healing ministrations become acts of requited love. Once Guigemar arrives at the lady's tower, "the lady...wounded him...badly" and (according to Guigemar) can only cure him by loving him (381, 503-5). Though when Guigemar returns to his own country his physical wound has been healed, the knot in his shirttail represents a wound of love that replaces the physical wound in his thigh. Both the thigh and his shirttail act as euphemisms for his male member, thus defining his wounded thigh and knotted shirttail as sexual wounds or problems. Arthur's wounds, however, are not at all sexual. In his final battle against Mordred, Arthur receives fifteen wounds, all of which are terrible and none of which is in his thigh. The description of the battle establishes a gritty war scene. He is wounded "mid wal-spere brade," and his fifteen wounds are large enough that "mon mihte ... / twa glouen iþrafte" (Laȝamon lines 28580-81).[31] Unlike Guigemar, Arthur's wounds are physical and physically deadly.

Another important difference between Guigemar and Arthur is the different relationship between the healing lady and the wounded man. Guigemar and his lady have a romantic and sexual relationship. Marie writes that "they lie down together and

[31] "with a broad slaughter-spear" and "in the least one might thrust two gloves" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 142-43)

converse, / kissing and embracing often. / I hope they also enjoy whatever else / others do on such occasions" (Marie, “Guigemar” lines 531-34). Laȝamon never suggests that a romantic or sexual relationship between Arthur and Argante exists. Through Merlin's prophecy and Arthur's final speech, Laȝamon establishes Arthur and Argante's relationship as solely focused on healing. In both examples, Laȝamon emphasizes that Arthur will go to Argante so she will heal him, and as soon as he regains his health he will immediately return to Britain. Their relationship seems almost crisp and businesslike in comparison with Guigemar's sensual and intimate relationship with his lady.

The healing in "Guigemar" and Laȝamon’s Arthur section also differs. Though both Guigemar's lady and Argante heal with water, the way the water is used in Guigemar fits more with the recurring emphasis on keeping wounds clean found in other twelfth-century continental romances than with Argante's holy water. When the lady lays Guigemar in her bed to tend his wound, she and her lady-in-waiting (her husband's niece) "brought him water in a golden basin, / washed his thigh, / and with a fine, white silk cloth / they wiped the blood from his wound. / Then they bound it tightly" (369-73). The medical treatment here reflects Chrétien's description of Enide's treatment of Erec's wounds, when she "having washed his wounds, she dried them and bound them up again" (Chrétien 67). In both "Guigemar" and "Erec et Enide" the water does not possess any magical properties and functions as only one step in the realistic process of dressing the wound and changing the bandages. In "Guigemar," Marie further de-emphasizes the water by highlighting the richness of the materials used to tend the knight. The women use "a golden basin" and "fine, white silk cloth" to treat Guigemar's wound, adding to the

sensual tone of the lai (Marie, “Guigemar” lines 369, 371). By contrast, Laȝamon presents the water as the key healing ingredient by writing that Argante will heal Arthur by drenching him “mid haleweiȝe” (Laȝamon lines 28618). Here, Laȝamon emphasizes the water as the healing agent and constructs it as independent of a recognizable medical procedure. Laȝamon leaves out bandages and sensual description, returning instead to his repeated promise of Arthur's return to Britain.

Guigemar's actual and Arthur's predicted return also vary, increasing the distance between the two tales. Guigemar's knotted shirttail implies that when he returns to his own country, he returns wounded by love, as his knotted shirttail represents. His return is also forced, since he leaves to avoid the anger of his lover's husband. Furthermore, the narrative complicates his return to his native country by presenting it as a departure from his beloved. The narrative thus postpones the resolution of the story arc until he and his mistress are reunited. Laȝamon describes Arthur's return quite differently. Though Arthur never actually returns to Britain, Laȝamon emphasizes that Arthur will return the moment his wounds are healed so he can live "mid Brutten / mid muchelere wunne" (28621-2).[32] Merlin prophesies that Arthur will "cum Anglen to fulste" (28651).[33] Argante's role remains limited to being Arthur's healer, and she remains on Avalon. Arthur assures Constantine, who he names his heir, that he will return as quickly as possible, implying that Arthur focuses on his kingdom rather than a love interest. Arthur's intent to return casts Argante as the means to an end rather than an end in herself, unlike Guigemar's lady, whose reunion with her lover forms the resolution to their tale. The essential

[32] "with much joy" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 144)
[33] "come to help the English" (Laȝamon, Trans. Madden, Vol. 3, 146)

differences between Guigemar and Laȝamon's Arthur suggest that Laȝamon either did not draw from "Guigemar" when writing his *Brut* or that Argante's healing served a different purpose than the lady's healing in "Guigemar."

Healing in Hagiographies

The only similarities between Argante and contemporary healing accounts in literature are between Argante's healing water and accounts of healing water in hagiographies. However, the similarities between Argante and hagiographies do not link her to the Continental tradition. Hagiographies that describe saints healing with water existed in England before the Conquest, and healing with water is associated with figures who define Englishness, such as Edward the Confessor and Wulfstan. Several stories attest to Wulfstan's healing power, and at least three of them involve water. In one example, Wulfstan encounters a Frenchman lying in the road suffering from severe abdominal pain. He offers him "consecrated water from a drinking horn" and prays for him, and the man is quickly healed (Mason 133). At another point, a woman suffering from a tumor asks Wulfstan to heal her, and he dips a relic into water and sends the woman the water. The holy water heals the woman of her tumor (238). In another example, a leper comes to Wulfstan asking to be healed but Wulfstan refuses to heal him. One of Wulfstan's friends, brother Eilmer, sneaks the water Wulfstan bathed his hands in during mass to the leper and adds it to his bath. The leper bathes in the water and is healed. Unlike the examples in the romances where water functions as a way to transfer the healing properties of herbs to the patient or keep the wounds clean, in the examples with Wulfstan the water itself acts as the healing agent. In both examples the water has

been imbued with divine power, either because it has been blessed in the name of God or because of its association with St. Wulfstan.

There are nine examples of healing water in Aelred of Rievaulx's "Life of King Edward," though two of the examples may be more related to the developing tradition of the King's Touch than to the water's intrinsic qualities. In the remaining six examples, people afflicted with blindness regain their sight by washing their eyes in water in which King Edward had washed. Just as in the episode with Wulfstan and the leper, in the examples where Edward heals blindness contact between him and the water imbues it with the king's healing power. The water, then charged with Edward's holiness, effectively heals the blind patients. The last four cases of healing emphasize the efficacy of the water itself. In this example, "a certain man from the palace...stole a portion of the water that had restored the blind man's sight" (a man whose sight Edward had recently restored through the proper application of King's Touch, water, and prayer). The man brought the pilfered water to four blind men and bathed their faces in it, praying to God to heal them in the name of King Edward. All four men regained their sight.

The similarities between Argante and these English hagiographies suggest that Laȝamon drew on these traditions when writing the Argante sections of the *Brut*. However, Argante does not wholly appear to be derived from these sources, as Laȝamon distinctly links her with Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian traditions surrounding elves and with British-Celtic traditions surrounding liminal locations and healing shrines. If Laȝamon drew solely from the hagiographic tradition, it would make more sense for Argante to be an anchorite, a nun, or the manifestation of the Virgin Mary. Laȝamon

already depicts Arthur as a Christian king by preserving the tradition that an image of the Virgin Mary was painted on the inside of Arthur's shield (a detail present in both Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Wace's *Roman de Brut*), so his description of Argante as an elf does not indicate a desire to depict Arthur as pre-Christian.

Laȝamon further distances Argante from the hagiographic tradition through his descriptions of Arthur's mystical travel to Argante in Avalon. The mystical nature of Arthur's transportation emphasizes the idea of Avalon as a liminal and supernatural location. To be healed in Laȝamon's *Brut,* Arthur travels from the shore (a liminal location) to an island (another liminal location) on a magically propelled boat. The repeated liminality of these locations ties Argante with the Celtic idea that, in locations that function as borders and centers, people can pass between this world and the Otherworld. Islands and coasts are both liminal as they are placed at an intersection between water and land. Though supplicants desiring healing in the hagiographies must sometimes travel to a physical location before they are healed, their means of travel and their destinations are usually not liminal. When supplicants travel in hagiographies, they usually travel to the church, shrine, or grave associated with the particular holy person whose name they invoke. Physical travel in the hagiographies often parallels the spiritual travel of the supplicant as they move from sin to repentance or disbelief to faith.

The overall goal of healing accounts in hagiographies differs from Arthur's anticipated healing in the *Brut*. The focus of healing in Laȝamon's *Brut*, as Laȝamon repeatedly emphasizes, is to restore Arthur's health so he can return to rule Britain. In the

hagiographies, however, saints heal the sick and the injured as a way to demonstrate God's power. Wulfstan and Edward act as conduits through whom God exercises his divine power, and the authors of their hagiographies consistently emphasize that the saints perform miracles to increase the glory of God. They both also repeatedly transfer the credit for the healing to God, both verbally and by invoking God's name and using objects consecrated to God. For example, when Wulfstan cures a woman who has a tumor, he blesses the water he sends her with a coin purportedly pierced by the same spear that pierced Christ's side when he was crucified. The constant reattribution of the miracle from the saint to God supports the saint's (and the hagiographer's) stated goal of convincing people of God's glory and power. The different role healing plays in the hagiographies from the Argante sections of Laȝamon's *Brut* indicates that though Laȝamon may have drawn elements from hagiographies in his description of Argante, her role as a healer functions differently from that of a saint.

Ultimately, the differences between the Argante healing episode in the Brut and the healing accounts in the continental romance and English hagiographic traditions imply that Laȝamon drew most of his descriptions for Argante from other, most likely British-Celtic, sources. Though Argante's *haleweiȝe* can be translated as *potion*, and several medical potions appear in the romances and treatises, Argante's potions are different. The romances and treatises specifically link potions with medicinal and/or mystical properties of herbs, while Laȝamon never connects Argante's *haleweiȝe* with medicinal herbs. He does not attribute the healing properties of the *haleweiȝe* to God or Christian relics, either, marking a distinct difference from the accounts of healing water

in the hagiographies of Wulfstan and Edward the Confessor. The healing episode in the *Brut* also has a different focus than the healing episodes in the romances or the hagiographies. The focus in the *Brut* constantly emphasizes Arthur's return to Britain, symbolizing a rebirth of English power and strength, while the romances often use healing to discuss love and sexuality, and the hagiographies provide healing miracles as proof of the power of God. Laȝamon's focus within the healing episode coupled with his rejection of the continental tradition supports the interpretation of Argante and Arthur as a nationalistic expression of pre-Conquest English identity and hope for the return of Anglo-Saxon cultural superiority in England.

CONCLUSION

Argante's strong links with Worcestershire's regional cultural traditions and her role in the *Brut* as Arthur's healer suggest that Laȝamon saw Worcestershire as largely responsible for the preservation and restoration of English cultural and political supremacy in England. Laȝamon's linguistic and stylistic decisions to rewrite Wace's *Roman de Brut* in a variant of Middle English very close to Anglo-Saxon indicate his preference for English rather than Norman cultural identity. Laȝamon's emphasis on Arthur's return departs from Geoffrey of Monmouth's and Wace's versions that minimize Arthur's potential return, suggesting that Laȝamon identified Arthur with English pre-Conquest identity and desire for a restoration of English power in England. Laȝamon's inclusion of Argante in his *Brut* tradition expands her role from Morgen in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* and implies that Laȝamon's Argante has a more important role than Geoffrey's Morgen. Laȝamon's repeated insistence that Argante will make Arthur's return possible places her at the center of Laȝamon's apparent desire for the resurgence of English cultural and political power.

Laȝamon asserts Worcestershire's role in this English return to power by linking Argante with Worcestershire regional cultural traditions. Argante's similarity to Celtic healing goddesses reflects the surviving British-Celtic traditions in Worcestershire and Laȝamon's preference for different healing traditions than the descriptions of healing in the Continental Romance traditions. Laȝamon's use of the term *aluen* to describe Argante reflects a regional dialectal variant on the Anglo-Saxon term *alf*, which further connects Argante with Worcestershire. Argante's identity as an elf links Argante with the Anglo-

Saxon tradition of renaming Celtic figures in a Germanic language, while her connections to ideas of whiteness connect her with St. Alban, St. Edward, and St. Wulfstan, three English saints associated with whiteness, healing, and English national identity. By linking Argante with these figures, Laȝamon associates Argante with English nationalism and through her asserts the nationalistic English sentiments of Worcestershire.

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