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Transformation and Medieval Aristocracy:

Werewolves, Lepers, and the King's Body

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Francesca Ann Marx

2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transformation and Medieval Aristocracy:

Werewolves, Lepers, and the King's Body

by

Francesca Ann Marx

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

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Medieval writers of epics, histories, lives, and romances find a rich symbolism and significance in the way sovereign bodies change through time, disease, or injury, because the royal body is a source and figure for individual power and social organization. When a ruler's body transforms, sickens, or ages, bodily instability becomes an opportunity to explore problems of authority and physical force. However, despite the *appearance* of bodily instability, the core behavior and character of nobility remain unaltered or actually intensify. This study will consider texts that exemplify these ambiguous transformations and their unexpected benefits. These works

– *Beowulf*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanneae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*), William of Tyre's *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (*History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*), and *Sir Orfeo* – stage the bodily transformations of rulers to explore the temporality of political authority.

Through these texts, we will examine two loosely defined but sometimes related and overlapping concepts: physical transformation and disability. "Transformation" is a purposefully imprecise term because it needs to cover many variations of change. Some transformations are natural and foreseeable, such as age. Other forms of physical alteration, less natural and predicable than the changes brought by age, are transformations into bodies that are either more than or less than human. In the category of more than human are giants and berserkers. Among the less than human are dragons and werewolves.

I will also be considering the changes brought by disability or illness. Though having a chronic illness such as leprosy is very distinct from having an alternate physical interaction with the world such as being lame or blind, they share in common some of the issues I will be exploring. This project seeks to test the "edges" of medieval disability, moments when the concept of disability is reversed in some way. Often a perceived or expected disability or illness turns out not to be a disability at all, especially in royal and aristocratic circles. As we shall see, for some kings, impairments almost seem to be an advantage, enhancing their ability to inspire and encourage their followers.

The dissertation of Francesca Ann Marx is approved.

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For my father, Richard Marx, whose creativity, curiosity,
and kindness have been an inspiration in all of my endeavors.

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I have been extremely fortunate to be surrounded by gifted colleagues and friends who have each played a part in the development of this dissertation. Mac Harris helped me through Old Norse, Old English, and paleography, and was an insightful sounding board for thoughts on *Beowulf* and other texts while we walked Lucy, Laika, and Katja. Kat Webster made café meetings not only fun, but also valuable, as she made me think about giants and islands in interesting new ways. Tom O'Donnell deserves special thanks for his kindness and

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INTRODUCTION

Medieval writers of epics, histories, lives, and romances find a rich symbolism

and significance in the way sovereign bodies change through time, disease, or injury.

These texts explore how the royal body is a source and figure for individual power

and social organization in medieval society. In epics and chronicles, kings

traditionally use strength as a means of conquest over outside threats and to unify

their people. In romances, the mutability of the royal body is sometimes used for the

good of the kingdom, but just as often is employed to achieve personal aims. When it

is a ruler whose body transforms, sickens, or ages, bodily instability becomes an

opportunity to explore problems of authority and physical force. However, despite the

appearance of bodily instability, the core behavior and character of nobility remain

unaltered or actually intensify. In fact, this bodily uncertainty often furthers chivalric

goals in unexpected ways. Without attempting to be comprehensive, this study will

consider a few texts that exemplify these ambiguous transformations and their

unexpected benefits. These works – *Beowulf*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*

Regum Britanneae (*The History of the Kings of Britain*), William of Tyre's *Historia*

rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum (*History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*),

and the romance *Sir Orfeo* – stage the bodily transformations of rulers to explore the temporality of political authority.

This study examines two loosely defined but sometimes related and often overlapping concepts: physical transformation and disability. "Transformation" is a purposefully imprecise term because it needs to cover so many variations of change. One thing that very quickly becomes clear in any study of individuals, whether aristocracy or not, is that physical change is diverse and inevitable. Some of the transformations one sees in medieval literature are natural and foreseeable, such as age. The representation of aging in medieval literature has intermittently been written about, but rarely with a specific focus on the aristocracy.[1] Given how intrinsic the subject of age is to any discussion of succession, this is a surprising omission.

Other forms of physical alteration, significantly less natural and predicable than the changes brought by age, are the transformations into bodies that are more than or less than human. In the category of more than human are giants and berserkers, figures whose strength lies in having exaggerated human characteristics.

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[1] Some overviews and collections on the subject of aging in the Middle Ages include Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages: 'Winter Clothes Us in Shadow and Pain'* (London: Routledge, 1997); Albrecht Classen, *Old Age in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Neglected Topic* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007); Shannon Lewis-Simpson, *Youth and Age in the Medieval North* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). The volume edited by Classen includes a chapter that does address age and aristocracy by Britt C. L. Rothauser: "Winter in Heorot: Looking at Anglo-Saxon Perceptions of Age and Kingship through the Character of Hrothgar," 103-120.

Among the less than human are dragons and werewolves, figures whose power is derived from the not-human aspect of themselves. A surprising number of aristocratic figures fall into these categories, albeit often briefly. These range from the Old Norse Sigmund, the giant Gogmagog, Bisclavret from the *lai* of Marie de France, and many more. Monsters in and of themselves have always been a subject of fascination, and have been written on frequently. For example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen has written comprehensively on giants and on monsters in general, and there is a compilation of papers on monsters from the International Medieval Congress in Leeds that was recently published.[2] There has been a continuous stream of books on medieval menageries, dragons, and the fantastical aspects of travel literature that inquire into the nature of imaginary creatures and monsters encountered in the medieval world. However, little has been written about the aristocratic monsters found in some medieval texts. In the following chapters, I will be looking at several royal figures who have alternative identities that are monstrous in some fashion.

The other form of physical transformation I will be considering in this study are the changes brought by disability or illness. Though having a chronic illness such as leprosy is very distinct from having an alternate physical interaction with the world such as being mute, lame, or blind, I am going to discuss them together in this dissertation since they share in common some of the issues I will be exploring.

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[2] Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003).

Specifically, this project seeks to test the "edges" of medieval disability, those moments when the concept of disability is reversed in some fashion. For example, often a perceived or expected disability or illness turns out not to be a disability at all, especially in royal and aristocratic circles. For some kings, impairments almost seem to be an advantage, enhancing their ability to inspire and encourage their followers. This may be the case with Beowulf, Baldwin IV, king of Jerusalem, and King Arthur's father, Uther, who are discussed in this dissertation.

Disability in the Middle Ages has become an area of interest recently, with surveys by Irina Metler, compilations edited by Joshua Eyler, and Edward Wheatley's studies and articles on specific disabilities, notably blindness.[3] While none of these specifically focus on aristocracy and disability, or on aristocracy and illness, they provide a useful conceptual framework for this dissertation.

The elusiveness of the term "disability" has become increasingly apparent.[4] In their discussions of disability in the Middle Ages, Irina Metzler and Edward Wheatley make a distinction between "impairment" and "disability" based on the social model

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[3] Irene Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking About Physical Impairment During the High Middle Ages, c. 1100-1400* (London: Routledge, 2006) and Joshua Eyler, *Disability in the Middle Ages: Reconsiderations and Reverberations* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010); Edward Wheatley's *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

[4] For a fairly comprehensive review of theoretical approaches toward disability, see Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 11-37.

of disability.[5] Wheatley writes, "impairment is the particular physical condition . . . while disability is constituted by the restrictive social and political practices that construct the environment of a person with an impairment."[6] Another concise description of this distinction comes from the *Statement of Aims* put together by the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS): "…it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society."[7]

The distinction between disability and impairment is significant, because many of the kings discussed in this dissertation are impaired but not disabled. Metzler argues that while "impairments" were everywhere, "disability" was not. Medieval society did not disable impaired individuals, and part of this project is to look at why this did not occur, especially in royal circles. As there has not been much research into the role social class plays in medieval disability, one of the goals of this project is to determine when and if a bodily difference of some sort becomes a "disability" for royal or aristocratic individuals.

In contrast to contemporary expectations that bodily disability works to isolate

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[5] Tom Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability" in Lennard Davis, ed, *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 266.

[6] Edward Wheatley, "Medieval Constructions of Blindness in France and England" in Lennard Davis, ed., *The Disability Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 63.

[7] Quoted in Shakespeare, "The Social Model of Disability," 266-7.

an individual from an able-ist society, the medieval epics, romances, and histories in this study show how bodily instability actually connected rulers to their followers. This connection is sometimes very concrete: Uther in Geoffrey of Monmouth's chronicle and Baldwin from William of Tyre's history physically depend on their followers for mobility as much as their followers depend on them for leadership. Figures whose bodies are changing, diseased, or aging are as engaged in society as anyone else, though sometimes this requires creating a new society to belong to. The complete estrangement of differently-*abled* people that we expect to see is in fact rarely found. Historically, while some groups such as lepers may at times have been isolated, at other times they were quite integrated into regular society. Some reasons for this might include that there was no organized support to isolate these groups; impairments may have been too widespread for individuals with them to be singled out; and there may have been a wider arena of social contributions in a pre-industrial community.

Given the dearth of medical treatment, and the high incidence of disease, injuries, and accidents in the Middle Ages, it seems impossible that there could have existed the present day division between differently-*abled* people and everyone else. Metzler remarks that the World Health Organization estimates ten percent of people have a disability, and she assumes similar percentages existed in the medieval period.[8] If one is using the modern definition of disability, which includes a wide range of

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[8] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 3.

impairments – physical, cognitive, and psychological – this would be a vast underrepresentation. Nonetheless, even if the percentage was indeed only the ten percent Metzler estimates, to isolate or estrange such a huge population would have been enormously destructive to medieval society, depriving communities as it would of much-needed talent and ability.

Whether medieval society was preoccupied by impairments in the evaluation of an individual's abilities or potential limits is one of the subjects explored in this dissertation, especially as it applies to a ruler's ability to lead his people. Lois Bragg uses the following quotation from the *Elder Edda* to argue that there was a lack of concern with impairments in the Middle Ages:

> The lame ride horseback, the handless drive herds,
> The deaf may be dauntless in battle;
> Better to be blind than burned on a pyre,
> Dead men do no deeds.[9]

Rather than illustrating that society was not concerned with impairments, I would instead suggest that this fragment emphasizes that society was simply more focused on what people *could* do than on what they could not do. Mike Oliver and Brendan Gleeson argue that in a pre-industrial environment where work was less bound by time constraints, so-termed disabled people were not as impaired as they are

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[9] Patricia Ann Terry, *Poems of the Elder Edda* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,1990) 20, quoted in Lois Bragg, "From the Mute God to the Lesser God: Disability in Medieval Celtic and Old Norse Literature," *Disability and Society*, 12.2 (1997): 173.

now; the emphasis was on whether the task was completed and if it was done well, not on how quickly it was done, or whether within the confines of a nine-to-five workday.[10] Wheatley points out while discussing the aid given by the church to people with disabilities that

> an overemphasis on charity also deprives disabled people of agency. Some blind people worked in the Middle Ages and the same would have been true of people with other disabilities; they were not all passive recipients of hand-outs, even though they might have been objects of paternalistic attitudes.[11]

All of the considerations that apply to disability in the general public can be applied to the aristocracy. Is a king a less effective ruler if he has a physical impairment of some kind? Just as interesting a question is whether it matters to his subjects if a king has an impairment. In some of these texts what we see that the king's impairment does not matter to his people but is seen as a vulnerability by his enemies.

As a result of mutual dependence and the pervasiveness of impairments in the Middle Ages, there was probably a great deal more interaction then than there is now between people with physical impairments or suffering from profound illnesses and those who possessed health, strength, and, most importantly, power. For example, despite the existence of leper colonies and communities for the blind, there really was no way to isolate these populations completely in such a mutually dependent society

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[10] Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe*, 25.

[11] Wheatley, "Medieval Constructions of Blindness in France and England," 66.

and, it seems, no consistent effort was made to do so. Herbert Covey observes that the isolation of lepers was very erratic from one village to the next, and that there were periods and places, particularly in Britain, where ostracism did not exist at all.[12] Robin Fleming, in her study of cemeteries going back to the seventh century, describes the grave of a young woman of about twenty who showed evidence of being cared for throughout her life and who was buried in an elaborate fashion with a variety of valuable grave goods that included a bed and a necklace of silver rings. From an examination of her skeleton, it is clear that she had very advanced leprosy and would have been extremely disfigured. Nonetheless, the details of her burial suggest that not only was she integrated into her society, but she was also truly embraced by those around her.[13]

The integration of lepers into general society is one thing, but what if the leper in question is the king? This is the situation we encounter with Baldwin IV, one of the kings of Jerusalem in the twelfth century. While there have been several books on leper knights, here we consider the impact of leprosy in royal circles.[14] Much like the

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[12] Herbert Covey discusses the development of these institutions in the 19th and 20th century in his article "Western Christianity's Two Historical Treatments of People with Disabilities or Mental Illness," *The Social Science Journal*, 42.1 (2005): 107-14.

[13] Robin Fleming, "Bones for Historians" in David Bates, Julia Crick, and Sarah Hamilton, *Writing Medieval Biography: 750-1250*. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006).

[14] See David Marcombe, *Leper Knights: The Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem in England, c.1150-1544*. (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2004).

effect of physical impairment on a king's ability to rule, illness may not have been perceived to be an obstacle to effective leadership. Even more startling, even illnesses as profound as leprosy may not have compromised people's confidence in their leader's abilities.

In this project, I will examine the effect of physical transformation and disability on the aristocracy, and hope to come to some conclusions about the effect these have on a leader's ability to rule. Though not the direct purpose of this dissertation, I hope by implication to question some of the modern attitudes we have about disability and illness in the modern world.

TEXTS:

This dissertation considers a variety of texts: an Anglo Saxon epic, a chronicle, a twelfth-century contemporaneous history, and a romance, since these provide detailed glimpses of medieval responses to individuals with different bodies of one kind or another. These genres are of particular interest because they place such an emphasis on the heroic, thus providing many opportunities to consider what is critical in representations of royalty. Is kingliness defined by behavior or the body? I will be looking at aristocratic and royal figures, real and imagined, in *Beowulf*, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanneae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*), William of Tyre's *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (*History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*), and *Sir Orfeo*. I will also be considering the classical

and Norse influences on some of these texts. In general, it will not be particularly useful to draw a distinction between fictional and historical figures since both reflect social attitudes toward leadership, illness, and physical abilities.

Beowulf

Beowulf provides a good starting point for a discussion of the royal body in the Middle Ages. Whereas the kings in other chapters of the dissertation are captured at a particular point in time, or perhaps a span of years, *Beowulf* uniquely follows a sovereign figure from youth to old age. There seems to be little focus or interest in disability in this text; indeed, any character who is not fit and whole is dead. Instead, at the core of *Beowulf* is an exploration of the effects on the body brought by age. Over the course of the epic, we see the arc of a strong young hero who becomes a physically vulnerable king. This transition is exemplified by the monsters Beowulf encounters, and the resources he must draw on in order to defeat them. Put simply, Grendel epitomizes physical might, while the dragon stands in for age and time. However, the monsters are not entirely distinct entities from Beowulf. A close look suggests that in fact they represent facets of the hero and king. The indistinct boundaries between Beowulf and the monsters are explored within the text through rich and complex allusions to Norse myth, in particular the story of the hero and shape shifter Sigemund and his nephew Fitela.

The tendency towards violence and even predation in both werewolves and

nobility is developed in the *Völsunga saga* with the story of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli.[15,][16] Sigmundr and Sinfjötli are royalty, since Sigmundr's father is Volsung, King of Hunaland, and Sinfjötli is the son of Sigmundr and his sister, Signý.[17] That a hero and king such as Beowulf shares shape-shifting characteristics with these Old Norse royal figures comes as little surprise.

Lois Bragg has looked at disability and werewolves, and begins her discussion of werewolves by examining Old Norse *berserkers*. Bragg calls these shape-changers "pagan," as opposed to Marie de France's and other later "Christian" werewolves, which she argues were treated first with charity and pity or viewed as cursed, and then later viewed from a medical point of view. All of these are marginalizing impulses. Rejecting both the medicalization of lycanthropy and the reflex to search for divine causes, she writes, "it is impossible to overemphasize the point that in the pagan Norse saga world, 'shapeshifting' is not an illness and O'Dinn is not its cause."[18] Bragg links together lycanthropy and disability as "exceptionalities." The medicalization of lycanthropy that Bragg discusses very much mirrors the medicalization of disability. Impairments went through a similar cycle of being

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[15] Christine Chism pointed out the connection between werewolves and nobility in conversation September 9, 2010.

[16] Sigmundr and Sinfjötli are the Old Norse names for Sigemund and Fitela.

[17] Werewolves as noble figures is a theme seen in other works as well, for example Marie de France's *Bisclavret*, in which a knight is transformed into a werewolf.

[18] Bragg, "From the Mute God to the Lesser God," 169.

regarded with pity or charity and / or thought to be a curse, and then, increasing, being viewed according to a medical model. This is important to keep in mind with Beowulf, whose shape-shifter characteristics are a strength when he must face Grendel.

In *Beowulf*, another significance of the Old Norse myth is that, like Sigemund, Beowulf must also eventually abandon his berserker tendencies and reliance on physical might in order to be a successful king. However, this setting aside of his exceptional body leads to his death. In *Beowulf* we see the inherent contradiction that physical strength appears to be essential for successful rule, yet in the end this is inadequate or incompatible with kingship, which also requires wisdom and restraint. The physical might that Beowulf relies on in his battle with Grendel must be replaced by caution in order to be a good ruler. Unfortunately, when the dragon comes, wisdom is insufficient, and strength again is needed – and not found. This prioritizing of physical might remains the defining characteristic of the royal body through many future texts.

Historia Regum Britanneae

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanneae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*) we start to see kings who do not conform to physical conventions of strength. The impulse of chroniclers such as Geoffrey is to describe heroic figures in effusive and superlative terms. Good kings are described as the bravest, fairest, most

generous, and most capable in battle. There is the expectation that kings will have a high degree of physical prowess, an inheritance from a heroic tradition best formulated by Tacitus in the first century in his work *Germania* that is also articulated in *Beowulf*. But what if a king does not fit into this model? This is the situation Geoffrey of Monmouth is presented with in the case of King Arthur's father, Uther. A once-strong king who is now unable to fight while standing, Uther insists on being carried to the battlefield in a litter. The Saxons mock him and are defeated, according to Geoffrey in no small part due to their misconceptions about the disabled king:

> Introposito itaque rege Uerolamium prerrexerunt ubi predicti Saxones uniuersum populum affligebant. Cumque nossent Octa et Eosa aduentum Britonum regemque feretro aduectum, indignati sunt cum eo preliari quia in uehiculo aduenerat. Aiebant enim ipsum semimortuum esse nec tantos uiros cum huiusmodi homine pugnare decere. Receperunt itaque sese infra urbem et ualuas quasi nichil timerent deseruerunt apertas. At Uther, cum id sibi relatum fuisset, iussit otius obsidere ciuitatem atque menia undique inuadere.
> ….
> At Saxones cum inspexissent superbiam suam sibi nocuisse, Britones autem fere triuphasse…. Postremo cum multum diei preterisset, cessit uictoria regi Britonum interfectisque Octa atque Eosa terga uerterunt Saxones.[19]
>
> (When Octa and Eosa learned that the Britons were approaching and that the king was lain out in a bier, they scorned to do battle with him since he had to be carried to the battlefield. They declared that he was already half-dead and that it would not befit men of their caliber to fight with someone in his condition. Then they withdrew into the city, leaving the gates wide open to show that they were not concerned with him. When this was reported to Uther, he commanded his men to

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[19] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed and trans. Michael Faletra (Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2008), 99-100.

besiege the city at once and to make an attack on the walls.
….
> The Saxons by now had realized how much their own insolence had harmed them and had almost led to a British victory…. After much of the day had passed, the king of the Britons won the field. Octa and Eosa were both slain, and the rest of the Saxons fled.)[20]

Whether a king who cannot walk is able to fight a battle is clearly in question – the Saxons' derision and their underestimation of the Britons demonstrates this. In contrast, Geoffrey never seems to question the king's abilities; it would seem that for him infirmity has far less to do with the body than it does with effectiveness at one's endeavors.

This is a moment when it is important to consider Geoffrey's purpose in writing *The History of the Kings of Britain*. In an apparent effort to reinforce his nationalistic agenda, it is as if, given the historical fact (as far as Geoffrey knows) of Uther's illness, he embraces the king as he is and transforms a potential weakness into an asset. Since Geoffrey is determined to demonstrate the superiority of the Britons, at least at this point in the narrative, he transforms Uther's impairment into a strength, or a disguise of weakness that the Saxons fall for. Perhaps unintentionally, the above passage sounds not only like the description of a brave king, but also like a defense of disability. The message is clearly that one should not underestimate the king (whether or not "half-dead" as the Saxons call Uther), or a person who is impaired, or the

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[20] Geoffrey of Monmouth, ed. and trans. Michael A. Faletra, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2008), 161.

Britons. As a point of comparison with today's views, consider the efforts that were made by a cooperative press to conceal the effects polio had on Franklin Roosevelt. His chroniclers, the press, collectively went out of their way not to reveal the extent of his difficulty walking.[21] Not so with Geoffrey of Monmouth, who does not hesitate to describe how Uther was brought to the battlefield on a litter.

The connection between the king's body and the land over which he rules is very significant in *The History of the Kings*. Quite often, the king's domain is an extension of the royal body. This is clear in the well-known myth of the Fisher King, who is probably the best known injured king from the Middle Ages. In Chrétien de Troyes's *Le Conte du Graal*, the Fisher King has been wounded between the thighs ("parmi les anches amedeus"), an injury that evokes infertility.[22] The king's injury is echoed in the wasteland of his kingdom, and this link between the king's body and the kingdom exists in other texts as well. In the same way that the Fisher King's unhealed wound manifests itself in the desolate land around him, Uther's illnesses also coincide with the health of his kingdom. It soon becomes clear that the Saxons are a disease that afflicts Britain, just as illness is afflicting the body of the king. Not only is the king a symbol of strength for his army, but the health of his kingdom is inextricably linked to the health of his body.

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[21] See Hugh Gregory Gallagher, *FDR's Splendid Deception: The Moving Story of Roosevelt's Massive Disability and the Intense Efforts to Conceal It From the Public*. (Arlington: Vandamere Press, 1994).

[22] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Conte du Graal*, ed Charles Méla, Lettres Gothiques (Paris: Librarie Générale Française, 1990) 3451.

Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis

William of Tyre takes a much more direct look at illness and disability in

Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis (*History of Deeds Done Beyond the*

Sea). Baldwin IV, king of Jerusalem from 1174-85, was expected to be a weak ruler,

if one at all given that he was diagnosed with leprosy at a very young age. Like

Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Tyre presents an expected weakness as a strength.

William of Tyre was Baldwin's tutor, so was in a position to describe in detail how

and when it was discovered that the heir to the kingdom of Jerusalem had leprosy:

> accidit quod colludentibus pueris nobilium qui secum erant, et se
> invicem, ut mos est pueris lascivientibus, unguibus per manus et brachia
> vellicantibus, alii sensum doloris clamoribus significabant; ipse autem
> quasi doloris expers patienter nimis, quamvis ei coaetanei ejus non
> parcerent, supportabat. Hoc autem cum semel et saepius accidisset,
> mihique nuntiatum esset, credidi prius, de virtute patientiae, et non ex
> insensibilitatis vitio procedere[23]
>
> (He was playing one day with his companions of noble rank, when they
> began, as playful boys often do, to pinch each others' arms and hands
> with their nails. The other boys gave evidence of pain by their outcries,
> but Baldwin, although his comrades did not spare him, endured it
> altogether too patiently, as if he felt nothing. After this had occurred
> several times it was reported to me. At first I supposed that it proceeded
> from his capacity for endurance and not from a lack of sensitiveness.)[24]

[23] William of Tyre, *Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis*. *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 201, ed J. P. Migne, (Parisiis: excudebat Migne, 1855), XXI.i.

[24] *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, translated and annotated by Emily Atwater Babcock and A. C. Krey, vol II (New York: Columbia UP, 1943), 397-8.

William begins his description of the discovery of the boy's illness by drawing attention to the similarities between insensateness and kingly traits such as fortitude and patience. By doing so, William gives leprosy noble attributes rather than the expected implications of illness and potential weakness. This was perhaps not as farfetched as it might seem, because lepers were already thought to be accorded a special status by Christ. Among all the diseased and impoverished people who approached Christ to be healed, he singled out the leper for special attention.[25]

The decision to nominate Baldwin to be king must have been made with the full understanding that at some point in the not too distant future he would be too ill to rule. A regent was appointed when Baldwin was too young to take the throne, but when he came of age, the young king took power and proved to be a successful ruler. At several points as Baldwin's disease worsened, various parties attempted to take control of the kingdom, sometimes with his assent. They invariably proved to be so unpopular and unsuccessful that, much like Uther, Baldwin was repeatedly required to step in despite his declining health, because the public believed him to be a better ruler than the proposed healthy regents and successors.

The support Baldwin IV enjoyed is striking. It was not until his illness was extremely advanced that he truly became disabled. This does not mean that others, including his mother and sister, did not try to exploit his precarious health but, much like the Saxons and their attempt to take advantage of Uther's illness, they were

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[25] See Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-45 and Luke 5:12-16.

unsuccessful and ineffective. William of Tyre lists off the effects of Baldwin's illness – blindness, pain, disfigurement – but these impairments never become disabilities until near the end of his reign as king.

It is also important to consider whether representations of kings are interventional or reflective. To what degree are chroniclers trying to shape the reader's understanding and interpretation of events, situations, and individuals? It is a safe assumption that authors often have an agenda, whether overt or unbeknownst even to themselves. Given William of Tyre's affection for his student, and his undoubtedly nationalistic tendencies, looking at specific moments and figures from different points of view is particularly useful, especially the implicitly hostile Arab accounts of Baldwin IV. The treaty of 1180 between Baldwin and Saladin was of major historical importance, and was covered in Arab as well as European chronicles. This alternate point of view provides the perspective of another culture and religion, and also helps to strip away any bias intrinsic to William's account. For example, examining Arab accounts of Baldwin IV's leprosy helps illuminate whether William of Tyre was accurately representing the impact of the young king's disease, or whether he was downplaying it in order to advance a nationalistic agenda.

Sir Orfeo

My final chapter looks at the fourteenth-century romance *Sir Orfeo*. The story of Orpheus is well known from Greek and Latin sources, especially the versions by

Virgil and Ovid, but the Middle English version changes what is conventionally thought to be the outcome of the myth. Orfeo regains Heurodis, or a version of her, but both he and Heurodis undergo striking bodily transformations along the way. After Heurodis is abducted, Orfeo casts off the appearance and accouterments of kingship as they are no longer helpful to him to achieve his ends. Heurodis also undergoes a profound change, in her case most strikingly a loss of speech. We see another queen who has been taken to some version of the underworld and returns mysteriously silent in Euripides' play *Alcestis*. While there is no known connection between Euripides's play and *Sir Orfeo*, they seem to have some indirect shared inheritance. For this reason, it is useful also to look at the figure of Alcestis and the causes and consequences of her silence.

While Virgil's story of Orpheus is well-known, it is interesting to consider the myth in the larger context of the *Georgics*. What does the story of Orpheus have to do with a treatise on agriculture, or for that matter with an indirect discussion about restoring civil order out of political chaos? Quite a lot, it turns out, because at least in the Middle English *Sir Orfeo* one of the main conflicts is between personal chaos and political order. There are also echoes of Virgil's natural setting within the urban milieu of Orfeo's castle. These hints of a more verdant world are lost by the end of the romance.

Sir Orfeo explores the complex relationship of obligation between a king and his people, and the need to provide and maintain political order. In *The King's Two*

Bodies, Ernst Kantorowicz argues that there are in effect two bodies – one that is mortal and physical, and one that is political and spiritual.[26] In *Sir Orfeo* we see that the line of division between these two bodies is not sharply drawn. Where the figural role of the body stops and the mortal body of the king begins is not always easy to determine. Further, Sir Orfeo leaves his people in a state where they have neither the figural nor the mortal king to lead them. A key question posed in this text that relates to this ambiguity is whether a king has an obligation to be king or whether he can prioritize a personal agenda over the needs of his people. If he chooses the latter, what are the consequences?

Common to all of these texts is a breakdown of linear genealogical inheritance. We see four kings who all fail to produce an heir. The consequences of being without a king, or without a good king, are always within sight on the horizon, and this creates an undercurrent of anxiety that runs through each of these works. Beowulf, Arthur, and Orfeo reach out to kin or reliable retainers – sometimes both in the same person – to find someone to take over the rulership. Baldwin is unable to find a competent heir and, as a result, Jerusalem quickly falls. Beowulf's and Arthur's kingdoms also decline, but not so precipitously. Orfeo reaches out to a different social order that relies less on a hierarchy based on genealogy, and in this text alone there is the suggestion of a possible solution to this dilemma, which is to look beyond the

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[26] E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

aristocracy for social stability. This common thread to all of these texts can be read as a comment on the ephemeral, non-linear, nature of kingship and kingdoms; even when a king is effective, how can he keep his kingdom intact, safe, and successful after his death?

CONCLUSION

This project demonstrates the fluidity in medieval conceptions and expectations of disability and physical transformations. In these chapters I look at how the expected diminishment of ability and isolation resulting from an impairment does not always materialize, especially if one is a king. Despite that many individuals with impairments or illnesses in the Middle Ages suffered from isolation, this was not at all inevitable. Indeed, most of the kings in this study are passionately embraced by their communities regardless of their physical attributes. In several of these texts, when offered the choice between a king with impairments and a king without them, the former is chosen emphatically.

Establishing what qualifies as impairment or disability in aristocratic and royal figures is difficult. Chroniclers have nationalistic agendas and sometimes personal biases that may distort representations of the aristocracy. Alternatively, the expected difficulties may simply not exist. This is where considering opposing points of view will be valuable in determining what texts are interventional – interpreting events for the reader, or trying to present them in a certain light – and which texts are actually

reflective of the events that are being described.

The lack of difficulty that royal figures encounter may in some instances be attributable to the prosthetic role that armies and courts play. This is particularly striking when an army makes it possible for a king to participate in battle. In several instances in these texts we see kings who are no longer able to walk who are carried onto the battlefield. The interaction between royalty and those who maintain that figure's power is often symbiotic. The king's body may also end up being a metaphor for the strength, or weakness, of a given country or people. As demonstrated in these texts, the king's body has both figurative and historical importance for the kingdom and its people.

Through the analyses of the examples I have chosen, it can be seen that the disabilities we expect to find in medieval literature are in fact subjective and very hard to locate definitively, especially when the individual is a member of the aristocracy. Contemporary categorizations of other-bodied individuals did not exist in medieval communities. Underlying all the assistive devices that modern society has to offer is the anticipation of difficulty; there was this expectation in the Middle Ages as well, but perhaps not as much as there is now. Though it would be absurd to assert that life was easier in the Middle Ages than it is today for individuals with different modes of communication and mobility, oddly enough there may then have existed an inclusiveness that has since been lost. Certainly there was an openness to rulers with impairments or illnesses that does not exist any longer. The ubiquity of impairments

and illnesses in the Middle Ages allowed them to be ignored in favor of more

important criteria, for example the ability to rule a kingdom successfully.

CHAPTER ONE:

BEOWULF AND THE MONSTERS WITHIN

1. Tacitus, and growing up in the heroic world.

As the opening to a larger discussion in this dissertation on kingship and the body, this chapter on *Beowulf* looks at the consequences of concentrating on the physical might of the body as it inhabits time. Later chapters explore illness, leprosy, disability, and other physical transformations. This discussion of Beowulf focuses on aging kings and on monsters who operate outside of temporal constraints.

Were there an *Ur*-text on medieval kingship, it would be *Beowulf*, with its unconventionally Christianized and not at all classicized heroic kings who look back to a Germanic heritage that pervades the following centuries of medieval depictions of sovereignty. That the text has been so difficult to date or even to assign an origin speaks to *Beowulf's* universality in its examination of kingship and the threats rulers and their kingdoms faced.[27] Tacitus's *Germania* has often been cited in discussions

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[27] See Colin Chase, *The Dating of Beowulf*, Published in association with the Centre for Medieval Studies, (Toronto: University of Toronto by University of Toronto Press, 1998), and Roberta Frank, "A Scandal in Toronto: The Dating of 'Beowulf' a Quarter Century On,"*Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies*. 82.4 (2007): 843-64.

of *Beowulf*, as it seems to outline many of the heroic values emphasized in the text.

Ironically, given the efforts of many medieval authors such as Geoffrey of

Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes, and even the author of the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*

to reference an idealized classical past, Tacitus wrote *Germania* as an implicit

criticism of Roman decadence and corruption. *Beowulf* may also be a critique of its

own society, questioning the effectiveness of kingship based on a heroic model.

Tacitus writes admiringly about behaviors that underlie the conflicts at the very heart

of Beowulf:

> scutum reliquisse praecipuum flagitium, nec aut sacris adesse aut
> concilium inire ignominioso fas; multique superstites bellorum
> infamiam laqueo finierunt.
>
> 7. Reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt. nec regibus infinita aut
> libera potestas, et duces exemplo potius quam imperio, si prompti, si
> conspicui, si ante aciem agant, admiratione praesunt.
>
> (To have abandoned one's shield is the height of disgrace; the man so
> shamed cannot be present at religious rites, nor attend a council:
> many survivors of war have ended their infamy with a noose.
>
> 7. They take their kings on the ground of birth, their generals on the
> basis of courage: the authority of their kings is not unlimited or
> arbitrary; their generals control the people by example rather than
> command, and by means of the admiration which attends upon energy
> and a conspicuous place in front of the line.) [28]

The fact that a chieftain leads by example is the fatal flaw in the heroic system

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[28] Both original and translation are from Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Agricola:*
translated by M. Hutton, revised by R.M. Ogilvie*; Germania,* translated by M.
Hutton, revised by M. Winterbottom (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1996).

according to Tolkien, Leyerle, and others.[29] As Leyerle writes, "heroic society

inevitably encouraged a king to act the part of a hero, yet a heroic king, however

glorious, was apt to be a threat to his nation."[30] Tacitus's valorized portrait of

Germanic tribes sets the tone for *Beowulf*, not only for his outline of a heroic code of

behavior, but also for his emphasis on the physical description of the Germanic

people.[31] This focus on appearance is reflected in the actions that take place in

Beowulf, where the attention is always first and foremost on the physical attributes

and abilities of kings, heroes, thanes, and monsters.

     Beowulf illuminates the dynamic character of kingship, revealing it as a state

not frozen in a particular moment but instead reflecting the arc of youth and power

followed by the wisdom and age that accompanies the corporeal transformations

brought by time. The king's body – specifically Hrothgar's and Beowulf's –

determines actions and outcomes in contending first with Grendel and later with the

dragon. The inevitability of mortality gives kingship, and Beowulf in particular, an

elegiac quality beyond the sorrow and despairing expectation of devastation that is

expressed at the close of the poem.

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[29] See J.R.R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936): 245-95, and John Leyerle, "Beowulf the Hero and the King," *Medium Aevum* 34 (1965): 89-102 for a detailed discussion of the inherent conflict in kingship under a heroic model.

[30] Leyerle, "Beowulf the Hero and the King," 97.

[31] See especially chapters 4 and 14-15 of *Germania* for Tacitus' descriptions of the appearance of the Germanic tribes.

The pervasive subtexts of transience and genealogical instability in *Beowulf*

are exemplified by the transformations that take place along the way from childhood

to adulthood to old age. *Beowulf* opens with a genealogy of kings though, tellingly,

the first king we are told about is an orphan. Thus the focus on genealogy is

immediately undermined by the fact that one of the finest kings has no known

parentage. Also emphasizing the precariousness of genealogical inheritance is the

unpredictable survival of princes. Beowulf and Scyld Scéfing are unpromising youths

who become great leaders, but there is another group of young men who seem to have

promising futures but who are killed before they can realize that potential. This

includes Herebeald, the hanging youth a father grieves for and, possibly, Hrothgar's

young sons. Inheritance by lineage repeatedly fails, as expected successors are

murdered by their relatives or killed in feuds, or needed heirs simply fail to be born.

The unreliability of genealogy we see in *Beowulf* is manifest in many subsequent

medieval texts that focus on kings, including, as we shall see, Geoffrey of

Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanneae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*),

William of Tyre's *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (*History of

Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*), and *Sir Orfeo* in the 14th century. In *Beowulf* and in all

of these texts, alternative heirs must be found. For Beowulf, this turns out to be his

young relation, Wiglaf.

Despite the vulnerability of youth, the successful transformation of children

into adults is mentioned at several key moments in Beowulf. The first lines of

Beowulf give one such instance:

> Oft Scyld Scefing   sceaþena þreatum
> monegum mægþum   meodosetla ofteah
> egsode eorl[as],   syððan ærest wearð
> feasceaft funden   He þæs frofre gebad
> weox under wolcnum,   weorðmyndum þah,
> oð þæt him æghwylc   þara ymbsittendra
> ofer hronrade   hyran scolde,
> gomban gyldan   Þæt wæs god cyning.
>   (4-11)[32]

> (Often Scyld Scefing   seized mead-benches
> from enemy troops,   from many a clan;
> he terrified warriors,   even though first he was found
> a waif, helpless.   For that came a remedy,
> he grew under heaven,   prospered in honors
> until every last one   of the bordering nations
> beyond the whale road   had to heed him,
> pay him tribute.   He was a good king!)
>   (4-11)[33]

Perhaps one of the most striking things about this passage is that it tells a narrative

where one can become king at least partly simply by surviving childhood. The

"remedy" is simply "growing under heaven." Though Scyld Scefing arrives in a

treasure-laden boat, he has no family to support any claim to power; instead he

advances entirely through age and conquest. In the next generations, we see a more

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[32] All quotations in the original are from Robert E. Bjork, R. D. Fulk, Fr Klaeber, and John D. Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press: 2008).

[33] All translations are from Howell D. Chickering, *Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition*. (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2006).

traditional road to leadership, a succession of princes who advance in measure with

their generosity and ability to inspire loyalty. But with Beowulf we have again a child

who is transformed as he grows older:

> Hean wæs lange
> swa hyne Geata bearn   godne ne tealdon
> ne hyne on medobence   micles wyrðne
> drihten Wedera   gedon wolde;
> swyðe (wen)don   þæt he sleac wære
> æðeling unfrom   Edwenden cwom
> tireadigum menn   torna gehwylces.

> (Yet his youth had been miserable,
> when he long seemed sluggish   to the Geatish court;
> they thought him no good;   he got little honor,
> no gifts on the mead-bench   from the lord of the Weders,
> They were all convinced   he was slow, or lazy,
> a coward of a noble.   A change came to him,
> shining in victory,   worth all those cares.)
> $\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad$ (2183-2189)[34]

In both the description of Scyld Scefing and in this description of Beowulf, an

emphasis is placed on setting up the contrast between the strong adult and the helpless

or unpromising child / youth. It is significant that the introductions to the young Scyld

and the young Beowulf are at the start of the two sections of Beowulf, the first

leading to the encounters with Grendel and his mother, the second leading to the

confrontation with the dragon. There have been numerous attempts to account for the

unflattering description of Beowulf as a youth: for example, Arthur Brodeur writes

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[34] Unless otherwise noted, line numbers are the same for passages from both Klaeber and Chickering.

that the author of Beowulf was attempting to set up a Cinderella-like story with a

contrast between an unpromising youth and the hero he becomes, while Norman

Eliasan argues that the passage describes Hygelac rather than Beowulf.[35] However,

another possibility is simply that the audience is intended to note the bodily disparity

between a child and a monster, thus keeping physical attributes and potential at the

forefront of the narrative.

2. More than human: Grendel and Sigemund

The conflicts at the center of *Beowulf* are with monsters: Grendel, his mother,

and the dragon. The essential difference between the men and women in *Beowulf* and

these monsters is not their motives or actions but their bodies. Grendel is vividly

portrayed, despite a lack of specificity; who he is, where he came from, and what he

represents are never explicitly stated. Hrothgar's report of Grendel and his mother is

an example of a description that conveys the presence and nuance of Grendel and his

mother but fails to establish their true identities:

> Ic þæt londbuend,   leode mine,
> selerædende   secgan hyrde,
> þæt hie gesawon   swylce twegen
> micle mearcstapan   moras healdan,
> ellorgæstas.   Ðæra oðer wæs,
> þæs þe hie gewislicost   gewitan meahton,

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[35] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley: University of California
Press, 1959), 237-9; Norman E. Eliason, "Beowulf's Inglorious Youth," *Studies in
Philology*. 76.2 (1979), 101-108.

idese onlicnæs;   oðer earmsceapen
on weres wæstmum   wræclastas træd,
næfne he wæs mara   þonne ænig man oðer;

("I have heard land-holders   among my people,
counselors in hall   speak of it thus:
they sometimes have seen   two such things.
Huge, vague borderers,   walking the moors,
spirits from elsewhere;   so far as any man
might clearly see,   one of them walked
in the likeness of a woman;   the other, misshapen,
stalked marshy wastes   in the tracks of an exile,
except that he was larger   than any other man.)
                                        (1345-52)

A key detail is that Grendel and his mother live on the borders of the land.

They are not totally in the wild, but they are outside Hrothgar's kingdom. That they

are seen on the marshy wastes also suggests their liminal quality; a marsh is neither

dry land nor a body of water but is instead an awkward convergence of the two.[36] The

murky home of Grendel and his mother stands in direct contrast to the light-filled

Heorot.

The liminal quality of the landscape extends to Grendel and his mother, who

seem neither to be entirely monsters nor to be entirely human but instead are some

blending of the two. Their shadowy genealogy – they are descended from Cain –

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[36] Philip Cardew also discusses the liminal characteristics of Grendel and his mother, in particular in terms of their lineage from Cain. See "Grendel: Bordering the Human" in T.A. Shippey, *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*. (Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in collaberation with Brepols, 2005).

lacks the proud clarity given to Hrothgar's ancestry. Whereas the narrator opens

Beowulf with a detailed genealogy that spans generations and ends with Hrothgar, for

Grendel we have only the name of his most infamous ancestor, Cain; even Grendel's

mother has no name, and his father is rumored not to exist. This mysterious heritage,

implied but in the shadows, also adds to the sense that Grendel exists on the borders

of the known world. At the same time, we are given the impression that Grendel and

his mother are not all that different from the Geats and Danes. Certainly, the

description of Grendel's arm being torn off, with bones breaking and sinews

snapping, suggests a familiar anatomy. Grendel's enormous size is emphasized, but

Beowulf is also depicted as huge at several points in the text. The watchman says,

> "Næfre ic maran geseah
> eorla ofer eorþan   ðonne is eower sum,
> secg on searwum;
>
> ("never have I seen
> a mightier noble, a larger man,   than that one among you,
> a warrior in armor)
> $$(247-9).[37]$$

The real difference between Beowulf and Grendel lies in the word

earmsceapen. Klaeber and Bosworth-Toller translate *earmsceapen* as "wretched" or

"miserable," but Chickering teases the word apart and from *earm* (wretched) and

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[37] Andy Orchard also notes this moment, and the similarity of the terms used to describe both Grendel and Beowulf. Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 31-32.

sceapen (created) decides on "misshapen."[38] Grendel is a distorted version of humanity, and of Beowulf in particular.

This ambiguity exists in Beowulf, too, who is at the same time both human and somehow monstrous in his size. This blending of human and monster may reflect a Norse tradition or Germanic inheritance. The possible connection between Beowulf and Böðvar Bjarki from the tales about Hrólf Kraki suggests the possibility that Beowulf, too, is a berserker or shape shifter. The significance of Bodvar Bjarki is that he is more than human; in the form of a bear, he is greatly more valuable and successful in battle than he would be in the form of a man. In fact, it is when he is pulled back into the shape of a man that the battle is lost and the king dies.[39] Beowulf certainly has the characteristics of a bear, beginning with his name, "bee-wolf," a possible kenning for "bear." His size is suggestive, as is his method of attacking his enemies by holding them close. Thinking about Beowulf as some kind of shape shifter is compatible with Panzer's hypothesis that *Beowulf* is a variant on the folklore tradition of the "Bear's Son's Tale," in which a child either has a parent who is a bear or is raised by bears, thus has superhuman strength and, of note, is an unpromising

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[38] Klaeber, Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's Beowulf*; Joseph Bosworth, and T. Northcote Toller. *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary, based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Chickering, *Beowulf: a dual-language edition*.

[39] Jesse L. Byock, *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki* (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

youth – as we are told Beowulf seemed to be.[40]

Taking this one step further, is seems possible that Grendel is also a shape shifter of some sort, that his distorted body and incredible strength are derived from that metamorphosis. O'Brian O'Keefe points out that Grendel becomes more human the nearer he is to Heorot, and more a monster when farther away.[41, 42] That shifting identity is in keeping with the berserkers of Norse myth. Further, in *Haraldskvaedi*, berserks are described as "drinkers of blood" one of the more chilling of Grendel's characteristics.[43] In the *Heimskringla* Saga, there is also this description: they "went to battle without coats of mail and acted like mad dogs or wolves. They bit their shields and were as strong as bears or bulls. They killed people and neither fire nor

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[40] Friedrich Panzer, *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte*, Vol. 1, *Beowulf* (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1910).

[41] Katherine O'Brian O'Keefe, "Beowulf, Lines 702b-836: Transformations and the Limits of the Human," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language.* 23.4 (1982): 484-94.

[42] Likewise, Andy Orchard notes that "as Grendel comes closer to Heorot, he becomes identified in successively more concrete and corporeal terms." *Pride and Prodigies,* 36.

[43] Quoted in Carl Lindahl, John McNamara, and John Lindow, *Medieval Folklore: A Guide to Myths, Legends, Tales, Beliefs, and Customs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 39. See also Snorri Sturluson, Magnus Magnusson, and Hermann Pálsson, *King Harald's Saga: Harald Hardradi of Norway* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966).

iron affected them."[44] This portrayal of a man with extraordinary strength who drinks

blood and is impervious to iron certainly sounds like Grendel.[45]

Thomas Pettit also notes that Beowulf has bear-like and berserker

characteristics, but then makes the important observation that this is only true of the

first part of the poem; when Beowulf meets the dragon, he does so as a man.[46] This

has significant implications in the outcome of the confrontations with both Grendel

and the dragon. If, as seems to be the case, Grendel becomes more human when he

approaches Heorot, this may be why he loses the battle with the less-human Beowulf

in his berserker / bear-like state. When Beowulf becomes king, he sets aside that

identity, or no longer has access to it. When he has to confront the dragon, then much

like Bodvar Bjarki when woken from his berserker self, he cannot reclaim that

persona and thus loses the battle.

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[44] Snorri Sturlsuson, *Heimskringla: A History of the Kings of Norway*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (1964), reprint (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), quoted in Michel Pastoureau and George Holoch, *The Bear: History of a Fallen King* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 44.

[45] See Arwen van Zanten, "Going Berserk: in Old Norse, Old Irish and Anglo-Saxon Literature". *Palaeogermanica Et Onomastica : Festschrift Für J.A. Huisman Zum 70. Geburtstag.* 63 (2007), 43 for a point by point consideration of whether Beowulf and Grendel are Bersekers. Van Zantens ultimately decides is that the evidence is inconclusive when considering the exact criteria common to Norse and possibly Irish berserkers.

[46] Thomas Pettitt, "Beowulf: The Mark of the Beast and the Balance of Frenzy" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen: Bulletin De La Societe Neophilologique/Bulletin of the Modern Language Society.* 77 (1976): 526-35.

In a similar vein, the reference to Sigemund in the wake of Beowulf's victory over Grendel is ultimately ambiguous, having both positive and negative connotations about the physical self. As Roberta Frank writes, "The Beowulf poet . . . is almost Chaucerian in his ability to make neutral or even mildly approving statements that suggest, despite the innocence of the speaker, that something is rotten in the state of Denmark."[47] Sigemund's story is told in the Old Norse *Vǫlsunga saga*. In brief, Sigmundr's twin sister, Signý, is married against her will to King Siggeir, who later treacherously kills her father, King Vǫlsungr, and imprisons his ten sons, all of whom die except Sigmundr. Unable to bear a child who is strong and brave enough to avenge her family, Signý disguises herself as a beautiful stranger and conceives a child with Sigmundr. That child is Sinfjǫtli. At a later point in the narrative, Sigmundr marries and has a son, Sigurðr, who famously fights the dragon Fafnir.[48] In the most positive light, the *scop* has conflated Sigmundr and Sigurðr and is comparing Beowulf to Sigemund because the Norse hero also overcame a dragon who was a

[47] Roberta Frank, "Germanic legend in Old English literature" in Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge, *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 103. Frank goes on to discuss that while the *scop* calls Fitela "nephew," Old English audiences probably knew that he was Sigemund's son through incest.

[48] R. G. Finch, *The Saga of the Volsungs.* Edited and translated with introduction, notes and appendices by R.G. Finch. Icel. & Eng. (London: Nelson:, 1965). Chapters 2-12, 3-22.

threat to the people and the kingdom.[49] Sigemund is then contrasted with Heremod, a

king known for cowardice and covetousness, the implication being that Beowulf

shares Sigemund's characteristics of bravery and generosity.[50] In this sense, the

scop's praise of Beowulf is unqualified and sincere. But there is another troubling

significance to the story. The narrator tells us:

> þæt he fram Sigemunde[s]   secgan hyrde
> ellendædum,   uncuþes fela,
> Wælsinges gewin,   wide siðas,
> þara þe gumena bearn   gearwe ne wiston,
> fæhðe ond fyrena,   buton Fitela mid hine,
> þonne he swulces hwæt   secgan wolde,
> eam his nefan,   swa hie a wæron
> æt niða gehwam   nydgesteallan;
> hæfdon eal fela   eotena cynnes
>
> (He sang all he knew   of famous Sigemund,
> his feats of courage,   many strange things,
> the Waelsing's strife,   far off journeys,
> feuds and crimes   unknown to men
> except to Fitela,   always beside him
> when he wished to talk,   to speak of such things,
> uncle to nephew;   they had always been
> battle-companions   in all their hardships;
> together they killed   a whole tribe of giants)
>   (875-83)

One of the most notable adventures of Sigmundr (Sigemund in *Beowulf*) and his son

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[49] This is also to assume that it was not commonly known that Fitela, the Anglo Saxon Sinfjötli, is not Sigemund's nephew but rather his son by incest. Roberta Frank disputes this. See note 43 above.

[50] Given that the dragon shares Heremod's covetousness, Beowulf's slaying of the serpent looks back to this moment as a rejection of those characteristics and that alternative path.

and nephew Sinfjǫtli (Fitela) in the *Vǫlsunga saga* is that they spend a long violent

interval in the shape of wolves; they are shape-shifters. This part of their adventures is

not mentioned here, but the *scop*'s choice of the phrase "*uncuþes fela*" (strange

things) is interesting. *Uncuþ* is variously translated as "strange," "forbidding,"

"uncanny"[51] or "unknown."[52] What could be more strange and uncanny than

werewolves?[53] The reference to their "feuds and crimes" suggests that Sigmundr and

Sinfjǫtli's interval of pillaging is not entirely unknown to either the *scop* or the

audience.

In the form of wolves, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli eventually fight with each other,

and Sigmundr deals Sinfjǫtli a mortal wound. Realizing what he has done, Sigmundr

searches for and finds (with the help of a weasel and a raven!) a leaf that will cure

Sinfjǫtli. Once healed, they burn their wolf skins and never again change into wild

animals. Another important connection between Sigemund and Beowulf is that

Sigemund also transitions from being a warrior to being a healer and a good king,

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[51] See Klaeber, 449.

[52] Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary, based on the manuscript collections of the late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 234. Accessed at http://www.bosworthtoller.com/008670.

[53] Andy Orchard points out that "the poet's use of the description "many a strange thing' (*uncuþes fela*, line 876b) to denote Sigemund's activities carries interesting implications in a poem in which the term 'strange' (*uncuþ*) is used mainly of Grendel and his kin. See Andy Orchard, *A Critical companion to Beowulf* (Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer, 2003) 110.

though this entails setting aside his alternate self as a wolf along with the benefits it brought. The expectation is that Beowulf, too, will make that transition from a shape-shifting warrior to a good king. That Sigemund and Fitela are shape-shifters was perhaps unknown to the Anglo Saxon *scop* and perhaps also to his audience, but it is interesting to consider whether this is the echo of an inherited tradition of heroes adopting different physical abilities to meet the challenges they encounter.

Given that Grendel and Beowulf are both in some sense more than human, the real contrast is in how they use this potential. Grendel never transcends the physical; he uses his extraordinary strength to destroy and devour those whom he perceives to be his enemies. The reward for Grendel's behavior is dinner. In contrast, Beowulf uses his strength to defend Hrothgar and his people, helping to keep Heorot intact. The results of Beowulf's actions rise above the physical; he uses his strength to preserve and protect a community and its social bonds. The different ways that Beowulf and Grendel use their extraordinary bodies suggests that in the end, monsters are defined by the physical, whereas for heroes, the physical is a means to something that transcends the body, in this case, community.

Whether human or monster, the bodies in Beowulf are often torn apart, emphasizing their vulnerability. There are numerous instances of the body being dismembered in graphic detail. Grendel's attack on the unfortunate Geat warrior nearest to the door of Heorot their first night is described thus:

> Ne þæt se aglæca   yldan þohte,
> ac he gefeng hraðe   forman siðe

slæpendne rinc,   slat unwearnum,
bat banlocan,   blod edrum dranc,
synsnædum swealh;   sona hæfde
unlyfigendes   eal gefeormod,
fet ond folma.

(Nor did the monster   think long to delay
he lunged the next moment,   seized a warrior,
gutted him sleeping   –ripped him apart –
bit into muscles,   swilled blood from veins,
tore off gobbets,   in hardly a moment
had eaten him up,   all of the dead man,
even hands and feet.)
                                        (739-45)

Grendel's fatal injury is also described in great anatomical detail:

Licsar gebad
atol æglæca;   him on eaxle wearð
syndolh sweotol,   seonowe onsprungon,
burston banlocan.

(The terrible creature
Took a body would there;   a gaping tear
opened in his shoulder;   tendons popped,
muscle slipped the bone.)
                                        (815-18)

People and monsters do not simply die in *Beowulf*; instead they are reduced to their

constituent parts: feet and hands, tendons, muscle, and bone. The unusual detail given

to the body in these attacks almost suggests an effort to understand or characterize

these figures in a way that lies outside of language, behavior, or position. Instead,

individuals – and their deaths – are defined by the way their bodies come apart. When

Beowulf imagines a negative outcome to his fight with Grendel's mother, he tells

Hrothgar that he will not need to worry about a funeral, as he will have been eaten and there will be nothing left to bury. Defeat in this battle literally as well as figuratively means being consumed by the enemy. Perhaps this is why Beowulf conveys such a sense of horror when he tells Hygelac how Hondscio was eaten by Grendel, even hands and feet.

The dismemberment of physical bodies also parallels the disintegration of social bodies. The deaths of Hrothgar's thanes, Beowulf's companion, and Æschere, stand in for the destruction of Heorot. Likewise, the destruction of Grendel's body, the tearing off of his arm that causes his death, leads to the ruin of his own small social community. It is important to remember that Grendel and his mother have a social bond, and they even have a home at the bottom of the mere. Once Grendel loses his arm, their community is doomed.

Running through *Beowulf* is a strong association between life and corporeal integrity; once that is broken, death is the only possible outcome. There does not seem to be the possibility of disability. The only injury in Beowulf that does not involve death is Wiglaf's burned hand. The distinction in his case seems to be that he is injured, but he does not actually lose the hand. In contrast, Grendel loses his arm and dies; Æschere loses his head and dies – as one would expect! But these losses are not accidental in their specificity. Grendel, who is defined by his attacks, loses the weapon of those attacks: his arm. Then he loses his head, significant because he eats his victims. Hrothgar's wise advisor and friend, Æschere, loses his head, in his case

the part of his body most integral to his role as someone who is valued for his mind. It is as if the isolated part of the body stands for the whole of the person or monster.

Death does not seem to be the end of the body, however. There is also a struggle to control these symbols of the body as a whole. In addition to her attack on Æschere, Grendel's mother reclaims her son's arm. Is this in order to deny the Geats their war trophy? To restore even in death the bodily integrity of her son? Or simply a mother's sorrow and outrage that a part of her son's body should be a trophy to gloat over? Beowulf then seizes an even larger trophy, Grendel's head, which is so enormous that it takes four men to carry it back to Heorot. There is something disturbing about Beowulf's attack on the already dead figure of Grendel; its apparent needlessness emphasizes that the value is as a trophy, since Grendel is already dead and no longer a threat. It does achieve another aim, however, which is to assert Beowulf's control over Grendel's body. It is not enough to kill an adversary; to claim victory unequivocally, that body must be taken apart.[54, 55]

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[54] Gale R. Owen-Crocker discusses the importance of proper burial to Anglo-Saxons and the distress caused by the unrecovered body in "Horror in Beowulf: Mutilation, Decapitation, and Unburied Dead" in Elaine M. Treharne, Susan Rosser, and D. G. Scragg, *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002).

[55] This emphasis on the pieces of the body, the wish and inability to keep the body intact, is revisited in an alternate tradition of literature in the form of saint's lives, where the dismembered body seems to gain rather than lose power and significance.

3. The dragon and the body.

Whereas Grendel holds some dynamic kinship with Beowulf, the dragon,

simply put, represents death. The dragon's fiery breath presages the flames that will

consume Beowulf at the close of the poem. It is no coincidence that the dragon lives

in a barrow. Grendel's home, frightening as it was, existed in the living world: the

water teemed with monsters, Grendel and his mother were seen walking on the

moors, and there was the sense that although they lived on the outskirts of society as

defined by Hrothgar and his thanes, they were still a part of some social group.[56] Not

so the dragon, who has made a tomb into his home and lives there in isolation.

Kenneth Sisam writes that "the monsters Beowulf kills are inevitably evil and hostile

because a reputation for heroism is not made by killing creatures that are believed to

be harmless or beneficent – sheep for instance."[57] It is true that Grendel, his mother,

and the dragon are definitely not harmless and beneficent, and certainly they are

hostile, but evil is a different matter, especially in the case of the dragon. Grendel,

Grendel's mother, and the dragon have motivations that are not totally out of line with

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[56] Put another way, Michael Alexander writes, "Whatever the significance of the dragon, it comes in here as a further embodiment of destructive malignity. In itself the dragon is a beast of a different sort to the manlike Grendel, and belongs in a less provincial world." Michael Alexander, *A History of Old English Literature* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 87.

[57] Kenneth Sisam, *The Structure of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 25.

the values held by the Geats and Danes in the poem.[58] However, the dragon is

beyond such easy classifications as good and evil; the dragon and the treasure he

guards over represent the body and the inevitability of death.

That the barrow is filled with treasure is a foreboding sign, because there is a

close relationship between treasure and the body. The kinship between the two is

emphasized by their link in death, where bodies, jewels, and armor are ritualistically

heaped together on a pyre, set in a drifting boat or, in this case, buried in a tomb

guarded by a dragon. This treasure has its own narrative, told in "the lay of the last

survivor."[59] In this poem, the treasure is the point of contact between the distant past

and the demise of an unnamed tribe and the foreseeable future with the decline of the

Geats. The jewels and armaments are all that is left of a social body that no longer

exists, and it is infused with the memory of victories, gifts, love, and loyalty. Cherniss

writes that "treasure is the material manifestation of the honor to which a warrior is

entitled for worthy deeds which he has performed or for the virtues which he

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[58] Andy Orchard argues that Grendel's motivation may be "the incursion of the Danes into the fens that he though were his, and the motive of Grendel's mother is entirely clear: vengeance." "Beowulf and Other Battlers: An Introduction to Beowulf" in *Beowulf and Other Stories: A New Introduction to Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures* (New York: Pearson Education Ltd. 2011), 69.

[59] Gale Owen-Crocker argues that the 'Lament of the Last Survivor' is the third of four funerals in Beowulf, though there is no human body to be buried. In this case, the treasure is a stand-in for the bodies of the people who have been killed by warfare. See Gale Owen-Crocker, *The Four Funerals in Beowulf: And the Structure of the Poem*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 61-84. Owen-Crocker also notes that the treasure decays as would a body.

possesses."[60] If that is so, and treasure reflects on characteristics of its owner, what are the implications when that trove has deteriorated? In *Beowulf*, treasure also shares the mortality and fragility of the body. Much like the decay of a long buried body, we see the treasure's deterioration in the description of the rusted, broken armor and jewels Wiglaf finds in the dragon's lair. The condition of the treasure reflects on the condition of Beowulf, whose body also shows the effect of time. It can be argued that Wiglaf's decision to bury the treasure with Beowulf is a disastrous decision for the future of the Geats; perhaps the treasure could have been used to protect them from the Swedes, either in the form of payment or to pay mercenary armies for their services. But if the treasure represents the body of that past ancient race that died out long ago, and now represents the body of Beowulf, then it must be buried with the dead king.[61]

Just as the loss of a single part of the body invariably brings death to a living individual, the loss of one small cup from the treasure brings disaster to the kingdom. The treasure operates as a complete body, and once that integrity is violated, it is akin to the loss of an arm for Grendel and presages disaster. The dragon's response is not so different from that of Grendel's mother; something that they valued whole has

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[60] Cherniss, Michael D. *Ingeld and Christ. Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), 82.

[61] Cherniss argues that Wiglaf cannot keep the treasure since "The glory of the victory, and the treasure that represents that glory, now belongs to Beowulf alone. See *Ingeld and Christ*, 92.

been destroyed, and their response is rage.

Before the final confrontation between Beowulf and the dragon, we are told the end of the conflict before it has even begun:

> Sceolde (li)þend daga
> æþeling aergod   ende gebidan
> worulde lifes,   ond se wyrm somod,
> þeah ðe hordwelan   heolde lange
>
> (The king, long good,
> was to reach the end   of his seafaring days,
> his life in this world,   together with the serpent,
> though long it had ruled   the wealth of the hoard.)
>   (2341-2344).

One thing that is both obvious and significant is that the dragon is old. Not only does he stand for death but he also stands for time. He has ruled over this treasure for three hundred years, and even when he first took over the hoard, he is referred to as "eald uhtsceaða" ("old dawn-scorcher") (2271). This passage echoes the earlier description of Beowulf when we first hear of the dragon:

> he geheold tela
> fiftig wintr(a)   --wæs ða frod cyning
> eald eþel(w)eard--   oð ðæt (a)n ongan
> deorcum nihtum   draca r[i]csian
> se ðe on hea(um) h(of)e   hord beweotode
> stanbeorh stear(c)ne·
>
> (He ruled it well   for fifty winters—
> by then an old king,   aged guardian
> of the precious homeland—   until a certain one,
> a dragon, began to rule   in the dark knights,
> the guard of a hoard   in a high barrow-hall,
> towering stone-mound;)

This is an old king confronting an ancient dragon. Not only in age are Beowulf and the dragon mirrors for each other. Beowulf is known for his size, and when their bodies are laid out together, a comparison begs to be made. The narrator marvels at dragon, stating:

> Ær hi þaer gesegan syllicran wiht
> wyrm on wonge wiðerræhtes þær
> laðne licgean: wæs se legdraca
> grimlic gry(refah) gledum beswaeled
> se wæs fiftiges fotgemearces
> lang on legere lyftwynne heold
> nihtes hwilum nyðer eft gewat
> dennes niosian wæs ða deaðe fæst
> hæfde eorðscrafa ende genyttod

>   (Before, they had seen
> that stranger thing, the huge worm lying
> stretched on the sand in front of his enemy.
> The terrible armor of that shining dragon
> was scorched by his flames. In length he measured
> fifty foot-paces. Once he controlled
> the air in joys, had ridden on the wind
> throughout the night, then flew back down
> to seek his den. Now he lay there,
> stiff in death, found no more caves.)
>   (3038-46)

This elegy for the dragon sounds rather like an elegy for Beowulf. We have just heard how Beowulf gained control of all the lands around the Geats, and throughout the poem we have heard how enormous Beowulf is. Even the numbers echo: Beowulf ruled for fifty winters, the dragon measures fifty paces.

This blurring of boundaries between hero and monster is again present in the mention that the dragon's terrible armor is scorched by his flames. We expected that Beowulf's armor would be scorched, but to hear that the dragon's armor is also scorched comes as a surprise. But this may be a subtle reminder of one possible interpretation of the poem: not only is the dragon "scorched by his terrible flames" but Beowulf is also scorched by his own terrible flames, in his case the heroism that leads him to fight the dragon. The flames are intrinsic to the dragon, just as Beowulf's bravery is intrinsic to his own character. Yet these qualities are a danger not only to others but also to themselves: the dragon scorches the land but also himself; Beowulf's heroism is a threat to his people and also leads to his own demise.[62] This scorching also looks back to Sigemund's dragon, melting in its own heat. This sudden reminder of Sigemund, thus of Grendel and Beowulf's shape-shifting characteristics, brings the suggestion to the forefront that, like Grendel, the dragon is another doppelganger for Beowulf, that the two are somehow fundamentally similar.

The final transformation in *Beowulf* is the transformation of death, which we see strikingly in the case of the dragon, where a creature of the air lies heavily on the ground, eventually to be unceremoniously pushed over the cliff into the ocean, a dramatic contrast to the other seaborne funeral in the poem, the elaborate farewell to

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[62] Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," 245-95, and John Leyerle, "Beowulf the Hero and the King," 89-102.

Scyld Scefing.[63] Though Beowulf and Scyld's funerals are held up as bookmarking

the poem, the contrast between Scyld's and the dragon's death rites is also worth

noting. Gale Owen-Crocker discusses the possibility that the boat that carries Scyld

Scefing is a dragon boat in its construction.[64] If so, then it is interesting to think about

the dragon as the living, breathing boat that ultimately carries Beowulf away. That the

dragon's body is pushed into the sea also suggests this affinity.[65] The two dragons and

their dead heroes reflect the cyclical character of events in *Beowulf* as well as the

inevitability of the death of kings. The tone of these deaths finds remarkable echoes in

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* when King Arthur is taken to

Avalon.[66] There is a similar note of mystery when the narrator writes of Scyld's body,

> Men ne cunnon
> secgan to soðe,   seleræden*de*,
> hæleð under heofenum,   hwa þæm hlæste onfeng.
>
> (Men cannot say
> wise men in the hall   nor warriors in the field,

---

[63] Alternatively, as John Leyerle sees it, sending the dragon's body into the sea a gesture of respect. See "*Beowulf*" the Hero and the King," 91.

[64] Owen-Crocker, "Chapter Two: The first funeral: Scyld Scefing's ship of death" in *The Four Funerals in Beowulf,* 13-42.

[65] John Leyerle notes that "the Geats push the body of the dragon into the sea as they would a longship." "Beowulf the Hero and the King," 91. Owen-Crocker also notes the similarity between the dispatching of the dragon's body and a boat. See *The Four Funerals in Beowulf*, 24.

[66] Chickering also notes the similarities between Scyld's funeral and Arthur's ceremonious departure for Avalon. See *Beowulf, A Dual-Language Edition*, 279.

not truly, who   received that cargo)
                    (50-53)

Scyld restored the Danish kingdom much as Arthur, briefly, restored the kingdom of Britain. Another echo with Geoffrey is with the battle between Corineus and the giant, Gogmagog. Like the dragon, Gogmagog is of extraordinary size and power, and he too is thrown off a cliff into the sea. Corineus is more powerful than other men, a giant in his own way. In both texts, characters seem to be battling exaggerated physical representations of themselves. The implication is that these heroes are trying to dispel the monstrous element in their own bodies.

How the body is treated in death seems to be the last attempt at controlling not only the fate but also the significance of the body. This is something Beowulf seems to be particularly aware of. When he realizes that death is near, Beowulf instructs Wiglaf to

> 'Hatað heaðomære   hlæw gewyrcean
> beorhtne æfter bæle   æt brimes nosan;
> se scel to gemyndum   minum leodum
> heah hlifian   on Hrones Næsse,
> þæt hit sælíðend   syððan hatan
> Biowulfes Biorh   ða ðe brentingas
> ofer floda genipu   feorran drifað.'
>
> "Order a bright mound   made by the brave,
> after the pyre,   at the sea's edge;
> let it rise high   on Whale's Cliff,
> a memorial to my people   that ever after
> sailors will call it   'Beowulf's barrow'
> when the steep ships drive   out on the sea,
> on the darkness of waters,   from lands far away."

(2802-8)

There is of course a deep irony to his instructions that his burial mound should be
made by the brave since, other than Wiglaf, his men abandoned him in his fight with
the dragon. It is also interesting that Beowulf sees this as not only his own memorial
but also a memorial to his people. Though it seems most likely that by "his people"
Beowulf means the Waegmundings, in light of the dire predictions made at the close
of the poem, the memorial may in the end be for the Geatish people. The memorial
here, as with the memorials seen later in Geoffrey of Monmouth, seems to be a wish
to extend power and immortality in the face of death. The monument serves as a less
vulnerable but unfortunately less effective version of the body. The desire to extend
Beowulf's power seems even more wished for, understandably, by his people than by
himself.[67]

4. Hrothgar, and the choices kings make.

  If *Beowulf* is about the search for effect methods of kingship, then it largely
fails in its quest. The first king we meet, Hrothgar, is important as an example of
kingship and as a contrast to Beowulf both as a hero and later as a king. Hrothgar is
portrayed as "eald ond *a*nhar mid his earla ġedriht" (old, gray-bearded,

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[67] Fred Robinson points out that these sorts of monuments were typical for early
Germanic people, but that the monument and ceremony that are provided for Beowulf
by his people exceed what he requested. See Fred C. Robinson, *The Tomb of Beowulf
and Other Essays*. (Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, 1993), 17.

surrounded by nobles" (ln 357). Later he is described as:

> Þa wæs on salum   sinces brytta,
> gamolfeax ond guðrof;   geoce gelyfde
> brego Beorht-Dena,   gehyrde on Beowulfe
> folces hyrde   fæstrædne geþoht.
>
> (Then the treasure-giver   was greatly pleased,
> gray-bearded, battle-famed,   chief of the Bright-Danes;
> the nation's shepherd   counted on Beowolf,
> on the warrior's help   when he heard such resolve.)
>   (607-10)

All of the references to Hrothgar are of this nature – he is depicted many times over

as gray-haired, and in all instances is praised for being a good king. The repeated

descriptions of Beowulf as huge and Hrothgar as gray haired are signals as to their

roles as much as their words might be. Appearances define characters and social

position in *Beowulf*, especially in the case of Hrothgar and Beowulf.

Despite being considered a good king, Hrothgar is unable to deal effectively

with Grendel, thus loses many good men night after night. For kings, the best solution

to feuds is the possibility of buying peace with payment, *wierguild*. That method of

gaining peace only works if both parties are willing, and it seems that generally

monsters are not. Grendel will not take payment, so there is no way for Hrothgar to

settle the dispute. Thus the role that a king plays as a negotiator and the giver of

treasure becomes useless in this situation. At the same time, Hrothgar's people retain

their king, though he is of course king over fewer and fewer men due to Grendel's

nightly attacks. Hrothgar is never criticized for not contending with Grendel himself,

because the consequences of his failing and being killed in the attempt would be so grave. Leyerle writes that "The depredations of Grendel are less of a threat than the consequences of a power struggle in the event of Hrothgar's death during the minority of his sons."[68] One reason why Hrothgar may be considered a good king is that he has to make the difficult decision to sacrifice a few men each night for the security of all of his people. The impossibility for Hrothgar to fight Grendel himself leaves only the heroic option, which is to find someone strong enough to fight with the monsters on his borders.

Beowulf is a good hero and a good king until the needs of heroism and kingship are in conflict. When the dragon comes, Beowulf attempts not to choose between kingship and heroism and instead conflates the two. Unfortunately, no young hero steps up to take his place, as he had done long ago for Hrothgar, though Wiglaf does takes his side at the scene of the battle. Were it not for the many foreshadowings, there might be the opportunity to wonder which will dominate, Beowulf's strong heroic past or his current status as an effective and aged king. Beowulf fulfills the expectation that such action will end in disaster when as king he tests the assumption that being both a hero and a king is impossible, and meets his death, leaving his people to face war and devastation. However, Beowulf is not entirely to blame; as Peter Baker comments, "any nation whose existence depends on the continued health of an aged king, one who has exceeded the average life span of his era by some fifty

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[68] Leyerle, "Beowulf the Hero and the King," 92.

years, is already in deep trouble. The future of the Geatish nation looks much the same whether Beowulf is killed by the dragon or dies of old age, as must happen soon."[69]

Although Beowulf fails in the sense of not being able to defeat the dragon on his own, he nonetheless succeeds by redefining the role of a hero and king. By facing the dragon despite the near certainty that he will fail, he inspires one of his thanes, Wiglaf, to heroic behavior.[70] Had Beowulf been less brave, the dragon would have continued to ravage the kingdom. Had Beowulf been victorious on his own, Wiglaf would perhaps never have realized his heroic potential. In the convergence of age and heroism, traditional expectations are met: Beowulf dies as a result of his confrontation with the dragon. At the same time, in a surprising fashion, Beowulf's seemingly futile heroic behavior may ultimately do his people more good than had he won the fight with the dragon. Since, as Hrothgar warns, Beowulf will eventually die, whether from war or illness or accident, it is better that when that happens there is someone to take his place. Without a son, a kinsman such as Wiglaf who is inspired to bravery is the next best thing.[71] Though the encounter with the dragon leads to Beowulf's death, it

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[69] Peter S. Baker, *Honour, Exchange and Violence in Beowulf* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer Ltd., 2013), 217.

[70] I owe this observation to Chris Chism, in conversation July, 2015.

[71] See "Deeds and Blood: The Inheritance Systems in Beowulf" by Michael Drout for a detailed discussion of inheritance by blood vs inheritance by deeds. Drout argues that neither blood nor deeds is sufficient in and of itself; both are needed for a successful succession. Following the initial succession of Scyld Scefing's sons, who

also leads to someone stepping forward to take his place.

This pattern of a heroic figure taking on a battle he cannot hope to win, but in the process inspiring those around him, is one that we see in other texts examined in this dissertation. Kings whose bodies have failed them, like Uther in *History of the Kings of Britain* or Baldwin IV from *History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, are nonetheless able to inspire their people to acts of bravery through their own heroic behavior. The other issue in *Beowulf*, the lack of a biological heir, we also encounter repeatedly. Fortunately, in some cases at least, there are unexpected figures who step into that role. The tradition we see with Wiglaf as Beowulf's heir continues right through the 14th century with the figure of the steward in *Sir Orfeo*.

Throughout *Beowulf*, physical might seems to be the only option for dealing with conflict; mediation is usually unsuccessful or is not even an option. The failure of diplomacy is presented in a tragic fashion: peace-weaving marriages fail and wierguilds are not accepted. The result is that the only successful kingdoms are those who have physically powerful rulers. This is the idea of kingship that comes to dominate until we see transitional texts such as Geoffrey's *History of the Kings of Britain*, where Brutus's rule by physical dominance gives way to the more nuanced kingships of Uther and Arthur. That Geoffrey of Monmouth was at least initially

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meet both criteria, there are numerous attempts at succession that fail due to a dearth of one or the other. Wiglaf meets the requirement of inheritance by deeds but is not a close enough relative to meet the inheritance by blood standard. According to Drout, the requirement for both criteria ensures the eventual destruction of a tribe, the Geats in this case. *Studies in Philology*, 104.2 (Spring 2007), 199-226.

beguiled by descriptions of the Germanic tribes like those in Tacitus's *Germania* shows in his admiration for the physical splendor of the Anglo Saxons invaders Hengest and Horsa. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, eventually he too concludes that physical might is insufficient for effective kingship, as he turns from the powerful Brutus to the more physically ambiguous figures of Uther and Arthur.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE KING'S BODY AND THE SAXON INVASIONS

1. Brutus and the giants.

It is never questioned in *Beowulf* that physical strength is mandatory in a king; the idea of a weak ruler is unfathomable. Indeed, when kings cease to be as strong as they were as heroes, they lose their kingdoms or are killed by dragons or worse. The requirement for kings to be physically strong is not overtly questioned until as late as the 12th century, when writers such as Geoffrey of Monmouth begin to explore new paradigms of kingship.

Historians in the early Middle Ages wrote chronicles shaped by a providential view of history influenced by Orosius and Augustine.[72] This was particularly true of writers such as Bede and Gildas in their accounts of the fall of Britain. They saw the narrative of the land and people of Britain as predetermined and unalterable. However, with authors such as Geoffrey of Monmouth, there started to be an effort to

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[72] See Robert Hanning, *The Vision of History in Early Britain: From Gildas to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 138-72.

understand history outside this paradigm.[73] The established Augustinian model

necessarily tended to de-emphasize the tangible physical presence of individuals, in

particular kings, since their actions could have no real effect on what was predestined

to happen. In the twelfth century this model begins to break down as some chroniclers

start to describe kings whose physical reality has a direct bearing on the outcome of

events. As kings become empowered to change history, they acquire a physical

presence that reflects the tangibility of the medieval body. This encompasses not only

the obvious transitions of birth and death but also more destabilizing transformations

such as from health to illness, or from alive to "half-dead," or from dead into effigies

and monuments that represent a last gesture towards immortality.

Geoffrey of Monmouth chronicles the impact of physical transformation on

kingship in an account that attests to the difficulty of measuring the relationship

between the king's body and the kingdom as a whole. The *Historia Regum Britannie*

(*The History of the Kings of Britain*) describes a succession of rulers whose bodies are

in a state of perpetual change. This bodily instability reflects kingdoms that are

likewise in constant flux. In *History of the Kings*, the king's physical volatility is

potentially a threat to the unity of the kingdom but, more than this, it serves as a

metaphor for that danger. Royal illness and national vulnerability become analogous,

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[73] See Francis Ingledew, "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History: The Case of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Historia Regum Britanniae." *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 69.3 (1994), especially 684-5, and Michael Faletra, "The Conquest of the Past in *The History of the Kings of Britain*," *Literature Compass*. 4 (1) (2007): 127.

and the kingdom and the king's body are depicted in tandem. Ultimately, the king's ill health is a mirror for the civil fragmentation that leads to the fall of kingdoms.

The History of the Kings of Britain is an attempt to create a cohesive narrative from Britain's tangled and violent past. Geoffrey draws on numerous precedents such as Bede and Gildas while seeking to abandon their ideology.[74] The chronicle begins with foundation myths, races through a catalog of kings that spans centuries, and peaks with an account of the idealized but ultimately flawed King Arthur. In doing so, Geoffrey narrates the creation and fall of the kingdom of Britain, and the transitions from a mythic landscape to a brief moment of British unity, and then to the beginning of foreign rule. The elusiveness of a stable identity for Britain is reflected in the shifting emphases in Geoffrey's portrayals of its rulers. Brutus, Vortigern, Uther, Arthur, and Cadwaller are steps along a continuum that begins with giants and ends with the Saxons. In the narrative of these rulers, the body is progressively deemphasized but ultimately reasserts itself in unexpected ways. Through the exploration of this shifting balance, Geoffrey attempts to narrow down a definition of effective kingship – what is regnal authority and what is its basis? How closely is it tied to the physical reality of the king? Ultimately, the attempt to create a stable

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[74] For an analysis of Geoffrey's borrowings from Gildas, see Neil Wright "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gildas," *Arthurian literature II* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), 1-40, and Neil Wright "Update: Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gildas revisited" *Arthurian literature IV* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 155-63. For a discussion of the influence of Bede, see Neil Wright "Geoffrey of Monmouth and Bede" *Arthurian Literature* 6 (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1986), 27-59.

kingdom with a unifying British king falters and is reluctantly abandoned – at least for the foreseeable future.

Geoffrey's history of the British kings is enclosed within a much longer narrative history that begins in Troy and ends with exile in Rome. This structure of enclosure with a demarcated beginning and ending emphasizes that the British kings never find a successful model for kingship that is able to lead them into the future. Michelle Warren's description of the Britons as "conquered conquerors" conveys this circularity.[75] Patterson writes that the *History of the Kings of Britain* "is a myth of origins that deconstructs the origin."[76, 77] Although Patterson is referring to the long narrative of monarchical self-destruction, he could in fact have been describing the cyclical history of British kings in which they ultimately come to resemble the native giants they once vanquished.

The two kings who effectively bookend *The History of the Kings* are Brutus and Arthur. A notable quality they share is the ability to act successfully as leaders for all of Britain. Unlike these two rulers, the vast majority of the kings in the *History of*

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[75] See Michelle Warren "Making Contact: Postcolonial Perspectives through Geoffrey of Monmouth's "Historia regum Britannie," *Arthuriana*, 8.4 (1998): 116. However, this description is borrowed without endorsing Warren's far-reaching postcolonial approach.

[76] Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 202.

[77] This phrase also captures Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's attention, see *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages,* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1999), 40.

the Kings are as much at war with each other as they are with foreign invaders. Brutus

holds a particularly significant place in the narrative, since he is the founder of

Britain, and thus sets the tone for much of what follows. Brutus is exiled from his

native Italy for innocently causing the death of his parents. Even though he is

blameless, the nature of their deaths identifies themes that prevail in his conquest of

Britain and in the chronicle as a whole. As a young man, Brutus shoots his father with

an arrow, an act of aggression whether or not his father was the intended target.

Brutus's coming to Britain, killing the native giants, settling the island and dividing it

among his sons, echoes the violent tenor of his origins. The colonizing of Britain is

accomplished entirely through the use of force, whether through Brutus's actions or

those of Corineus, another of the legendary founders of Britain. From the start, British

kingship relies far more on physical strength than on wisdom or any less tangible trait

of leadership.

Brutus and his men succeed in killing off the native giants and claiming the

island for their own, but the significance of the giants and their heritage cannot be

banished as easily as their presence. We are not told much about these original

inhabitants, but the few details we are given are revealing. Geoffrey's first line about

Britain is "Erat tunc nomen insulae Albion que a nemine exciptis paucis hominibus

gigantibus, inhabitabatur" [78] (In those days the island was named Albion, and was

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[78] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The Historia Regum Britannie of Geoffrey of Monmouth I: Bern, Burgerbibliothek, MS.* 568, ed Neil Wright (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1984), 13.

uninhabited except by a few giants).[79] This is a telling inversion of conventions of

identity. Most peoples are identified with the places they occupy – Britons, Trojans,

Romans, and so on – but the giants are given neither acknowledgement of a legitimate

presence in Britain (the island is *un*inhabited except by. . .) nor a place name for their

people; instead their identity is defined entirely by their stature. This lack of British

identity is emphasized when Geoffrey later refers to them as "invaders," though in

fact it is the Trojans who are the invaders. Soon we are told about a specific giant,

Gogmagog,

> Erat ibi inter ceteros detestabilis quidam nomine Goemagog stature .xii.
> cubitorum. Qui tante <uirtutis> existens quercum semel excussam uelut
> uirgulam corili euellebat
>
> (There was among them a certain giant by the name of Gogmagog who
> stood some twelve cubits tall. This Gogmagog was so strong that he
> once uprooted an oak tree as if it were a hazel-shoot.")[80]

We are not given any attributes of Gogmagog's character, only details about strength

and height; for all intents and purposes, the giants begin and end with the dimensions

of their bodies. The foundational history of Britain as an island initially inhabited by

giants underscores a close relationship between physical and national identity that

persists through the entirety of the *History of the Kings*.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen attempts a comprehensive analysis of the role giants

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[79] Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed and trans. Michael
Faletra (Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2008), 56.

[80] GM, *Historia Regum*, 14; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 57.

play in early English literature that includes an examination of the giants in the

Historia Regum Britannie. Of Brutus's encounter with the giants, Cohen writes,

> The first Trojan encounter with the aboriginal giants has a clear
> biblical subtext. The spies sent by Moses to search Canaan discover
> dwelling there a race called the Anakim, towering giants in whose
> sight the invading Israelites say they seemed like small insects…. The
> inhabitants of Canaan are imagined as gigantic in order to convey the
> difficulty of the ensuing settlement. Just as the country is great (*fluit
> lacte et melle*), so is its resistance to colonization (*sed cultores
> fortissimos habet*)."[81]

The problem with this analogy is that in fact Brutus and his men do *not* seem to have

much difficulty at all in defeating the giants. If anything, the emphasis is on the ease

with which they claim Britain for their own. Even the battle with Gogmagog is

presented as a competition Corineus looks forward to; what is deathly serious for the

giants is a game to the invading Trojans. Certainly it is reasonable to draw similarities

to the biblical analogue of Moses, but the more obvious precedent is simply the story

of Aeneas, who encounters plenty of his own giants.[82] Even in his own time,

Geoffrey's models were perceived as classically rather than biblically inspired.

William of Newburgh, certainly not one of Geoffrey's admirers, writes, "However, in

order to expiate the Britons of their sins, a writer has emerged in our times who has

woven the most fantastic lies regarding them and has with shameless boasting

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[81] Cohen, *Of Giants*, 34.

[82] However, though there does not seem to be any concrete reason for the beginning
of The *History of Kings* to be drawn from biblical sources, this is not to say that the
conclusion is not intentionally made to *seem* so. See discussion below.

elevated their virtues far beyond those of the Macedonians and Romans."[83] The

significance of this distinction lies in the fact that Geoffrey's choice of models is a

clue to his intentions. By looking to classical rather than biblical models, Geoffrey is

establishing his text as a quest, in particular the search for a perfect king.

The infamous Vortigern, known primarily for his invitation to the Ango-Saxon

invaders, Hengist and Horsa, represents the culmination of the dysfunctional kings

who rule after Brutus. Vortigern's son, Vortimer, tries to gain control of Britain, with

the intention of expelling the Saxons, but Vortigern's Saxon wife, Renwein, has him

poisoned. The death of Vortimer is one of the first instances in the *History of Kings*

where there is an effort to redefine the material death of a king. When Vortimer

realizes he is dying, he attempts to use his death to help the Britons he had sought to

protect during his brief tenure as king:

> Audatia autem maxima docente iussit piramidem fieri aeriam locarique
> in porto quo Saxones applicar<e> solebant. Corpus uero suum,
> postquam defunctum foret, sepiliri desuper ut uiso busto barbari retortis
> uelis in Germaniam redirent. Dicebat enim neminem illorum audere
> propius accedere si etiam bustum ipsius aspicerent. O maximam uiri
> audatiam, qui eis quibus uiuus terrori fuerat post obitum etiam ut
> timeretur optabat! Sed defuncto illo aliud egerunt Britones quia in urbe
> Trinouantum corpus illius sepelierunt.

> (Then a bold plan occurred to him. He commanded a monument of
> brass to be built at the port where the Saxons were accustomed to land.
> After his mortal body had perished, he would be buried atop that
> monument so that, spying from his grave, the barbarians would turn
> their sails back to Germany. He declared that no Saxons would dare to

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[83] Quoted in Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 289.

> come any closer once they had caught a glimpse of his grave. Oh, the great courage of this man, who chose to terrorize even while dead those in whom he had inspired such fear while still alive! However, once Vortimer had died, the Britons acted otherwise and buried his body in the city of Trinovant.) [84]

This seems like a twelfth-century version of Beowulf's tomb on top of a cliff to frighten off invaders. In both cases, the plan to protect Britain after death through a monument marking the tomb of the king suggests the belief – or desire to believe – that a king's body, whether living or dead, has enough power in and of itself to achieve miracles.[85] Whether this monument would have provided any protection is never proven one way or the other, since inexplicably it never built.

From Brutus's physical domination of Britain to Vortimer's aborted effort to maintain a presence beyond death, the focus on the king's physical engagement is unwavering in the *History of the Kings*. The figure of Uther, King Arthur's father, serves as a transition to a new model of kingship in which the body of the king begins to play a secondary role.

2. Uther and the health of the kingdom.

Geoffrey's *History of the Kings* races through its subject, only now and then slowing down and allowing for the kind of detailed narrative that examines the basis

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[84] GM, *Historia Regum*, 69; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 125.

[85] The idea that Vortimer's body is a kind of talisman of safety for the country echoes the belief that the relics of saint's bodies have an inherent power.

of leadership. One of these narrative interludes is the lead-up to Arthur's kingship with the story of Uther's liaison with Igerna, his illnesses, last battles, and death. In this account we see Geoffrey reevaluating the relationship between kingship and the body. More than any other king in Geoffrey's text, Uther's physical state mirrors the political environment. Like nearly all the leaders of Britain, for the duration of his rule, Uther must fend off both foreign incursions and internal regional conflicts. For a time he is able to do so successfully through strength and success on the battlefield, characteristics that previous kings relied on in order to acquire and maintain power. In this way, Brutus, Corineus, and the subsequent kings of Britain are heirs to the giants they displaced; they conquered the giants through physical domination, and then continued to use this method to acquire and maintain power. However, as many of the kings who follow Brutus amply demonstrate, strength and physical prowess do not guarantee a successful rule.

Uther falls ill on three distinct occasions, each instance quite different from the others, and all have political consequences. The first time Uther is ill is when he is overcome with desire for Igerna, the wife of the duke of Cornwall, Gorlois. Uther's obsession with Igerna conforms to a pre-romance view of love as a kind of madness that brings with it no redemptive qualities. *Amor heroes* was considered a medical illness that was potentially fatal. While in romance literature one might also waste away from love, there is also the conception of love as something exalting that brings out the best in knights. This form of ennobling love is not seen until the development

of romance literature, particularly in France, though it is hinted at in Geoffrey's description of Arthur's court, when courage and deeds as knights become prerequisites for a lady's affection. In this case, instead of an idealized love that leads to improvement in character and actions, Uther's passion for Igerna has potentially catastrophic consequences for the nation, and exemplifies the conflict between personal desires and national good that arises in numerous instances in Geoffrey's *History of the Kings*.[86] Geoffrey's description of the banquet scene is a demonstration of Uther's prioritizing desire over all else, as he alienates his longtime supporter, Gorlois:

> Cumque inter alias inspexisset eam rex, subito incaluit amore illius ita ut postpositis ceteris totam intencionem suam circa eam uerteret. Hec sola erat cui fercula incessanter dirigebat, cui aurea pocula familiaribus internuntiis mittebat. Arridebat ei multociens, iocosa uerba interserebat. Quod cum comperisset maritus, confestim iratus ex curia sine licencia recessit. Non affuit qui eum reuocare quiuisset, cum id solum amittere timeret quod super omnia diligebat. Iratus itaque Uther precepit ei redire in curiam suam ut de illata iniuria rectitudinem ab eo sumeret. Cui cum parere diffugisset Gorlois, admodum indignatus….

> (When the king beheld her there among the other women, he was suddenly consumed with such love that he forgot all else and could think of nothing but her. Igerna alone it was to whom Uther continually directed the serving trays, Igerna alone it was to whom he sent his personal attendants with goblets of wine. He smiled at her many times, and engaged her in pleasant conversation. When her husband noticed this, he became quite angry and left the court without permission. No

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[86] See also Hanning, *The Vision of History*, 150-5. Hanning discusses the conflict between individual passion and national good using examples that include Vortigern and Renwein and Mordred and Guenevere.

one there could persuade Gorlois to stay, for he feared losing the one thing he loved above else. Uther grew furious and ordered Gorlois to return to the court so that Uther could render judgment for the insult he had suffered. But Gorlois continued to flee, and this infuriated Uther even more.)[87]

This exchange has significant national consequences; not only does Uther make an enemy of a valuable general, Gorlois, but his passion for Igerna also leads to civil war.

Despite the cost to the country, Uther feels he must have Igerna or die. He says to Ulfin of Rhyddcaradoc,

> "Uror amore Ingerne nec periculum corporis mei euadere existimo nisi ea potitus fuero. Tu igitur adhibe consilium quo uoluntatem meam expleam aut aliter internis anxietatibus interibo."

> (I burn with love for Igerna, and I hold myself in bodily peril unless I can have her. Advise me as to how I can quench my desire, or else I shall perish from this torment within.)[88]

Since there is no way to take the castle Tintagel by force, Ulfin suggests that Uther turn to Merlin for help, which Uther does:

> Uocatus confestim Merlinus, cum in presentia regis astitisset, iussus est consilium dare quo rex desiderium suum in Igerna expleret. Qui comperta anxietate quam rex patiebatur pro ea commotus est super tanto amore et ait: 'Ut uoto tuo potiaris, utendum est tibi nouis artibus et tempore tuo inauditis.'

> (Merlin soon stood before the king, who commanded him to offer his

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[87] GM, *Historia Regum*, 96-7; Faletra, *History of the Kings,* 157-8.

[88] GM, *Historia Regum,* 97; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 158.

advice as to how he could sate his desire for Igerna. When Merlin perceived the torment that the king suffered for his great love of that woman, he said: "For your wish to be fulfilled, it will be necessary to employ new arts that are unheard of in this day and age.")[89]

This is one of the first instances when we see the nature of kingship transformed into something quite different from before. The "new arts" Merlin refers to most obviously include the transformation of Uther's appearance, but they also refer to the new approaches to leadership and conquest that Uther increasingly employs. This change in emphasis is signified by the arrival of Merlin in the narrative; when unable to achieve goals through conventional means, Uther turns to Merlin to find new strategies to achieve his leadership objectives. As Laurie Finke and Martin Shichtman put it, "He represents a power to govern significantly different from physical domination – the brute force – embodied in the kings of England Merlin serves…."[90] Merlin's role as the harbinger of this change is established early, when Aurelius decides to bring the Ring of Giants from Ireland.

> Cumque hec audissent Britones, censuerunt pro lapidibus mittere populumque Hibernie prelio infestare si ipsos detinere niterentur. Postremo eligitur Utherpendragon frater regis et .xv. milia armatorum ut huic negotio pareant. Eligitur et ipse Merlinus ut ipsius ingenio et consilio agenda tractentur.
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> (When the Britons heard Merlin's words, they agreed to send for the stones and to attack the people of Ireland if they tried to withhold them.

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[89] GM, *Historia Regum,* 97; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 158.

[90] Laura A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman, *King Arthur and the Myth of History* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2004), 63.

At last they chose Uther Pendragon, the brother of the king, along with fifteen thousand armed soldiers to carry out this business. Merlin was also chosen so that they could be guided by his wisdom and advice.)[91]

In this endeavor there is the recognition that strength alone may not suffice, and that other skills may be required, as proves to be the case. After successfully moving the stones with Merlin's assistance, Geoffrey writes,

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

(Merlin carried out the king's desire, and the stones were set up in a circle around the graves exactly as they had been arranged on Mount Killaraus in Ireland. Merlin thus proved that his craft was indeed better than mere strength.)[92]

Likewise, the seduction of Igerna cannot be achieved through strength alone. Uther is unable to win Igerna through force, since the castle where she is enclosed can withstand any military attack, so he turns to a strategy that does not involve physical might. Uther's transformation of his appearance also represents a transformation in his style of leadership. When he is not able to succeed at his aims by looking like himself or by using his usual methods of conquest, he becomes someone else and employs new methods to achieve his aims.

It is only when Uther's destructive desires are brought in line with legal and

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[91] GM, *Historia Regum,* 91; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 151.

[92] GM, *Historia Regum,* 92; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 152-3.

moral codes of behavior – "igernam a maritali lege solutam" (Igerna was now freed

from the bond of marriage) – that the kingdom is again at peace. Geoffrey writes

"Commanserunt deinde pariter cum minimo amore ligati progenueruntque filium et

filiam." (From that day on, Uther and Igerna lived together as equals bound by mutual

affection, and they had a son and a daughter.)[93] There is no further mention of war or

civil discontent until Uther again falls ill. Valerie Flint writes that Geoffrey "meant to

exalt certain of the ways of life that monasticism threatened. The virtues he meant to

exalt were the physical bravery of men, the judicious influence of women, and the

power for good in society of family care and pride. The way of life he meant to exalt

was that of responsible rulership and marriage"[94] In this sense Uther and Igerna are an

example of the kind of responsible rulership and marriage Flint describes. They stand

as a corrective to Vortigern and Renwein, whose marriage epitomized bad rulership

and catastrophic alliances. Vortigern chose a Saxon bride, and she supported her

kindred Saxons in their invasion of Britain over the interests of her husband and his

people.[95] In contrast, once Uther and Igerna are legally married (after Gorlois is killed

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[93]GM, *Historia Regum,* 98; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 160.

[94] Valerie Flint, "The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Parody and Its Purpose, A Suggestion," *Speculum* 54 (1979): 463.

[95] Siân Echard also sees the connection between Vortigern and Uther, noting that both kings subordinate national responsibilities to personal desires, and the scenes of Vortigern at the Saxon feast when he first sees Renwein is a lead-up to the victory feast where Uther first sees Igerna. See *Arthurian Narrative in the Latin Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 42-44.

in battle) the national strife that initially surrounded their relationship subsides. Reflecting the critical role of legitimacy is that after their marriage a period of peace ensues, and their union results in the births of Anna and Arthur.

At some undefined moment after Uther has married Igerna, he again falls ill. Geoffrey does not state the cause of Uther's condition; he simply writes, "Cumque dies et tempora preterissent, occupauit infirmitas regem eumque multis diebus uexauit. (As the days and years passed, the king was seized by an illness and lay in pain for many days.)[96] All we are told about his illness is that it prevents him from being able to walk. Susan Murray has suggested that there is a causal relationship between Uther's illness and his deceptive seduction of Igerna on the basis of physical proximity in the text, but the narrative does not give any support for this argument.[97] The story of Uther's seduction and marriage to Igerna ends one section and the next begins with the mention of Uther's falling ill. However, the narrative suggests that a considerable amount of time has elapsed between these events: Octa and Eosa have had sufficient time to escape to Germany, gather a large army, and come back and begin ravaging the land. Enough time has passed for Arthur and Igerna to have had a daughter, Anna, who is old enough to marry Lot, into whose hands the protection of Britain is placed when Uther is unwell.

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[96] GM, *Historia Regum,* 98-9; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 160.

[97] See Susan E. Murray, "Women and Castles in Geoffrey of Monmouth and Malory" *Arthuriana*, Vol 13, No 1 (Spring 2003): 17-41.

Whatever the cause of Uther's illness, the correlation between the health of the

kingdom and the health of the king is made very clear. Uther is not the first instance

in *History of the Kings* when the king's health and the state of the kingdom are

closely correlated. Early in the *History of the Kings*, King Leil, who takes over the

kingship after several generations of fraternal strife, is described thus:

> [Brutus Greenshield] successit Leil filius suus pacis amator et equitatis.
> . . . Uixit Leil deinde post sumptum regnum .xxv. annis sed regnum in
> fine debiliter rexit. Quocirca segnitia eius insistente ciuilis discordia
> subito in regno orta est.
>
> ([Brutus Greenshield] was succeeded by his son Leil, a lover of peace
> and justice. . . . Leil lived on for twenty-five years after assuming the
> throne, but he ruled rather feebly towards the end. As the king's health
> slowly debilitated, civil unrest arose in the realm.)[98]

Geoffrey draws an explicit parallel between the king's physical well being and

the state of the kingdom and, as with Uther, connects health with law and illness with

discord. As opposed to the death of a king, which results in consequences that are

tangible and expected, ill health in a king introduces an indeterminate state that results

in national discontent. This link occurs on several occasions, but the corollary is

finally revised in the account of Uther. The expectation, especially on the part of the

Saxons, is that Uther's illness will follow the pattern of Leil and the kingdom will be

weakened and vulnerable as a result of the king's poor health. However, in the

narrative of Uther, effective kingship starts to diverge from the physical

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[98] GM, *Historia Regum,* 18; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 62-3.

representation of strength.

When Uther succumbed to lovesickness, this reflected national internal strife, perhaps mirroring the interior nature of the desire that caused Uther's illness. In contrast, this and the final instances of Uther's falling ill not only involve internal strife but must also be evaluated in a larger political context since they coincide with the Saxon invasion of Britain. The king's body soon becomes a metaphor for the besieged and weakened state of the country.

When the Saxons begin ravaging Britain,

> Committitur itaque exercitus Britannie Loth de Lodonesia ut hostes longius arceret. Erat autem ille consul Leis, miles strenuissimus, sapientia et etate maturus. Probitate ergo ipsius acclamante, dederat ei rex Annam filiam suam regnique sui curam dum infirmitati subiaceret. Hic cum in hostes progressus esset, multociens repulsus est ab eis ita ut sese infra ciuitates reciperet. Sepius uero fugabat eos atque dissipabat et nunc ad nemora, nunc uero ad naues diffugere cogebat. Fuit inter eos dubia preliorum decertatio ita ut nesciretur cui uictoria proueniret. Superbia enim ciuibus nocebat, quia dedignabantur preceptis consulis obedire. Unde debiliores
> existentes nequibant imminentes hostes triumphare.

> (Then, in order to protect the land from its enemies, the army of Britain was placed under the command of Loth of Lothian. He was the lord of Leis and a most experienced soldier, wise and mature. In token of his prowess, the king had given Loth his daughter Anna in marriage, and he entrusted the kingdom to Loth in his illness. But whenever Loth led his men against the enemy, his forces were repeatedly driven back, so that he had to take refuge within the cities. At other times, Loth was able to rout and scatter the Saxon forces, forcing them to flee into the wilderness or back to their ships. The outcome of the battles between them was always in doubt so that no one ever knew which side would gain the victory. Pride, moreover, afflicted the Britons, for they scoffed at obeying Loth's orders. They weakened themselves by doing this, and

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they were therefore unable to triumph once and for all over their wicked enemies.) [99]

Unfortunately, only the high king of Britain has the ability to fight off these foreign invaders, and Uther had withdrawn because of his illness. The Britons will not obey Loth, hence their "scoffing" at his orders, because he is a regional leader and his position is no more elevated than their own. The Saxons are a national problem and need the unifying guidance of a king who rules over all of Britain. Throughout the *History of the Kings*, Geoffrey chronicles the infighting of regional kings who vie with each other for fleeting and geographically limited rule and who do not prioritize the interests of the nation as a whole. This is one of the instances where Geoffrey makes clear that it is not the Saxons' strength or superiority in battle that leads to their success as much as it is the Britons undermining themselves. This episode becomes an analogue for the history in its entirety, since over the course of the *History of Kings* it becomes apparent that Britain falls not because the Saxon forces are so powerful or because it is foreordained but because of the behavior of the Britons when they are without a strong king.

Uther's anger finally rouses him from his sickbed:

> Uastata itaque pene insula, cum id regi nunciaretur, ultra quam infirmitas expetebat iratus est iussitque cunctos proceres conuenire, ut ipsos de superbia et debilitate sua corriperet. Et cum omnes in presentia sua inspexisset, conuicia cum castigantibus uerbis intulit iurauitque quod ipsemet eos in hostes conduceret. Precepit itaque

[99] GM, *Historia Regum,* 99; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 160.

sibi fieri feretrum quo asportaretur, cum gressum alterius modi
abnegaret infirmitas.

(When it was made known to the king that the Saxons had ravaged
almost the entire island, he grew so angry that even illness could not
restrain him, and he summoned all his vassals in order to upbraid them
for their arrogance and weakness. When they all were assembled before
him, he censured them with scornful words and swore that he would
now lead them against the enemy himself. He ordered that a litter be
made to carry him, since illness prevented him from moving in any
other way.)[100]

Loth, though healthy and strong, is unable to win his army's respect and to get

them to obey, while Uther, too unwell to walk, is able to lead the Britons to battle and

to victory.

Not only does the king's presence lead to victory, but victory leads to the

king's health. When Octa and Eosa are slain and the rest of the Saxons have fled,

Cepit inde tanta leticia regem ita ut, cum prius sine iuuamine alterius
sese erigere nequiret, leui conamine erectus resedit in feretro acsi
subitam sanitatem recepisset. Solutus etiam in risum hilari uoce in hunc
sermonem prorumpebat: 'Uocabant ambrones me regem semimortuum
quia infirmitate grauatus in feretro iacebam. Sic equidem eram. Malo
tamen semimortuus ipsos superare quam sanus et incolumis superari
sequenti uita perfuncturus. Prestantius enim est mori cum honore quam
cum pudore uiuere.'

(King Uther was so elated that, although he had been unable to get up
by himself, he now sat up effortlessly in his litter as if he had suddenly
regained his former health. Laughing, he cried out with a glad voice:
"Those Ambrones called me a half-dead king just because illness has
laid me out in this bier. And so I was. But I far prefer to be half-dead

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[100] GM, *Historia Regum,* 99; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 160-1.

and victorious than to go into the next life healthy but defeated! It is always better to die with honor than to live on in shame!")[101]

Uther's brief recovery after success on the battlefield mirrors the momentary success at driving back the Saxons, and emphasizes the intertwined relationship between the king's body and the kingdom itself. The kingdom is only as healthy as the king.

Unable to walk and no longer able to lead by example in the battlefield, Uther is nonetheless able to maintain authority and inspire his army. The success Uther and his army have in this battle attests to two things: first, it is no longer necessary for a king to be physically strong for his country to succeed in war. Second, the king's presence on the battlefield is essential even if he is not engaged in the battle himself. In other words, it does not matter what bodily condition the king is in, but his presence is required; a half-dead king is better than no king at all. This is one of the moments when we see how Uther is a transitional king. The previous emphasis on physical strength seen in the account of Brutus and his conquest of Britain is abandoned; rather than relying on strength, Uther wins by force of personality and kingly presence.

The final time Uther is ill is soon after this success on the battlefield:

> <Deuicti> autem, ut dictum est, Saxones non iccirco a malacia sua destiterunt sed aquilonares prouintias ingressi populos incessanter infesthabant. Quos Uther rex, ut proposuerat, affectabat insequi sed

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[101] GM, *Historia Regum,* 100; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 161.

dissua<s>erunt principes quia eum grauior infirmitas post uictoriam occupauerat. Unde audatiores insistentes hostes omnibus modis regnum subdere nitunter. . . .

(Although defeated, as I have just related, the Saxons did not desist from their wickedness, but they withdrew into the northern regions of Britain and molested the people there ceaselessly. King Uther wished to pursue them as he had planned, but the nobles dissuaded him because a more serious illness had set in since the last victory. This made the Saxons grow even bolder, and they tried to conquer the land by any means conceivable….)[102]

Just as Uther's illness lurked in the background despite a brief interlude of good health, so too the Saxons persisted in the edges of Britain despite being pushed back for a time. Soon after this initial success, Uther dies after drinking from a well the Saxons have poisoned. The Saxons are then able to overrun Britain unchecked until King Arthur is able to force them back.

3. Arthur, Cadwallo, and the fall of Britain.

The kings who preceded Uther acquired their power through either strength or genealogy, both of which are in different ways examples of physical assertion. Uther's ability to be an effective king despite physical limitations tests existing assumptions about leadership because he is able to dissociate bodily integrity from leadership. Uther's physical instability serves as a transition from the more solidly bodily presences of past kings such as Brutus to his quasi-legitimate son, Arthur,

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[102] GM, *Historia Regum,* 100; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 162.

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whose substantiality lies more in his personality than in his body. King Arthur rules not so much on the basis of physical strength or rules of inheritance as on the force of persuasion and a new courtly behavior that is only tangentially military in nature. However, this model of kingship is unsustainable, and upon Arthur's departure to Avalon, Britain quickly becomes divided and falls to the Saxons.

It is during Arthur's reign that we see the first drawn out and detailed description of peace in Britain. In the absence of an enemy to fight, Britain begins to evolve into a different kind of nation, one where courtliness is emphasized and there are games rather than wars. There is even an effort to reclaim a Trojan past through elaborate rituals. The arrival of the Roman emissaries is the end of that new chapter. The contrast between the youthful British court and the elderly Roman contingent can be read in many different ways, some that reflect positively on Arthur's court and some less so. Geoffrey emphasizes Arthur's youth from the very start: the first thing we hear about Arthur is that he is fifteen years old. This emphasis on youth quickly defines his court: when preparing to attack the Saxons, Arthur "*collecta deinde sibi subdita iuuentute eboracum petiuit*" (Gathering together all the young soldiers, he marched to York.)[103] Here again we see the relationship between the physical state of the king and the physical state of the kingdom since the focus on Arthur's youth signifies not only a new start with a young king but also a young army. Further, as Siân Echard points out, Arthur's campaigns against the Picts, Scots, Saxons, and Irish

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[103] GM, *Historia Regum,* 101; Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 163.

are "presented positively, as '[returning] the whole country to the dignity of its (*pristinam*) state.'[104] The word *pristina* is a powerful one, connoting a sense of ultimate origins – Arthur returns the island of Britain to what should be its ideal state, to the condition of wholeness which Brutus first imposed upon it."[105] With this in mind, it is not a surprise that the discussion between Arthur and his knights on how to respond to the Roman demands also becomes a return to the past, emphasizing conquests and behaviors from long ago. As expected, when Arthur and his court follow this regressive course of action that emphasizes physical dominance, everything that has been created is systematically undone. The circle of knights and advisors Arthur has gathered around him are killed off one by one. The return to the warring behavior of Arthur's predecessors, the reliance on physical strength and the use of force, is the undoing of the new kingdom.

Mirroring the shift in methods of leadership are the changes in personal connections. In contrast to the supportive and protective relationship Arthur had with his nephew Hoel at the start of his reign, he has a relationship defined by betrayal with his nephew Mordred at the end of his reign. Geoffrey shows the possibility of a new method of leadership defined by unity, chivalry, and youth, but then closes off

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[104] 'tocius patriae statum in pristinam dignitatem reduxisset' quoted in Siân Echard, *The Arthur of medieval Latin literature: the Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin*. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), 65, see footnote 55.

[105] Echard, *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, 55.

that possibility. It is here that we see a glimpse of a future that never was, one that relied on relationships and negotiation rather than on bodily strength and conquest.

Arthur's death is one of the most mysterious moments in the chronicle. As Michael Faletra notes, Geoffrey "scrupulously avoids mentioning the widespread "Breton hope" that King Arthur will return to liberate Britain from its oppressors."[106] However, Geoffrey cannot get away from the contradiction that Arthur is "mortally wounded" yet is carried away to Avalon to be healed. This state of being neither dead nor alive echoes Uther's status as the half-dead king. But there are key differences. First, Uther has at least two children, Arthur and Anna, and having children is a particular form of physical assertiveness. In contrast, Arthur has no children, and hands over the throne to his kinsman Constantine. This pattern of great kings having no direct heirs is seen repeatedly in medieval literature, for example Beowulf and Orfeo. This is significant because it is another symptom of how ephemeral successful rule often is. Faletra writes that "*The History* as a whole valorizes the linearity of succession", but we see this linearity disrupted in the case of Arthur.[107]

Another difference is that Uther is buried at the Ring of Giants, like Ambrosius before him and Constantine after Arthur, but Arthur is not. Returning to the idea of giants being an exaggerated representation of the body, to be buried there is in some sense an acknowledgement of the material presence of these particular

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[106] Faletra, *History of the Kings*, footnote 1, 199-200

[107] Faletra, *Conquest of the Past*, 128.

kings. With Arthur, though, there is no tangible presence; he is like Schrödinger's cat: if there is a body, then there is no Avalon and no dream of the once and future king. If there is no body, then Britain is forever held hostage to, or can cling to, the hope for a king who will return and once again create a unified kingdom of Britain.

Cadwallo, one of the last kings of Britain, signifies the final reversal of the kings of Britain. Key moments in his story are defined by physical presence, often in the most literal way. When Cadwallo falls desperately ill, he recovers after eating the flesh of his nephew, Brian. Not only does this remind us of the giants who first inhabited Britain and who ate human flesh, but it is also a graphic metaphor of how a king's illness can lead to the destruction of the country and its people. Robert Stein writes "this scene that dramatizes the devotion of a man to his lord in terms of feeding him with his own flesh is easily reversible; a very slight change in perspective transforms the event into the story of predatory monarchs eating their subjects, as indeed we find in the story of the Giant of Mont-St. Michel."[108] Stein implies that that is *not* what we are seeing, but perhaps in fact Geoffrey intends for exactly that association to be made. As discussed in the previous chapter, treasure is often a stand-in for the body; here we have Brian offering his king what is his most valuable possession: his body. It is symbolically a complete reversal of the usual pattern of a king distributing treasure to his knights.

[108] Robert Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1125-1180*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 118.

Right up to the last, Cadwallo's bodily presence is emphasized in his reign, and even after his death this focus is maintained. Returning to Vortimer's unrealized wish to have a monument built after his death, when Cadwallo dies,

> Cuius corpus Britones balsamo et aromatibus conditum in quadam aenea imagine ad mensuram staturae suae fusa mira arte posuerunt. Imaginem autem illam super eneum equum mirae pulcritudinis armatam et super occidentalem portam Lundoniarum erectam in signum predictae uictoriae et in terrorem Saxonibus statuerunt.

> (Preserving his body with balsam and fragrant herbs, the Britons placed it within a bronze statue that, by a feat of extraordinary skill, they had cast to his precise measurements. Then they placed this statue, which was strikingly beautiful, atop a bronze horse and set it above the west gate of London as a sign of Cadwallo's great victory and as a terror to the Saxons.)[109]

Cadwallo follows on the continuum from Uther and Arthur: Uther is half dead, half alive; Arthur is mortally wounded but does not die; and Cadwallo dies but his body is placed inside bronze statue, thus turning the tangible physical and unstable body into a fixed and unassailable representation. However, this statue is representative of Britain's misdirected focus: even when the outside looks wonderful – the Saxons are kept at bay, the borders of the country are intact – there is still a dead body within – the British and their civil discontent.

Ultimately, it is the civil discord reflected in a king's illness that is Britain's undoing:

> Suscepit itaque regni gubernaculum Cadualdrus filius suus (quem Beda

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[109] GM, *Historia Regum* 144, Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 214.

Cheduallam iuuenem uocat) quod et initio uiriliter et pacifice tractauit. At cum .xii. annos post sumptum diadema preterisset, in <infirmitatem cecedit> et ciuile discidium inter Britones ortum est.

. . . .

Quo igitur, ut dicere ceperam, languente afficiuntur discordia Britones et opulentam patriam detestabli discidio destruunt. Accessit aetiam aliud infortonium quia fames dira ac famosissima insipienti populo adhesit ita ut totius cibi sustentaculo quaeque uacuaretur prouintia excepto uenatoriae artis solatio. Quam uero famen pestifera lues mortis consecuta est quae in breui tanta<m> populi multitudinem strauit quantam non poterant uiui humare. Unde miserae reliquiae patriam factis agminibus diffugientes transmarinas petebant regiones. . . .

("Cadwallo's son Cadwallader (whom Bede calls Cadwallo the Younger) then took up the governance of the realm, and at first he reigned both bravely and peacefully. However, twelve years after taking the crown, a great sickness befell him and civil discord arose among the Britons . . .

And so, as I had begun to say, the Britons were afflicted with a lamentable civil discord, and they destroyed the well-being of their country with their terrible divisiveness. Then yet another misfortune struck them: a dire and infamous famine afflicted them so badly that they were deprived of the support of any food at all; their only solace remained in the art of hunting. A deadly plague followed on the heels of this famine, striking down such a multitude of people in so short a space of time that the living were unable to bury the dead. The wretched survivors gathered together in companies and fled from their homeland, seeking out lands across the seas.)[110]

This time the king's illness leads not only to the fragmentation of the kingdom but is followed by Britain itself becoming ill, first with disease and then with famine. It is this final cascade of the king's illness, the kingdom's fragmentation, and the

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[110] GM, *Historia Regum*, 144-5, Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 214-5.

island of Britain itself becoming diseased that costs the Britons their country. In a complete reversal, the arrival of Brutus and his Trojan followers to a lush healthy island is replaced by a king who has fallen ill, an inhospitable and barren land, and ultimately flight from Britain. Geoffrey concludes his history by writing:

> .lxix. annis gentem seuissima inquietatione affecerunt; sed non multum profuit. Supradicta namque mortalitas et fames atque consuetudinarium discidium in tantum coegerat populum superbum degenerare quod hostes longius arcere nequiuerant. Barbariae etiam irrepente iam non uocabantur Britones sed Gualenses, uocabulum siue e Gualone duce eorum siue a Galaes regina siue a barbarie trahentes. At Saxones sapientius agentes, pacem et concordiam inter se habentes, agros colentes, ciuitates et opida aedificantes et sic abiecto dominio Britonum, iam toti Loegriae imperauerant duce Adelstano qui primus inter eos diadema portauit.

> (For sixty-nine years they fought with great ferocity against the Angles but with little success, for the abovementioned plague and famine, as well as their own penchant for civil war, had caused this once proud people to degenerate to such a degree that they could no longer fend off their enemies. Through their habitual barbarity, they were no longer called Britons but "Welsh," a term derived either from their leader Gualo or from Queen Galaes or indeed from their own barbarity. But the Saxons acted more wisely. They established peace and concord among themselves, and they tilled the fields and rebuilt the cities and towns. Casting aside the power of the Britons, they ruled all of Logres under their leader, Athelstan, who was the first to wear the royal crown.)[111]

With the Saxons the opposite sequence occurs: civil peace, the recovery of the land, and unity under their king leads to a successful realm. Meanwhile, the Britons even lose their name, along with their country. Indeed, that their name is no longer a

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[111] GM, *Historia Regum* 146-7, Faletra, *History of the Kings*, 216-7.

place name (though it later becomes one), but is instead a synonym for barbarity,

suggests again that they have become the very giants whom they originally displaced.

Faletra notes "The Anglo-Saxon word *wealh*, which is the ancester of the modern

term *Welsh*, meant "foreigner" or "slave"; hence Geoffrey's etymology is not far from

the mark."[112] This too signifies the reversal the Britons have undergone; once again

they are foreigners, as they first were when they arrived as Trojans. The implication is

of course that in turn the Saxons will also be supplanted, as indeed they had been by

the time Geoffrey writes his history. While Geoffrey's account purports to be past

history, the diversity of 12th century Norman Britain makes this to some extent an

account of recent and present cultural and ethnic struggles.[113, 114] There is the implicit

suggestion that the Normans will in due course lose Britain themselves, though

Geoffrey does not go so far as to suggest overtly that future in the *History of the*

Kings.

During the course of *The History of the Kings* Geoffrey progressively

renegotiates the link between the island of Britain, kingship, and the king's body. This

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[112] See Faletra, *The History of the Kings*, footnote 1, 217.

[113] For a quick summary of the ethnic diversity of 12th century Britain, see Faletra,
The History of the Kings of Britain, 9. For a more detailed analysis, see Jeffrey
Jerome Cohen "The Flow of Blood in Medieval Norwich," *Speculum* 79 (2004): 26-
65.

[114] Faletra writes, "It is my contention that this pastiche "history" that Geoffrey
produces is structured in such a way as to authorize Norman colonization and
annexation of Wales and to depict the Welsh as ultimately as a barbarous people,
worthy of Norman domination." "The Conquest of the Past," 124.

can best be seen in the deemphasizing of the bodies of the leaders of Britain. We move from the giants, who by their very name are defined by their physical stature, to Brutus, who is able to defeat those giants by a greater show of strength. Following Brutus is a long succession of kings whom Geoffrey describes largely in terms of lineage. Then there is a transition to Uther, the half dead king, and to Arthur, a king whose death is ambiguous and perhaps temporary. Finally we have Cadwallo, whose body is bizarrely transfigured in numerous ways, beginning with cannibalism that is almost too easily read as a metaphor for a king devouring his people to his replication in bronze as a way of protecting his people after his death.

History of the Kings of Britain is an attempt to write a new kind of historical narrative, something quite unlike the chronicles that preceded it.[115, 116] In the last, post Cadwallader pages of the history, Geoffrey sounds similar to authors like Gildas or Nennius on the fall of Britain, but he frames its downfall in secular rather than religious terms.[117, 118] Geoffrey not only wrestles the history of Britain out of the constraints of an Augustinian foreordained plan and sets it into an unpredictable

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[115] See also Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature*. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 201.

[116] See also Ingledew, "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History, and Faletra, "Conquest of the Past."

[117] See Hanning, *The Vision of History*, 171.

[118] See Ingledew's discussion of Geoffrey's use of Orosius, and his ability to move beyond this paradigm in "The Book of Troy and the Genealogical Construction of History."

Vergilian narrative, but he also seeks to redefine kingship in such a way that takes into account the tangible, physical aspects of leadership specifically represented in the body of the king. It is possible that Geoffrey is not even attempting a real history of the British people, hence the difficulty establishing his allegiances or his sources, but instead is writing a history of methods of kingship that take into account the bodily presence of the king.[119]

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[119] See Monica Otter, *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth Century English Historical Writing,* (Chapel Hill: U. North Carolina Press, 1996); Valerie Flint, "The Historia Regum Britanniae of Geoffrey of Monmouth: Parody and its Purpose. A Suggestion," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 54, no. 3 (1979): 447-468; and Faletra, "Conquest of the Past." on Geoffrey's allegiances.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE LEPER KING OF JERUSALEM

Illness is one of the most tangible kinds of transformation, since it can affect appearance, behavior, and physical strength. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britannie* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*), a king's illness was often a symptom of the kingdom's vulnerability, but was not always indicative of poor leadership. For example, Uther was repeatedly ill but was an effective ruler. Geoffrey of Monmouth explores the effect of illness on kingship, but the physical vulnerabilities and metamorphoses of kings is not the explicit subject of his work. For William of Tyre, however, transformation and illness are inextricable from kingship.

William of Tyre was first tutor and then biographer of Baldwin IV, king of Jerusalem from 1174-1185. He documents the slow transformation from a healthy and promising prince into the "Leper King," as he came to be known. While narrating this change, he delineates which expectations of kingship are met and which are not. With current and future readers in mind, William is anxious to find the balance between representing the king and his illness accurately, but at the same time, not undermining Baldwin's credibility as a strong leader. Geoffrey gives a detailed account of Uther's success as a military leader and king, but his descriptions of the king's illnesses are

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vague and undefined. The ambiguity of Uther's physical maladies gives credence to the idea that Uther's illnesses may need to be read in a metaphorical context rather than as a realistic depiction of disease. In contrast, Baldwin's illness can also be read metaphorically, but there is the historical immediacy of a king whose illness is well-known and quantifiable. Both William and Geoffrey use illness and the transformations it can bring to narrow down a definition of secular kingship. Specifically, what is the role of the body in kingship? When physcial strength is undermined, how do kings then assert authority?

Leprosy held a unique position in the medieval imagination. The belief that leprosy was a curse or the result of sexual promiscuity or moral deviance alternated with the idea that lepers were blessed through a kinship with Christ.[120] Christ specifically singled out lepers to be healed and cleansed, giving them a special status among those with grave illnesses.[121] This conflicted view is accentuated when reading accounts of Baldwin IV. The contemporaneous and historical responses to Baldwin's reign, and attempts to reconcile his character and rank with the fact of his leprosy, reflect the ambivalence felt towards the disease. Ultimately, interpretations of Baldwin's leprosy were very often aligned with political beliefs, specifically with views of the Latin Kingdom. Those who saw Jerusalem as corrupt felt Baldwin's leprosy was a symptom of its depravity; those who believed in the holiness of the

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[120] Carole Rawcliffe, "Learning to Love the Leper: Aspects of Institutional Charity in Anglo-Norman England," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 23 (2001): 241-2.

[121] See *Matthew* 10:8.

kingdom saw Baldwin's illness as a reflection of the city's sanctity and considered him a chaste and moral ruler. This disparity in how Baldwin was regarded attests to the considerable fluidity in how leprosy was interpreted in the twelfth century.

Carole Rawcliffe has argued that Baldwin IV and other lepers of high station helped promote a positive view of leprosy.[122] However, in the case of Baldwin, it seems possible that he was born into a society with a relatively open attitude towards leprosy rather than that he brought about this change himself. Had Baldwin been brought up in an environment that was wholly intolerant of illness, he would never have been made king, much less have had the opportunity to prove himself an adept ruler. Baldwin's character was certainly in part responsible for a "less censorious" response to leprosy over time, but a more interesting question to consider is whether having leprosy helped Baldwin to be a more effective ruler. The interplay between leprosy and kingship in the case of Baldwin IV will be the subject of this investigation.

By far the most detailed account of Baldwin IV's reign is William of Tyre's *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (*A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*). King Amalric, Baldwin IV's father, commissioned William to write a history of the Crusader Kingdom, a project William continued after Amalric's death. In 1170 William was appointed as Baldwin's tutor and, in 1175, during Baldwin's

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[122] Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 54.

minority, he was appointed archbishop of Tyre and chancellor of the kingdom. These close alliances put William in a position to know intimately the details of the events he chronicles. As a result, he was able to shape current and future views of Baldwin by presenting his actions and events in a selective fashion. Nuanced descriptions are added to factual events, and sometimes important details are omitted from episodes. These biases ultimately prove to be very useful when trying to discern public attitudes toward Baldwin IV. The last two books of the *Historia* are an account of Baldwin IV's rule. Shortly after Baldwin's death, the chronicle abruptly ends, partially because William is unwilling to record the fall of Jerusalem that he foresees as inevitable when the young king dies without an heir capable of taking his place.

Three other accounts of this period in Jerusalem's history also exist: *La Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier*, an Old French version of William of Tyre known as *L'Estoire de Eracles empereur et la conqueste de la Terre d'Outremer*, and the Old French *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr (1184-1197)*. Ernoul's *Chronique* does not attempt to present a structured historical account; instead, much of the narrative is based on eyewitness accounts interwoven with topographical descriptions, biblical stories, and depictions of flora and fauna. Both Ernoul's *Chronique* and *L'Estoire de Eracles* contain original material, but the sections that discuss Baldwin IV generally follow William of Tyre's account. The Old French Continuation picks up, as the title suggests, just before William of Tyre's *Historia* ends. None of these accounts adds information concerning the reign of

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Baldwin IV, though they are useful for seeing how Jerusalem was perceived at this time.

When Baldwin IV was nine years old, he was sent to stay with his tutor, William of Tyre, and it was soon thereafter that he was first suspected of having leprosy. William frames the discovery of Baldwin's illness with a discussion of his capacity for endurance. By drawing attention to the similarities between the insensateness caused by leprosy and noble traits such as fortitude and patience, William intermingles leprosy and chivalric strength from the very beginning. The suggestion that kingship and leprosy are congruent rather than in opposition sets the stage for the prince's later ascent to the throne. The traits that William emphasizes may also be early hints of the personality that was to make Baldwin so popular among his followers. William writes:

> Dumque apud nos esset, et ei vigilem curam, et quantam regio puero convenit, tum in morum disciplina, tum litterarum studio sollicitudinem impenderemus, accidit quod colludentibus pueris nobilium qui secum erant, et se invicem, ut mos est pueris lascivientibus, unguibus per manus et brachia vellicantibus, alii sensum doloris clamoribus significabant; ipse autem quasi doloris expers patienter nimis, quamvis ei coaetanei ejus non parcerent, supportabat. Hoc autem cum semel et saepius accidisset, mihique nuntiatum esset, credidi prius, de virtute patientiae, et non ex insensibilitatis vitio procedere; vocansque eum, percunctari coepi, quidnam esset; tandemque comperi brachium ejus dexterum manumque eamdem, pro parte dimidia, obstupuisse, ita ut penitus vellicationes, aut etiam morsus non sentiret.[123]

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[123] William of Tyre, *Historia rerum gestarum in partibus transmarinis*. *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 201, ed J. P. Migne, (Parisiis: excudebat Migne 1855), XXI.i.

(While he was under my charge, I devoted myself to my royal pupil with vigilant care and watched over him with the solicitude befitting his exalted position. I endeavored to train him in the formation of character as well as to instruct him in the knowledge of letters. He was playing one day with his companions of noble rank, when they began, as playful boys often do, to pinch each others' arms and hands with their nails. The other boys gave evidence of pain by their outcries, but Baldwin, although his comrades did not spare him, endured it altogether too patiently, as if he felt nothing. After this had occurred several times it was reported to me. At first I supposed that it proceeded from his capacity for endurance and not from a lack of sensitiveness. But when I called him and began to inquire what it meant, I discovered that his right arm and hand were partially numb, so that he did not feel pinching or even biting in the least.) [124]

William's strategic response to Baldwin's illness was to initiate the view that leprosy brought with it heroic qualities. While not going so far as to imply that Baldwin's leprosy might be an asset, Baldwin's father, King Amalric, also challenged the idea that his son's disease might make him unfit for leadership. He sought out Abu Sulayman Dawud, a Christian Arab doctor, to treat Baldwin's illness, but at the same time, he also engaged Abul'Khair, Abu Sulayman's brother, to teach Baldwin to ride. This skill was mandatory for a knight and ruler, but was difficult for Prince Baldwin since he needed to control the horse with his knees while using his good hand to wield a sword. He was apparently an excellent rider until he became too ill to

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[124]*A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*. trans. and annot. Emily Atwater Babcock and A. C. Krey, vol II (New York: Columbia UP, 1943), 397-8.

mount his horse.[125, 126] If King Amalric had had another heir, the suspicion that

Baldwin had leprosy would probably have put an end to any efforts to prepare him to

be king. As it was, Amalric was pragmatic in his actions; if a replacement for

Baldwin could not be found, ideally through a marriage to Baldwin's sister, Sibylla,

then he would prepare his son to be king regardless of any possible limitations.

Much in the same tenor as his description of the discovery that Baldwin was

showing signs of leprosy, William of Tyre describes the prince's maturation in a

narrative that identifies him as noble in character and possessing every key chivalric

quality. In the course of doing so, his affection for his student is also readily apparent:

> quodque siccis oculis dicere non possumus, cum ad pubertatis annos
> coepit exsurgere, morbo elephantioso visus est periculosissime laborare;
> quo per dies singulos ingravescente nimium, extremitatibus maxime
> laesis et facie, fidelium suorum corda, quoties eum intuebantur,
> compassionis affectu molestabat. Proficiebat tamen in studio litterarum;
> singulisque diebus magis et magis, bonae spei et amplectendae indolis
> succrescebat. Erat autem juxta illius conditionem aetatis, forma venusta,
> et praeter morem majorum suorum, equis admittendis regendisque
> aptissimus; memoriae tenacis et confabulationum amator; parcus tamen;
> sed et beneficiorum pariter et injuriarum valde recolens; patri per omnia,
> non solum facie, verum toto corpore, incessu quoque et verborum
> modificatione similis; ingenii velocis, sed verbi impeditioris; historiarum
> more patris avidus auditor, et salubribus monitis valde obtemperans.
>
> (It is impossible to refrain from tears while speaking of this great
> misfortune. For, as he began to reach years of maturity, it was evident

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[125] Hamilton, Bernard, *The Leper King and His Heirs: Baldwin IV and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 28.

[126] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXI.i; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 398.

that he was suffering from the terrible disease of leprosy. Day by day his condition became worse. The extremities and the face were especially attacked, so that his faithful followers were moved with compassion when they looked at him. Nevertheless, he continued to make progress in the pursuit of letters and gave ever-increasing promise of developing a lovable disposition. He was comely of appearance for his age, and far beyond the custom of his forefathers he was an excellent horseman and understood the handling of horses. He had a retentive memory and loved to talk. He was economical but always remembered both favors and injuries. In every respect he resembled his father, not alone in face but in his entire mien; even his walk and the tones of his voice were the same. His intellect was keen, but his speech was halting. Like his father he eagerly listened to history and was well disposed to follow good advice.)[127]

Everything in this description portrays Baldwin as a suitable heir to the crown. William endows the prince with all the chivalric attributes expected of royalty: generosity, intelligence, horsemanship, intelligence, and physical grace. The mention of a stammer brings a note of realism to an otherwise seemingly idealized portrait. It is hard not to wonder if this passage is an attempt by William to gloss over Baldwin's illness, but another possibility is simply that Baldwin was indeed all of these things, and this is why he was elected king despite having leprosy. This passage was written in the interval after Baldwin's coronation while he was still in his minority, and it implicitly suggests that Baldwin was preparing and would be capable of ruling when he came of age.

We can begin to trace some of the ambivalence felt toward Baldwin in the

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[127] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXI.i; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 398.

narratives of his coronation. William of Tyre does his best to present this as an unproblematic and uncontested ascension, but other accounts hint at cracks in this story. William writes:

> Defuncto igitur patre, convenientibus in unum universis regni principibus, tam ecclesiasticis quam saecularibus, consonante omnium desiderio, in ecclesia Dominici Sepulcri solemniter et ex more, a domino Amalrico, bonae memoriae, Hierosolymorum patriarcha, cum ministrantibus archiepiscopis, episcopis et aliis Ecclesiarum praelatis, Idibus Julii, quarta die post patris obitum, inunctus est et coronatus
>
> (On the death of King Amaury, the nobles of the realm, both ecclesiastical and secular, met in assembly, and the wishes of all were found to be in perfect harmony. Accordingly, on July 15, the fourth day after the death of his father, Baldwin was solemnly consecrated and crowned, according to custom, in the church of the Sepulchre of the Lord. The rites were solemnized by Amalrich, patriarch of Jerusalem of good memory, assisted by the archbishops and other prelates of the church.)[128, 129]

William gives no hint that there might be any dissent. However, there is evidence that suggests that things may not have gone as smoothly as he would have liked his readers to believe. Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, better known in the West as Saladin, told his nephew Farrukh-Shāh three days after Amalric's death that he had heard from an informant in Darum that the Franks had not yet decided on a successor.[130, 131] Saladin's letter is too unspecific for any real conclusions to be made

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[128] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXI.ii; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 399.

[129] Malcolm Lyon and David Jackson give the date of Amalric's death as July 14. *Saladin: The Politics of the Holy War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 75.

[130] MS of al-Fadil, B.M. Add MSS 25757.146. See Lyon and Jackson, *Saladin*, 75.

on its basis, but the fact that Baldwin's succession was not immediate, and that there had to be a meeting rather than a straightforward announcement, suggests that there was at least some discussion. It is also possible that the debate was not over Baldwin's leprosy but rather his age, or over who would be selected as regent while the boy was a minor. Certainly, the difficulty in finding an appropriate regent for the kingdom persisted through Baldwin's reign. For that matter, being crowned four days after his father's death is not a very long delay; and it could have taken at least that length of time for the "nobles of the realm" to be assembled. Hamilton suggests that William is possibly glossing over any difficulties, but the fact that William does not conceal that the process took four days is also important; if this was a revealingly long interval, and he was in fact trying to promote an agenda that included smoothing over any hints of strife, then he could simply have omitted any mention of how long it took to announce Baldwin's succession.

The question of whether there was debate over Baldwin's coronation is significant because it gives some clue as to whether there was resistance to having a leper become king. Crowning Baldwin king of Jerusalem strongly suggests that there did not exist the immediate and irrevocable assumption that a person with such

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[131] According to Hamilton, "There is every reason to suppose that this report is true. William of Tyre wrote his account of the election during the new reign, when personal affection for the king and loyalty to the kingdom would have inclined him to keep silent about any doubts which had been voiced concerning Baldwin's capacity to rule. Nevertheless, such doubts must have been aired, and Saladin would have learned about the prolonged meeting of the High Court from his excellent system of informers in the Latin Kingdom." *Leper King,* 32.

physical limitations could not be a good leader. Though it has been argued that

Baldwin's leprosy would not have been apparent at the time of his coronation, this

seems unlikely.[132] William of Tyre writes,

> Nuntiatum est hoc patri; consultisque medicis, crebris fomentis, unctionibus, pharmacis etiam, ut ei subveniretur, diligenter, sed frustra, procuratum est. Erat enim, ut processu temporis, ipso rerum experimento postea plenius cognovimus, amplioris et penitus incurabilis doloris initium, quod praemittebatur

> (The lad's father was informed of his condition, and physicians were consulted. Repeated fomentations, oil rubs, and even poisonous remedies were employed without result in the attempt to help him. For, as we recognized in process of time, these were the premonitory symptoms of a most serious and incurable disease which later became plainly apparent.)[133]

From these efforts, it is clear that the court was aware that there was something amiss

with Baldwin well before his coronation. Despite the failure to find effective

treatments for leprosy, doctors were well trained in the symptoms and so too would

have been the general public. Even if the diagnosis had not been confirmed, the

doctors treating the prince would have considered the possibility that he had leprosy,

the king would certainly have known, and thus too would key members of the court

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[132] Stephen Lay has argued that Baldwin's leprosy would not have been apparent at the time he assumed his father's position, and thus there is nothing remarkable or inferable about his election to the throne. "A Leper in Purple: The Coronation of Baldwin IV of Jerusalem," *Journal of Medieval History* 23 (1997): 317-34. Piers Mitchell also argues that outward signs of leprosy would not have been obvious at that time. See Hamilton, *Leper King*, appendix, 245.

[133] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXI.i; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 398.

have been aware of the prince's illness.[134] Simply the fact that Baldwin could not use

both arms in order to ride and use a sword simultaneously would have indicated that

something was critically wrong. Hamilton observes that "no attempt was made to

segregate him [Baldwin IV] either then or at any later stage of his life."[135] That

Baldwin's closest advisors apparently did not try to conceal his leprosy suggests that

not only did they not think his illness would keep him from be crowned, but also that

they did not believe his illness would or could be used as cause in and of itself to

remove him from the throne.

The decision to make Baldwin king was at least in some part because he was

more likely to be a successful ruler than any of the other possible candidates for the

throne, despite any concerns over his leprosy. This seems significantly more probable

than the theory that Baldwin was supported by people who did not suspect he was ill.

There were no good alternatives for the succession: Baldwin's older sister Sibylla had

been brought up in a convent, thus was not trained to be queen, and it was neither

possible to find her a suitable husband in the region to whom she was not closely

related nor to find her a foreign husband within a reasonable period of time.

Baldwin's younger sister, Isabel, was only two years old; her appointment would have

necessitated a long and destabilizing regency. Baldwin had several cousins who could

have been appointed to the throne, but it was not clear which of them had the best

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[134] Hamilton, *Leper King*, 38.

[135] Hamilton, *Leper King*, 101.

claim.[136]

Interestingly, there is no hint of this debate in William of Newburgh's description of Baldwin IV's ascension to the throne.

> Qui nimirum Amalricus, post multa fortiter et feliciter gesta, hominem exuens, filio impuberi Baldwino regnum reliquit. Hic autem cum non parvæ spei esset, occulto Dei judicio plaga lepræ percussus, regni tamen quoad vixit moderamina animi magis quam corporis viribus tenuit.
>
> (This Amalric, after many great and fortunate exploits, died, and left his kingdom to his son Baldwin, not yet arrived at the state of manhood. He was a youth of great promise, though afflicted by God's secret judgment with leprosy; and he governed the kingdom as long as he lived rather by strength of mind than of body.")[137]

The phrase "*occulto Dei judicio*" (God's secret judgment) is ambiguous. It is not clear whether Newburgh means that the leprosy was secret when Baldwin was a youth, or whether the judgment was secret because the reason for it was known only to God.

Another factor to consider is that leprosy may have been more tolerated in the

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[136] For details on the competing claims to the throne, see Hamilton, *Leper King*, 40-1.

[137] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, in *Chronicles of the Reigns of Stephen, Henry II, and Richard I*, Vol One, ed. Richard Howett, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1884, Reprint 1964), Liber Tertius, Cap. X; *The History of English Affairs* in *The Church Historians of England*, volume IV, part II; translated by Joseph Stevenson (London: Seeley's, 1861), Book III, Chapter 10.

Latin Kingdom than in Western Europe.[138] "Sources for the Latin kingdom suggest

that leprosy did not generally imply moral judgement and was suffered simply 'by the

will of God', an attitude that might owe something to the Moslem approach to the

disease, which was more practical than moralistic.'"[139, 140] These more flexible

attitudes may have affected the way Baldwin was perceived. This tolerance was not

consistent, however. Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), who traveled through Jerusalem near

the end of Baldwin IV's reign, writes, "This pig, the lord of Acre whom they call

king, lives secluded and is not seen, for God has afflicted him with leprosy. God was

not slow to vengeance, for the affliction seized him in his youth, depriving him of the

joys of his world. He is wretched here, 'but the chastisement of the hereafter is

severer and more lasting [Koran XX, 127]."[141] At an earlier point in Ibn Jubayr's

narrative, he refers to Baldwin's mother, Agnes of Courtenay, as "the sow known as

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[138] David Marcombe, *Leper Knights: The Order of St Lazarus of Jerusalem in England, c.1150-1544* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 6; Shulamith Shahar, "Des lepreux pas comme les autres. L'ordre de Saint-Lazare dans le royaume latin de Jerusalem," *Revue Historique* 541 (1982): 38.

[139] Saul Brody, *The Disease of the Soul. Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (New York: Cornell UP, 1974), 132-46; Michael Dols, "The Leper in Medieval Islamic Society," *Speculum* 58 (1983): 891-916.

[140] Hamilton, *Leper Knights*, 6.

[141] *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London: Jonathan Cape, Camelot Press 1952), 324.

Queen who is the mother of the pig who is Lord of Acre—may God destroy it."[142]

Referring to Baldwin and his mother as pigs is a convention, but describing Baldwin as cursed by God shows that at least in some cases leprosy was seen as a punishment. Ibn Jubayr was a Spanish Moor, so his beliefs would probably not be representative of the beliefs of Syria, Egypt, or other populations more proximate to Jerusalem, but he was a devout Muslim and his views may tell us something about Islamic if not geographically-based attitudes toward leprosy.

What Saladin thought of Baldwin and his ascension to the throne is also interesting. Their first direct correspondence was undoubtedly Saladin's letter of condolence on the death of Amalric. "The master of a house cannot but be saddened by the loss of his neighbors. . . The king must know that we have a sincere affection for him, as we had for his father. . . Let him rely on us."[143] On the other hand, upon hearing of the king's death, Saladin also wrote to his nephew, Farrukh-Shāh "may God curse him and abandon him and lead him to punishment as bitter [murr] as his name… We give abundant thanks to God as this is the fulfillment of the most for which we could have hoped."[144] Of these two letters, Lyons and Jackson write, "this can be taken as diplomatic usage rather than as hypocrisy but there was some room

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[142] *Travels of Ibn Jubayr,* 316.

[143] al-Qalqashandi 7.115 quoted in Lyons and Jackson *Saladin,* 75.

[144] al-Fadil, ʿAbd al-Rahim b. ʿAli al-Baisani: al-durr al-nazima min tarassul ʿAbd al-Rahim, ed A. Badawi, Cairo n.d. MSS. Brit. Mus. Add. 25757.146 quoted in Lyons and Jackson, *Saladin,* 75.

for ambivalent feelings."[145] It is possible that Saladin did not know that Baldwin had

leprosy at that time, although unlikely if Hamilton's statement that he had an

extensive intelligence network is accurate.

By strange coincidence, Saladin also suffered from an extremely painful and

debilitating skin disease. While not leprosy, the tenor of the portrayal of Saladin's

illness may give some hint at what could be a regional tolerance toward disfiguring

skin diseases. One of his biographers, Bahāʾ al-Dīn, writes "I saw him [Saladin] on

the plain of Acre smitten with such a painful malady; boils covering him from waist

to knees, so that he could not sit down, but lay on his side in his tent."[146] He goes on

to mention that Saladin could ride nonetheless, and that his pain disappeared when on

horseback. This emphasis on ridership in the descriptions of both Saladin and

Baldwin demonstrates how strongly this skill was associated with leadership in the

twelfth century.

In July 1176 Baldwin came of age and the regency of Raymond of Tripoli

ended. One of Baldwin's first actions as king was not to ratify the peace treaty with

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[145] Lyons and Jackson further explain, "Amalric's death had cleared a powerful piece from the chessboard of the Holy War, but in Saladin's diplomatic manoeuvring it could block a line of advance. If the Franks were inactive, the Syrian emirs would have time to set their house in order and an Egyptian march on Damascus would seem indefensible in Islamic terms. On the other hand, with the deaths of Amalric and Nūr al-Dīn Saladin had seen the two greatest military commanders of Syria and Palestine removed from his path." *Saladin,* 75.

[146] Francesco Gabrieli, *Arab Historians of the Crusades*, trans. E. J. Costello (London: Routledge, 1969), 102.

Saladin that Raymond had initiated. This policy had proven disastrous, for it had allowed Saladin to surround the Franks unopposed. That same month, Baldwin led a raid into the lands around Damascus. In August he led another raid to the Beka'a valley and defeated a garrison of Damascus led by Saladin's nephew, Shams al-Daula Turan-Shah. These two forays immediately established that Baldwin was not going to let his illness deter him from taking what seemed to him to be necessary military action. Further, the success of these raids demonstrated that he was a capable leader whose men would follow his instruction.

In recognition that Baldwin's illness would ultimately lead to an early end to his rule, even without agitation from the court, a suitable husband for Baldwin's sister Sibylla was sought during this time. She married William Longsword of Montferrat in 1176, the father of the future King Baldwin V. Baldwin offered him the position of regent as his health grew more precarious, but the appointment would have been controversial, and William of Montferrat declined. The regency was next offered to Philip of Flanders, who also declined. Philip did not wish to stay away from his lands in Flanders unless he could replace them with greater territories and a kingship in Egypt, and this was not possible. The difficulty in finding a regent gives some hint of the political instability of the region and the challenge of ruling over Jerusalem.

In 1177 Saladin invaded the Latin Kingdom, leading to the battle of Mont Gisard. "An anonymous Christian writer in north Syria described how in this crisis 'everyone despaired of the life of the sick king, already half-dead, but he drew upon

his courage and rode to meet Saladin.'"[147] Mont Gisard was a near miraculous

victory for the Franks given that they faced overwhelming odds.[148] Baldwin's ability

as a military leader had been proven in the attacks of 1176, but it was at this battle

that Baldwin's reputation as being chosen by God seems to have taken hold. In the

narratives of Mont Gisard, the extreme unlikelihood of military success converges

with Baldwin's then conspicuous illness, resulting in a narrative that sounds very

much like a saint's life. William of Newburgh describes Baldwin's victory in heroic

and religious terms:

> Audiens autem Saladinus, abducta militia terram Domini plus solito
> præsidiis vacuatam, cum infinito exercitu repentinus irruit, nec moratus
> in terminis, tanquam possessurus eam intima ejus illico penetravit. Tunc
> princeps Christianus, lepram corporis animi virtute exornans, quantulam
> pro tempore potuit militiam convocavit, et, prœliaturus non suum sed
> Domini prœlium, hostium numeros non expavit. Itaque, præeunte vexillo
> Dominico, juxta Rama oppidum quod hostes obsederant, congressurus
> eum eis, tremendas illas gentis spurcissimæ copias, divino fretus auxilio,
> profligavit. Saladinus, fuga elapsus, ægre evasit, cæsis de exercitu ejus
> multis millibus. Gestum est hoc prœlium a Christianis, Christo propitio,
> feliciter, septimo calendas Decembris.

> (Hearing that the land of the Lord was more than usually bereft of its
> defense, in consequence of this removal of its troops, Saladin made a
> sudden irruption into it at the head of a countless force; and, making no

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[147] *Anonymi Auctoris Chronicon ad Annum Christi 1234 pertinens* [comprising *Histoiria Ecclesiastica* and *Historia Civilis*], ed J. B. Chabot, CSCA, *Scriptores Syri* 3rd ser., vols XIV and XV (Paris, 1926), trans. A. Abouna, intro. J.M. Fiey, CSCO, *Scriptores Syri*, 3rd ser., 154 (Louvian, 1974). Quoted in Hamilton, *Leper King*, 133.

[148] For details of this battle, see Hamilton, *Leper King*, 133-7.

stop on the frontiers, forthwith penetrated into the heart of the country, as though he should possess it. The Christian prince, adorning the leprosy of his body by the energy of his mind, assembled as large an army as the time would permit; and, as he was about to fight the battle of his God, and not his own, he was undismayed at the number of his enemies. Preceded, therefore, by the cross of the Lord, and about to engage near the town of Rama, which his opponents had besieged, he relied on the Divine assistance, and routed these terrific armies of an abandoned race. Saladin, taking to flight, escaped with difficulty, while thousands of his hosts were slain. This battle was successfully fought by the Christians, by Christ's assistance, on the seventh of the kalends of December. [25th Nov.)[149]

Michael the Syrian described the battle thus:

God, who manifests his strength in the weak, inspired the sick king. He dismounted, prostrated himself on the ground before the Cross, and prayed in tears. At this sight the hearts of all the soldiery were moved and they swore on the Cross not to give way and to hold as traitor any man who turned his bridle. They remounted and charged.[150]

In these narratives it is clear how closely faith in God and faith in Baldwin were intertwined for the Franks. Baldwin himself felt that it was divine intervention that led to their success. After the battle he erected a monument to St. Catherine, whose saint's day it was. Despite this gesture, Baldwin does not seem to have been an extremely pious man, at least according to what is recorded of his actions by William of Tyre.

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[149] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Liber Tertius, XI; Stevenson, *The History of English Affairs*, Book Three, 11.1.

[150] Michael the Syrian, quoted in René Grousset, *The Epic of the Crusades* (NY: Orien Press, 1970), 150-1.

There is a striking similarity between this scene with Baldwin and the Saracens and Geoffrey's description of Uther, the half-dead king, rising from his sickbed to fight the Saxons. Both kings are only able to achieve momentary victory, but their overcoming physical limitations in orfer to defeat a much stronger opponent becomes an empowering event for the people they lead. Both the Franks and the British are destined to lose their kingdoms, a fact both chroniclers are well aware of, and these kings, briefly triumphant yet tied to their failing bodies, are a metaphor for that reality.

Despite this success, the political situation was very precarious. Given the progressive nature of leprosy, Baldwin's health was deteriorating, and the only heir to the throne was the infant child of Sibylla and William of Monferrat. William had died suddenly, and the search for a suitable new husband for Sibylla to whom Baldwin could hand over the throne became ever more desperate. William of Tyre reports the unanimous decision that Sibylla should marry the Duke of Burgundy, and in 1178-9, Baldwin wrote to Louis VII:

> To be deprived of the use of one's limbs is of little help to one in carrying out the work of government. If I could be cured of the disease of Naaman, I would wash seven times in Jordan, but I have found in the present age no Elisha who can heal me. It is not fitting that a hand so weak as mine should hold power when fear of Arab aggression daily presses upon the Holy City and when my sickness increases the enemy's daring. . . . I therefore beg you that, having called together the barons of the kingdoms of France, you immediately choose one of them to take charge of this Holy Kingdom. For We are prepared to receive with affection whomever you send Us, and We will hand over the kingdom to a suitable

successor.[151]

As Hamilton writes, "The letter, it would seem, formed part of the negotiations relating to Sibyl's second marriage. There was no guarantee that Hugh of Burgundy would accept the invitation to come to Jerusalem, but if he did, Louis VII's approval would be needed to allow him to leave the kingdom permanently and transfer the duchy to his son. If he did not accept, then the urgency of determining the succession was so great that the king of France was given freedom to choose an alternative husband for Sibyl."[152] This letter not only emphasizes the urgency of the situation, but it also gives a suggestion of Baldwin's tenacity and sense of responsibility to his kingdom despite facing overwhelming illness.

Baldwin and Naaman shared more in common than leprosy. Both were successful leaders in battle in the conflict-ridden region of Israel and Syria. It is tempting to consider the possibility that in Baldwin's imagining himself as the Naaman of his time, he was also consciously modeling himself in the image of a leper successfully leading armies to victory. In the biblical story, the king of Israel, Joram, sees the request to cure Naaman's leprosy as a provocation for war from Syria. Since Joram believes he has been asked to do the impossible, he suspects the Syrian leader

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[151] A. Cartellieri, ed. *Ein Donaueschinger Briefsteller. Lateinische Stilübungen des XII Jahrhunderts aus der orleanischen Schule,* no 148 (Innsbruck, 1898), p. 33; RRH, no 569c, II, p. 35. quoted in Hamilton, *Leper King*, 140.

[152] Hamilton*, Leper King*, 140-1.

who sent Naaman to him as looking for a pretext to attack him. In both the biblical story and in twelfth-century Jerusalem, leprosy becomes a metaphor for the threat against the kingdom. Naaman's leprosy is cured by a symbolic baptism in the river Jordan and, in later interpretations, Naaman prefigures Christian baptism of non-believers. Thus, also inherent in the comparison between himself and Naaman is the suggestion that leprosy, or having one's leprosy cured, may have nothing to do with faith. Perhaps this is why Baldwin did not put much effort into expressions of piety; he simply did not believe they would make any difference.

Not long after Baldwin appealed for help, Alexander III, pope from 1159-1181, issued his appeal for crusade, *Cor nostrum*, dated January 1181. With it, he included a letter, *Cum orientalis terra*, addressed to the hierarchy of the church which expresses his concern for the Latin kingdom and which reflects his ambivalence towards Baldwin IV: "Non est enim rex, qui terram illam regere possit, cum ille, videlicet Balduinus, qui regni gubernacula possidet, ita sit [sic] graviter, sicut nosse vos credimus, justo Dei judicio flagellatus, ut vix ad tolerandos sufficiat continuos sui corporis cruciatus."[153] Alexander asserts that there is no one to lead the Latin Kingdom, because Baldwin is suffering God's just judgment, leprosy, and his body is so tormented he can hardly tolerate it. Just about everything known about Baldwin's

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[153] Jaffé-Löwenfeld, *Regesta pontificum romanorum ab condita Ecclesia ad annum post Christum Natum 1198*. ed. Phillip Jaffé., 2nd ed. 2 vols., eds Samuel Löwenfeld, Ferdinand Kaltenbrunner and Paul Ewald (Leipzig, 1885-1888, reprint, 1965), 14360, PL 200, 1294-7.

history contradicts this assessment. Up until this point at least, Baldwin had largely been able to manage his illness sufficiently well enough for him to be a strong king. There is a disconnect that occurs between the Franks in the Latin Kingdom, who find Baldwin to be an excellent ruler, and observers elsewhere, who have difficulty reconciling the fact of Baldwin's leprosy with his effectiveness as a leader. However, though the pope refers to the just judgment of God, he is also at pains to clarify that Baldwin is not to be blamed for his inability to rule; rather, that his illness makes it impossible.[154]

Baldwin's letter to Louis VII was not answered in time to prevent what was one of Baldwin's worst political decisions, especially according to William of Tyre. Baldwin's paternal kin, Bohemond of Antioch and Raymond of Tripoli, opposed the marriage to Hugh of Burgundy and instead favored a liaison with Baldwin of Ibelin. Fearing a coup, in 1180 Baldwin abruptly married Sibylla to Guy of Lusignan. While this successfully prevented Bohemond III, Raymond III, and the Ibelins from seizing power, this action also lost their support. Because of the ensuing political division, Baldwin was unable to abdicate as he had wished, and thus the main intent of the marriage – to find a suitable replacement for Baldwin – was not achieved.

Peter Edbury views William of Tyre's *Historia* as an "apologia" and approaches

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[154] See also John G. Rowe, "Alexander III and the Jerusalem Crusade," in *Crusaders and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1993), 131.

the entire work from this point of view.[155] However, William's reaction to Baldwin's

impulsive decision to marry his sister Sibylla to Guy of Lusignan is quite critical. His

frustration and disapproval of the king's decision argues convincingly against the

view that William was simply writing a defense of Baldwin IV's reign. William

writes:

> Cognoscens ergo rex illorum nobilium, et licet uterque esset ejus
> consanguineus, suspectum habens adventum, sorori maturat nuptias; et
> quamvis nobiliores et prudentiores, ditiores etiam in regno, tum de
> advenis tum de indigenis potuissent reperiri, penes quos multo
> commodius, quantum ad regni utilitatem, illa posset locari: non satis
> attendens, quod: Male cuncta ministrat Impetus, tamen causis quibusdam
> intervenientibus, cuidam adolescenti satis nobili, Guidoni videlicet de
> Liziniaco, filio Hugonis Bruni, de episcopatu Pictaviensi, ex insperato
> traditur, infra paschalia, praeter morem, solemnia.

> (But the king knew these two nobles well [Bohemond, prince of Antioch,
> and Raymond, count of Tripoli] and, although both were his kinsmen, he
> distrusted their motives in coming. When he learned that they had
> arrived, he hastened the nuptials of his sister. He might have found in the
> kingdom nobles of far greater importance, wisdom, and even wealth,
> both foreigners and natives, an alliance with any one of whom would
> have been of much greater advantage to the kingdom. But without
> waiting to consider that "too much haste spoils everything,"[156] the king,
> for reasons of his own, suddenly married his sister to a young man of
> fairly good rank, Guy de Lusignan, son of Hugh the Brown, of the diocese
> of Poitiers. Contrary to the usual custom the marriage was celebrated
> during the week of Easter.)[157]

[155] Peter Edbury and John Rowe, *William of Tyre: Historian of the Latin East*.
Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought: Fourth Series. (Cambridge:
Cambridge UP, 1991).

[156] Statius, *Thebaid*, X. 704.

[157] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXII.i; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 446.

This is the most direct criticism William ever makes of Baldwin, perhaps

because the consequences of this quick decision were to be so far-reaching. However,

it is not the only time William expresses his frustration with the king. When the Count

of Tripoli sought to visit two years later, Baldwin refused him entrance:

> et jam usque Biblium pervenisset, praedicti viri nequam regem nimis
> simplicem, maligna suggestione circumvenerunt, persuadentes
> praedictum comitem sinistra intentione in regnum velle introire, ut de
> ejus supplantatione tractaret occulte; unde factum est, quod eorum
> verbis seductoriis, rex aurem nimis credulam praebens, missa legatione,
> regni aditum ei inconsulte nimis interdixit. Quo facto, comes, cui praeter
> meritum tanta irrogata erat injuria, confusus et justa succensus
> indignatione, desistens a proposito, licet invitus, sumptibus innumeris
> factis inutiliter, Tripolim reversus est. Erat autem praedictorum ea
> intentio seductorum, ut, absente comite, qui vir industrius erat, et ad
> omnia circumspectus, ipsi regia negotia pro libero tractarent arbitrio et
> regis infirmitatem ad suum traherent compendium. Inter quos regis
> mater, mulier plane Deo odibilis, et in extorquendo importuna; et
> ejusdem frater, regius senescalcus, cum paucis eorum sequacibus, viris
> impiis, regem ad hoc protervius impellebant.
>
> (He [the Count of Tripoli] had proceeded as far as Jubail when the
> aforesaid wicked men, by their malicious insinuations, induced the too
> credulous king to believe that the count was coming to the kingdom with
> the wicked design of secretly working to supplant him. He readily lent an
> ear to their seductive words and at once sent a peremptory message
> refusing the count permission to enter the realm.
>> At this injury, so little deserved, the count, confused and justly
> indignant, very unwillingly refrained from advancing further and
> returned to Tripoli after a useless expenditure of effort and money.
>> It was the intention of these troublemakers, unrestrained by the
> presence of the count, an indefatigable and thoroughly upright man, to
> handle the affairs of the kingdom themselves just as they wished and to
> turn the infirmity of the king to their own advantage. Among those who

shamelessly influenced the king to this course of action were his mother, a most grasping woman, utterly detestable to God; her brother, the king's seneschal; and a few wicked men, their partisans.)[158]

The criticism here of Baldwin is indirect. William of Tyre does not explicitly blame Baldwin beyond saying that he is too credulous and too open to malicious gossip. However, the disapproval is implicit; Baldwin has allowed himself to be surrounded by morally unscrupulous advisors, at the same time rejecting the much esteemed count of Tripoli.

Given the internal strife of the Latin kingdom that resulted from this marriage, Baldwin formed a truce with Saladin to buy time for the political environment to stabilize. The treaty was broken by Prince Reynald, though it was apparent that Saladin himself had no interest in renewing the truce. Saladin laid siege to the castle of Bethsan, and Baldwin IV and his army marched to its relief. It is possible that Baldwin remembered Mont Gisard and knew how important his presence was on the battlefield. Otherwise it is nearly incomprehensible why he would have attempted the journey in his condition. In order for the Franks to make the speedy time they needed, with Baldwin too ill to ride, he would have had to be transported in a litter strung between two horses; the jostling alone would have been tortuous for someone who was gravely ill. Though neither William of Tyre nor other chroniclers specifically describe Baldwin on the battlefield of Le Forbelet, it is implicit that he was present

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[158] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXII.ix; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 459-60.

based on William of Tyre's mention of his return from there.[159] The battle was fought

in intense heat, and it must have been excruciating for Baldwin to remain on the field.

The Franks were again successful, despite facing a vastly larger Muslim army. That

the battle was fought on July 15, the eighth anniversary of Baldwin's coronation,

must also have seemed fortuitous. The importance of Baldwin's presence on the

battlefield of Le Forbelet, most likely in a litter and too ill to fight, strongly echoes

Geoffrey of Monmouth's description of King Uther and his army facing the Anglo

Saxon invaders, with a king too unwell to engage in the battle himself yet able to

inspire a small force to defeat a much larger one. Given Baldwin's inability to

participate in the fighting, the only reason he would have been present would have

been to encourage and inspire his army.

In 1183, Baldwin's health markedly deteriorated, making further military forays

out of reach and even putting his capacity to rule in question. William of Tyre reports:

> morbo quoque elephantioso, quo ab initio regni sui, et a primis
> adolescentiae auspiciis molestari coeperat, praeter solitum
> ingravescente, lumen amiserat, et corporis extremitatibus laesis et
> computrescentibus omnino, pedes manusque ei suum denegabant
> officium; regiam tamen dignitatem et administrationem nihilominus
> (licet a nonnullis ei suggereretur, ut cederet, et de bonis regiis sibi
> tranquillam seorsum eligenti vitam, honeste provideret) hactenus
> detrectaverat deponere. Licet enim corpore debilis esset et impotens,
> forti tamen pollebat animo, et ad dissimulandam aegritudinem et

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[159] 'Domino igitur rege cum suis expeditionibus ad locum [fontem Sephoritanum] supradictum reverso (The king now returned with his forces to the place [the fountain of Sephorie] mentioned above.) WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXII.xvii; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 475.

supportandam regiam sollicitudinem supra vires enitebatur.

(In addition, the leprosy which had begun to trouble him at the beginning of his reign – in fact, in the very early youth – became much worse than usual. His sight failed and his extremities became completely deadened so that his hands and feet refused to perform their office. Yet up to this time he had declined to heed the suggestion offered by some that he lay aside his kingly dignity and give up the administration of the realm, so that, with a suitable provision for his needs from the royal revenues, he could lead a tranquil life in retirement.
     Although physically weak and impotent, yet mentally he was vigorous, and, far beyond his strength, he strove to hide his illness and to support the cares of the kingdom.)[160]

At this point, it was necessary for Baldwin to appoint a permanent regent. This had to be Guy of Lusignan, since he was the heir apparent, but he was a far from ideal choice given the controversy surrounding his marriage to Sibylla. This appointment was done with constraints attached that demonstrated the lasting suspicion and lack of confidence in Guy, despite Baldwin's success in repairing many of the rifts that had initially resulted from the abrupt marriage to his sister. However, it was soon proven that Guy was unable to command the army coherently, and Baldwin was forced to relieve him of his regency, at the same time ending any possibility that Guy would be king. The military's absolute rejection of Guy stands in dramatic contrast to the willingness with which they followed Baldwin. This again echoes Geoffrey of Monmouth; the British refused to follow King Lot, the husband of Uther's daughter, but they followed Uthur without hestation despite his illness. With few other options,

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[160] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XXII.xxv; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 492.

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Baldwin then appointed his five-year-old nephew, Baldwin V, co-king, and Raymond of Tripoli was elected regent with many conditions attached that revealed the misgivings people had towards the count. Left in the hands of the distrusted Count Raymond of Tripoli, the child king Baldwin V, the morally questionable Sibylla, and much disparaged Guy de Lusignan, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem immediately started to disintegrate after the death of Baldwin IV, culminating in its downfall at the Battle of Hattin in 1187 only two years later.

Baldwin died some time before May 16, 1185. William of Tyre's chronicle ends abruptly after the final confrontation between Guy de Lusignan and Baldwin IV, and it does not go on to record Baldwin's death. However, *The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre* does give a description of Baldwin's final days:

> Ne demora puis gaires que li rois ot portee corone que li Rois Meziaus fu mors. Et devant ce que il morust manda il tos ses homes que il venissent a lui en Jerusalem. Et il i vindrent tuit. A cel point que il i vindrent, trespassa li rois de cest siecle, si que tuit li baron de la terre furent a sa mort. L'endemain l'enfoïrent au mostier dou Sepulcre, la ou li autres rois avoient esté enfoïs puis le tens Godefroi de Buillon. Il estoient enfoïz entre la montaigne de Monte Calvaire, la ou Jhesu Crist fu mis en la crois, et le Sepulcre ou il fu mis, et tout est entre le mostier del Sepulcre, Monte Calvaire et Golgatas.

> (Not long after the king [Baldwin V] had worn his crown, the Leper King died. Before he died he ordered all his men to come to him at Jerusalem. They all answered his call, but just as they were arriving, the king departed this life, and all the barons of the land were present at his death. On the next day they buried him in the church of the Sepulchre where the other kings had been buried since the time of Godfrey of Bouillon. He

was buried between the hill of Mount Calvary where Jesus Christ had been put on the cross and the Sepulchre where He was laid. All the kings are buried between the place of the Sepulchre and Mount Calvary and Golgotha.)[161]

This death scene is strikingly similar to Baldwin's coronation. All the key figures in the land were present to confirm Baldwin as king, and then came again to say their farewells. The king is buried in the Church of the Sepulchre, the same place where he was crowned. His burial is as ritualized as was his coronation. There are two additional elements, however. Baldwin's inclusion with other kings is emphasized and then re-emphasized; if there had been uncertainty about his ability to be king at the start of his tenure, there was none about his standing with other kings by the end of it. Not only is Baldwin placed with all the other kings, but he is also very precisely localized in terms of religious iconography. Contrast this with the description of Amalric's death from dysentery and its treatment, and his subsequent burial:

> antequam tamen corpus medicinae violentia exhaustum, sumpto cibo posset reficere, febre solita recurrente, in fata concessit. Mortuus est autem anno ab Incarnatione Domini 1173, V Idus Julii; regni vero duodecimo, mense quinto; aetatis vero tricesimo octavo. Sepultus est autem inter praedecessores suos, secus fratrem, in eadem linea, ante locum Calvariae
>
> (But before he could take nourishment to strengthen his body which had been weakened by the violent remedy [purging], the usual fever returned,

[161] *La Continuation de Guillaume de Tyr (1184-1197)* ed Margaret Morgan (Paris: Librarie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1982), 21; *The Conquest of Jerusalem and the Third Crusade, The Old French Continuation of William of Tyre 1184-97*, trans. Peter Edbury (Farnham: Ashgate, 1999), 15.

and he yielded to his fate. He died on July 11, in the year of the
Incarnation of our Lord 1173, in the twelfth year and fifth month of his
reign and the thirty-eighth year of his life. He was buried by the side of
his brother among his predecessors of the same line, before the place
Calvary.)[162]

Instead of being buried "with all the other kings," Amalric is laid to rest with his

brother and predecessors. Instead of being localized very specifically in terms of the

life of Christ, he is placed very generally before the "place Calvary." The use of the

word "place" (*locum*) deprives the location of its symbolic weight by putting the

emphasis on the actual physical location rather than on the events tied to the

geography that surround it.

Contemporary and near contemporary accounts are unstinting in their

admiration for Baldwin IV's character, the loyalty shown to him, and all that he

accomplished while king. This was true of Muslims as well as Christians. Saladin's

biographer, Imad ad-Din al Isfahani wrote "In spite of [Baldwin's] illness the Franks

were loyal to him, they gave him every encouragement. . . being satisfied to have him

as their ruler; they exalted him . . . they were anxious to keep him in office, but they

paid no attention to his leprosy."[163, 164] The Italian historian, Sicard of Cremona, wrote

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[162] WT, *Historia rerum gestarum,* XX.xxxiii; Babcock, *History of Deeds*, 395-6.

[163] Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani, *La conqûete de la Syrie et de la Palestine par Saladin*, tr.
H. Massé, Documents relatifs à l'Histoire des Croisades publiés par l'Académie des
Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres 10 (Paris: Paul Geuthner 1972), 18; Translated by
Hamilton, *Leper King*, 241.

"Although he suffered from leprosy from childhood, yet he strenuously preserved the frontiers of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and won a remarkable victory over Saladin at Mont Gisard, and as long as he lived he was victorious."[165] However, in the non-Frankish eulogies, it seems there is a tendency to expect conflict between Baldwin's disease and his abilities as a leader. Both Imad ad-Din al Isfahani and Sicard of Cremona begin their statements with qualifiers: "in spite of illness" and "although he suffered from leprosy." Illness and leadership are implicitly put in opposition. These qualifiers do not seem to exist as much in the accounts of Baldwin written by his Frankish followers, where nearly always his leprosy is mentioned as a part of his description but not necessarily as a reason for him to be unsuccessful. In these portrayals, Baldwin's leprosy is more often used as a symbol of strength than as a potential impairment; illness and leadership are associated but not in conflict.

Baldwin's success in holding Jerusalem earned him respect from not only

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[164] il [Amaury] laissa un enfant lépreux [Baudouin IV], pauvre être qui traînait un semblant d'existence: sa maladie était incurable, sa guérison désespérée; ses membres s'affaiblirent; son malheur se prolongea. Donc les Francs mirent la couronne sur sa tête; malgré ses infirmités, ils s'attachèrent à lui, l'encouragèrent, profitèrent de lui, tirèrent de sa maladie leur prospérité, s'élevèrent en se servant de lui; satisfaits de l'avoir pour chef, ils l'exaltèrent, le firent chevaucher; ils avancèrent en le conduisant et le mirent en avant; ils étaient soucieux de le maintenir en place, mais ne prêtaient guère attention à sa lepre; et ils le préservaient afin que l'approche de son trépas ne fût pas décrétée. Ils demeura parmi eux dix années environ, monarque obéi, objet de leur sollicitude, veillant à la concorde entre eux." Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani, *La conqûete de la Syrie,* 18-9.

[165] Sicard of Cremona, *Chronicon*, *Patrologia Latina*, 213, col. 512. Quoted in Hamilton, *Leper King*, 244.

William of Tyre and Muslim observers but also from other contemporary European

chroniclers. William of Newburgh gives an account of Baldwin's death that describes

the deterioration of the kingdom that followed Baldwin's death:

> Eo tempore rex Ierosolymorum, mortis beneficio liberatus a lepra, nepoti
> ex sorore, novenni puero, regnum reliquit. Qui cum esset unctus in
> regem, sub tutela comitis Tripolitani pro ætate nutriebatur; rerum vero
> summa penes eundem comitem potissimum esse videbatur. Cum ergo
> res Ierosolymitanæ indies languescerent, atque illud Salomonis,
> "Maledicta terra cujus rex puer est, et cujus principes mane
> comedunt. . ."
>
> (At this time the king of Jerusalem, being delivered from his leprosy by
> the kind hand of death, bequeathed his kingdom to his nephew on his
> sister-side, a boy of nine years old.[166] After he was anointed king he was
> brought up, as his age required, under the guardianship of the count of
> Tripoli, with whom the chief management of everything appeared to rest
> entirely. Therefore, when the affairs of Jerusalem every day declined,
> and the intelligent part of the people were perpetually thinking about
> the saying of Solomon "Woe to that land whose ruler is a child, and
> whose princes eat in the morning"
>
> [Ecclesiastes 10:16]).[167]

Another contemporary of William of Tyre, Roger of Howden (d. 1201-02), who

visited Jerusalem but who was not involved in the conflicts of the region, observed

that Baldwin had achieved great success despite his leprosy, and that many miracles

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[166] Baldwin V was five years old when he was crowned co-king, and seven when he
became sole king of Jerusalem, not nine as Newburgh states here.

[167] William of Newburgh, *Historia Rerum Anglicarum*, Liber Tertius, XII; Stevenson,
The History of English Affairs, Book Three, 12.1.

had been worked during his reign.[168] "This king was a leper and therefore ill-equipped to defend his subjects. All the same, in his time the Lord achieved many things for His people. For unless the Lord guards the city, he who guards it watches in vain'." [169, 170] It is hard to generalize on the basis of just a few statements, but the pattern seems to be that Baldwin's followers saw his leprosy as integral to his kingship, possibly even an asset, while outsiders, whether Christian or Muslim, tended to see more of a conflict.

By the third crusade, Baldwin's reputation had been sealed. In the *Itinerarium Peregrinorum et Gesta Regis Ricardi*, a chronicle of the third crusade, the author writes, "After his father died Baldwin was crowned, although he was underage and suffered from leprosy. With a small force he miraculously defeated Saladin and 60,000 Turks [Battle of Montgisard, 1177]"[171] Later, when Richard is negotiating with Saladin, his goals are delineated by the perameters of Baldwin's kingdom: "So, he [Richard] sent conscientious noblemen to Saladin and his brother Saphadin, demanding the whole kingdom of Syria with all that belonged to it, as the leprous

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[168] *Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Hauedene*, ed. W. Stubbs(4 vols, RS, 1868-71), I, p. 275.

[169] Cf Psalm 127 v.1,

[170] Translation in Edbury, *The Conquest of Jerusalem,* 150.

[171] See Helen J. Nicholson, ed. and trans., and William Stubbs, *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade:a translation of the Itinerarium peregrinorum et gesta Regis Ricardi*. (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 1997), 102.

king had lately held it."[172] Baldwin's reputation for having been able to hold the

kingdom together is passed down through time. Later generations admired 'the

doughty kyng', whose tenacious defense of his beleaguered realm ('neuer in his lyue

he lese a fote of lond') put others to shame.[173, 174]

A French genealogical history roll dating to the mid-fifteenth century gives an

indication of how Baldwin IV was viewed over time.[175] Under the heading *"Cy dit*

par qui la saincte terre de iherusalem fut perdue," is given the narrative: "Amalric's

son Baldwin the Leper now became king. He governed well but was greatly stricken

by leprosy, so that he gave his sister in marriage to 'vng cheuallier de poictou messire

guy de lesignen' to help look after her young son who became king after him at the

age of five."[176] The two characteristics that are passed on through the centuries and

across many languages and countries are that Baldwin was a leper and that he was a

successful ruler. As demonstrated here, by the 15th century, Baldwin's leprosy and

kingship are no longer in opposition, nor are they complementary; instead, they

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[172] Nicholson, *The Chronicle of the Third Crusade*, 272.

[173] *Peter Langtoft's Chronicle*, ed. T. Hearne, (2 vols, Oxford 1725, reprinted 1810),
vol I, 140.

[174] Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 54-5.

[175] MS 100 in the Brotherton Collection of Leeds University Library. Entire MS now
available online at http://ludos.leeds.ac.uk/rights-std.

[176] Oliver Pickering, "Leeds University Library's Genealogical History Roll," *From
Clermont to Jerusalem*, ed. Alan V. Murray (Turhout: Brepols, 1998), 265.

simply co-exist.

Baldwin's popularity in his own time and through history was based on several factors. His success on the battlefield certainly contributed to his renown. However, military victories would not have been enough to garner Baldwin the support he had. For example, Raymond of Tripoli was considered a great military strategist, but he was not trusted sufficiently to be able to rule. Instead, Baldwin was able to inspire the military he led and the people of Jerusalem with other intangible qualities. Baldwin's refusal to submit to his disease must have been seen as analogous to the Latin Kingdom's refusal to admit defeat in the face of enormously disproportionate armies in various battles and, on a larger scale, a kingdom that had become surrounded by powerful enemies. Judging by his determination to be present in circumstances such as the battlefield that must have been extremely difficult for someone as ill as he was, it seems likely that Baldwin was aware of the role he played in the minds and hearts of those he led and did his best to fulfill those expectations.

Baldwin's leprosy also removed him from the sexual politics that contributed to the distrust felt toward his mother, sister and Guy of Lusignan. While Baldwin himself seems rarely to have gone beyond routine gestures of piety, the chastity that resulted from his disease implicitly endowed him with an aura of sexual incorruptibility, especially since he was stricken with it before reaching physical maturity. Given that he first showed symptoms of the illness as a child, the sometimes encountered belief that leprosy was the result of sexual excess could never take hold.

The limits leprosy imposed on him freed him from these kinds of suspicions and allowed him to transcend the sordid rumors and political conniving that brought down many of those around him.

While there were certain exceptions, for example Pope Alexander III, who believed that the king's leprosy reflected moral compromise, in general, Baldwin's illness must have caused him to be viewed as falling into the category of those suffering on Earth because blessed by God. William of Tyre's early presentation of Baldwin in carefully chosen chivalric terms probably also helped shape how people saw his leprosy. Depicted from the start as a trial of endurance, the disease called attention to Baldwin's strengths rather than his weaknesses. As a combination of martyr and knight, he was the perfect leader for Jerusalem.

For all of these reasons, contrary to expectation, it seems possible that Baldwin IV might not have been as effective a ruler as he was had he not also had leprosy. Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani made the observation that "[the Franks] tirèrent de sa maladie leur prospérité" (took from his malady their prosperity).[177] Instead of Baldwin's leprosy becoming a weakness and liability for the kingdom, the Franks transformed their king's malady into a source of strength.

Conclusion:

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[177] Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani, *La conqûete de la Syrie*, 18.

William of Newburgh's responses the *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (*A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*) and *Historia Regum Britannie* (*A History of the Kings of Britain*), admiration for one and condemnation for the other, shows that these chronicles even shortly after they were written were perceived in very different ways despite having similar orientations and agendas. William of Tyre and Geoffrey of Monmouth both demonstrate significant concern in their chronicles with the role of the body in kingship and its relationship to the kingdom. Given that the last successful king of Jerusalem in *History of Deeds* has leprosy, William of Tyre has no choice but to address this issue. Geoffrey of Monmouth's exploration of this relationship is somewhat more optional but is also inevitable given his presumed agenda of secularizing British history. However, this search to define the relationship between the idea of kingship and the physical reality of kings results in very different narratives. Both tell the story of the rise and fall of kingdoms, and both seemingly eschew an Augustinian model of providence in explaining how events come to pass. However, the subjects of their chronicles are ultimately claimed by other narrative structures.

Geoffrey's succession of kings gives rise to a whole new category of literature and characterization in the form of romance. As Robert Hanning writes in his discussion of Geoffrey and twelfth-century history, "the providential view of history was subtly modified to allow a larger role for purely human causation, and to reflect a

lively interest in psychological motivation…."[178] This interest in the interior workings of the mind springs to the forefront in Geoffrey's *Historia regum*, beginning with Uther and continuing through Arthur, and ultimately gives rise to the romances of Chrétien and others in which the emotional and *physical* aspects of characters become central to the story. In contrast, in William of Tyre's chronicle, the physical aspect of kingship begins in the forefront of the narrative but is progressively deemphasized, leading to a work that bears more similarity to a saint's life than to a secular history.

Geoffrey presents King Arthur as the most successful and renown of the British kings. Unlike the kings before him, Arthur rules more through force of personality than through brute strength. Likewise, Baldwin rules successfully more through charisma than any show of physical power. However, everything they each achieve is ultimately undone by their deaths, the ultimate physical assertion, which leads the way to civil fragmentation and, inevitably, the fall of both kingdoms. That their deaths almost immediately result in the destruction of their nations demonstrates the intertwined nature of the kingdom and the king's body; once one fails, the other quickly follows. Geoffrey's work is part of a long succession of texts chronicling the fall of Britain and, interestingly, William of Tyre's account of the fall of Jerusalem closely follows that tradition in style and tone. Geoffrey and William are able to write their narratives outside the constraints of a providential view of history, but the secular framework only changes the interpretation of events, not the events

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[178] Hanning, *A Vision of History in Early Britain*, 126.

themselves. Setting aside a predestined outcome results in a history that is framed by human action but is also limited by physical reality. Even the best of kings cannot overcome the inevitable limits of mortality, and with the king's death comes the fall of the kingdom.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ORFEO AND THE RETURN OF HEURODIS

Introduction.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* and William of Tyre's *History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea* look at one king after another, seeming to search for an exemplar of a king who manages to rule effectively without being betrayed or overruled by his body, whether through death, disease, dismemberment, or simply rash choices. In contrast, the Middle English *Sir Orfeo* focuses on one king in particular, parsing carefully the relationship between the king and the king's body over a set period of time and through a series of metamorphoses and changing environments. Geoffrey of Monmouth, William of Tyre, and other chroniclers like them cover events that occur over decades or longer, but the focus is nonetheless very much on the present moment; they tell of how we got to where we are now, usually by recording sequential historical or quasi-historical events, producing the past for present consumption. Rather than attempt to create a record of the past, real or imagined, the fourteenth century romance *Sir Orfeo* forgoes an identifiable present and reflects not a series of events but rather a sequence of retellings of the same story. Much as Geoffrey's *History of Kings* explores a succession of negotiations between

effective rule and the king's body, each version of the Orpheus myth suggests a new potential relationship with the physical self in the context of kingship.

At the heart of Geoffrey of Monmouth's and William of Tyre's chronicles is the irreconcilability of a stable kingdom and an unstable king. The threats to the kingdom are exterior and interior, often in tandem: incursions on the kingdom from surrounding kingdoms as well as interior chaos mirroring, or gaining momentum from, political conflict and personal ambitions. Threats to the king are likewise from within and without: murderous relations and political foes on the one hand, and corporeal vulnerability on the other. The effect of these assaults is obvious and often inevitable: Jerusalem falls, and likewise so does Britain. *History of the Kings* closes with a portrait of an idyllic Saxon Britain defined by its stability and productivity. This search for a stable and productive kingdom is picked up in romances such as *Sir Orfeo*. *Sir Orfeo* also explores the contrast and conflict between native and foreign kingdoms. In William, this conflict is between the Franks and the Saracens; in Geoffrey, ultimately, the contrast is between the Britons and the Saxons; and in *Sir Orfeo*, it is between Orfeo's familiar seeming kingdom and the otherworldly kingdom of the Fairy King. Dominique Battles argues, often convincingly, that the conflict in *Sir Orfeo* is between Anglo Saxon and French culture, which would be another conflict and contrast between native and foreign kingdoms.[179] But this conflict is not

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[179] Dominique Battles, "Sir Orfeo and English Identity," *Studies in Philology* 107.2 (2010): 179-211.

just about self and other, whether on a national or personal scale; instead, the tension in *Sir Orfeo* is about cultivation, productivity, and how they depend on stability, specifically the stability of the king, both in behavior and corporeal integrity. This particular tension may be intrinsic to the Orpheus myth in all of its many retellings.

The well-known Latin tradition of Orpheus remains relatively consistent through Ovid, Virgil, Boethius, Alfred, and medieval compilations such as the *Ovid Moralisé*: Orpheus and Eurydice marry, Eurydice is stung by a serpent, and Orpheus descends to the underworld to find her.[180] His music charms the monsters guarding the gates, provides reprieve for the souls being tortured, and beguiles Pluto and Persephone such that they return Eurydice to Orpheus. However, Orpheus breaks the one injunction placed on him, which is not to look back until they are safely into the sunlight, and so he loses her a second time. Orpheus mourns the twice-lost Eurydice, wandering afar and refusing to look at another woman ever again. Ultimately, his rejection angers the Thracian women, who tear him to pieces in their fury. The last we see of Orpheus is his head drifting to the sea still lamenting the loss of his beloved

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[180] The *Ovid Moralisé* contains the same story outline but is complicated by offering multiple interpretations and outcomes. Sometimes it is actually a good thing that Orpheus loses Eurydice; other times he seems almost to be successful in bringing her back. Jeff Rider discusses some of the transformations of the Orpheus story in "Receiving Orpheus in the Middle Ages: Allegorization, Remythification and Sir Orfeo," *Papers on Literature & Language* 24 (1988): 343-366. John Block Friedman reviews the medieval commentary on *The Metamorphosis* by Arnulphus of Orleans, Pierre Bersuire, and William of Conches, among others in "Eurydice, Heurodis, and the Noon-Day Demon," *Speculum*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1966): 22-29.

Eurydice. The Orpheus myth seems to be dramatically transformed in *Sir Orfeo*, not least because of the seemingly successful retrieval of Heurodis (the Middle English Eurydice). However, a lesser-known Greek tradition that precedes the Latin version seems to bear a closer relationship to the medieval *Sir Orfeo* than the intervening Latin myth, because it details a successful, or semi-successful, journey to the underworld. The early Greek version and its medieval incarnation are more similar than the line of transmission would lead one to expect. Not only does Heurodis seem to return, but the ambiguity of her return also seems to be inherited from the Greek tradition. This is particularly striking when looking at the Orpheus myth as retold by Euripides and Plato. Consistent in all of these texts – Greek, Latin, Old English, and Middle English – is an intense focus on maintaining corporeal integrity, often unsuccessfully.

2. Cultivation in *Sir Orfeo*

The earliest extant texts that tell a full account of Orpheus are Virgil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[181] However, unlike Ovid, Virgil folds the story of Orpheus and Eurydice into the narrative of Aristaeus, a story that explicitly links

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[181] Of note, W. S. Anderson argues that this material was nonetheless a familiar Greco-Roman myth even before Virgil. See "The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid: flebile nescio quid," in *Orpheus: the Metamorphoses of a Myth,* ed. John Warden, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 27.

transformation and the body.[182] Seeking to find out why his crops have failed and his bees have died, Aristaeus searches out Proteus, the god of rivers and the ocean, who explains to him that the cause of his ill fortune is Orpheus, who has cursed him for bringing about Eurydice's death. While fleeing Aristaeus, Eurydice failed to see the serpent that fatally stung her. In Virgil's text, Proteus is the narrator of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, but when he has finished his narrative, the nymph Cyrene steps in and explains that it is the nymphs who were Eurydice's friends who have caused the death of his bees. She instructs him to offer them gifts and give them homage to gain their pardon. He follows the instructions he is given in exact detail, which includes the sacrifice of cattle whose bodies he leaves lying exposed in a grove of trees. At dawn on the ninth day, Aristaeus returns to the grove and finds that a new swarm of bees has arisen from the carcasses of the cattle he had sacrificed. We do not see Aristaeus' reaction to this strange metamorphosis, but the narrator describes this event as *subitum ac dictu mirabile* ("sudden and wondrous to tell").[183] Sudden and wondrous as it is, the bees arising from the sacrificed cattle is in keeping with Virgil's overall purpose, which is to return a threatened and chaotic landscape to agricultural productivity. Aristaeus and Orpheus start on the same path, with love, or lust, for

[182] For a thorough discussion of the relationship between the Orpheus myth and the rest of the *Georgics*, see Charles Segal, *Orpheus: the Myth of the Poet*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), and Anderson, "The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid," 25-50.

[183] Virgil, *Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid 1-6*, Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935): 235.

Eurydice, but in the end they have very different fates. Aristaeus atones for his actions, but Orpheus, never able to let go of his love for Eurydice, is ultimately torn to pieces. Virgil concludes the Georgics by writing,

> Haec super arvorum cultu pecorumque canebam
> et super arboribus, Caesar dum magnus ad altum
> fulminat Euphraten bello victorque volentis
> per populos dat iura viamque adfectat Olympo.
>
> (Thus I sang of the care of fields, of cattle,
> and of trees, while great Caesar thundered in war by
> deep Euphrates and gave a victor's laws unto willing
> nations, and essayed the path to Heaven.
> (559-561)

There is a parallel victory here: Virgil has not only sung of the care of fields, cattle, and trees but he has also reorganized them, along with the farmers who tend them, into an effective social structure. Octavian, meanwhile, has brought an end to war and has introduced effective rule of his own sort.

As in the *Georgics*, in *Sir Orfeo* it is ultimately the goal of stability and productivity that is in jeopardy and threatens to collapse altogether. These themes of order and disorder, productivity versus calamity, all in the context of an agricultural treatise, are not explicitly inherited by *Sir Orfeo*, but echoes of them remain. This is first apparent in the choice of setting. There is no specific reason why Heurodis should be abducted from an orchard rather than from a forest or meadow, but there are a few possible explanations. Most obviously, it would be indecorous for a courtly lady to be napping in a meadow rather than in an enclosed and private garden. More

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than this, however, is that the orchard in *Sir Orfeo* suggests the themes of cultivation

and productivity. She is not abducted from a forest or meadow out in the wild but

rather from a carefully constructed natural setting. This is emphasized by the presence

of the *ympe* tree. The argument that this tree is related to Virgil's elm of dreams or,

somewhat more convincingly, to Celtic mythology, seems more complicated than

need be, when in fact Virgil discusses grafted trees at length in the same text as his

retelling of the Orpheus myth.[184] The image of grafted trees as a symbol of cultivation

is developed in great detail in the *Georgics*. Virgil writes:

> inseritur vero et fetu nucis arbutus horrida,
> et steriles platani malos gessere valentis;
> castaneae fagus, ornusque incanuit albo
> flore piri, glandemque sues fregere sub ulmis.
> nec modus inserere atque oculos imponere simplex.
> nam qua se medio trudunt de cortice gemmae
> et tenuis rumpunt tunicas, angustus in ipso
> fit nodo sinus; huc aliena ex arbore germen
> includunt udoque docent inolescere libro.
> aut rursum enodes trunci resecantur et alte
> finditur in solidum cuneis via, deinde feraces
> plantae immittuntur: nec longum tempus, et ingens
> exiit ad caelum ramis felicibus arbos,
> miraturque novas frondes et non sua poma.

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[184] See Constance Davies, "Classical Threads in 'Orfeo'," *The Modern Language Review* Vol. 56, No. 2 (Apr., 1961): 165 for discussion of elm of dreams. For a discussion of the *ympe-tre* in terms of fairy lore see, for example, Dean Baldwin, "Fairy Lore and the Meaning of Sir Orfeo," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*. 41 (1977): 129-42. It seems perfectly reasonable that in Sir Orfeo there is a blending of elements from more familiar fairy lore with the more remote and abstract classical inheritance. The confusion over the gender of Juno may be an example of a classical inheritance where some of the details are a bit fuzzy but the sense remains intact.

> (But the rough arbutus is grafted with
> a walnut shoot, and barren planes have oft borne
> hardy apple-boughs; the beech has grown white with
> the chestnut's snowy bloom, the ash with the pear's;
> and swine have crunched acorns beneath the elm.
> Nor is the mode of grafting and of budding
> the same. For where the buds push out from amid the
> bark, and burst their tender sheaths, a narrow slit
> is made just in the knot; in this from an alien tree
> they insert a bud, and teach it to grow into the
> sappy bark. Or, again, knotless boles are cut open,
> and with wedges a path is cleft deep into the core;
> then fruitful slips are let in, and in a little while, lo!
> A mighty tree shoots up skyward with joyous boughs,
> and marvels at its strange leafage and fruits not its own.)

Some have seen Virgil's description of grafting as sinister, but others have seen the

practice as prosaic and commonplace.[185] Dunston Lowe writes that over time

"grafting went from mundane reality to utopian fantasy. This is reflected in responses

to Virgil from Ovid, Columella, Calpurnius, Pliny the Elder, and Palladius…"[186]

While it is hard to claim for certain that the *ympe* tree in *Sir Orfeo* is a direct

descendent of Virgil's grafted trees, it seems to reflect all of the aspects of Virgil's

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[185] For a more chilling interpretation of Virgil's passages on grafting, see Richard F. Thomas, "Tree Violation and Ambivalence in Virgil," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 118 (1988): 261-273.

[186] Dunstan Lowe, "Symbolic Value of Grafting," *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 140, 2 (2010): 461.

trees: practical and productive but ultimately magical and, in this case, perilous. The grafted tree establishes the setting, implying an ideal, calm, and productive kingdom with Heurodis in its center, but it also suggests a theme that runs throughout *Sir Orfeo*: physical ambiguity and transformation. Grafting also stands as a metaphor for the fluidity between Orfeo's kingdom and that of the fairy king and for the mutual dependence between the aristocracy and the serving class.

The *ympe* tree is also an overarching metaphor for the textural grafting that defines *Sir Orfeo*. The sources of Sir Orfeo have been explored and debated at enormous length, but ultimately what is clear is that the 14th century text is grafted onto an opaque but resilient tradition that precedes even the Greek texts we have access to. Given that the *ympe* tree suggests so many of the currents that run through *Sir Orfeo*, it is no surprise that Heurodis is abducted from under its boughs.

When we first see Heurodis, she is strolling in the garden:

> Bifel so in the comessing of May
> When miri and hot is the day,
> And oway beth winter schours,
> And everi feld is ful of flours,
> And blosme breme on everi bough
> Over al wexeth miri anought,
> This ich quen, Dame Heurodis
> Tok to maidens of priis,
> And went in an undrentide
> To play bi an orchardside,
> To se the floures sprede and spring
> And to here the foules sing.
> Thai sett hem doun al thre
> Under a fair ympe-tre,
> And wel sone this fair quene

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> Fel on slepe opon the grene.
> The maidens durst hir nought awake,
> Bot lete hir ligge and rest take.
> So sche slepe til after none,
> That undertide was al y-done.
> (57-76)

The *locus amoenus* is proverbial: spring has arrived, birds are singing, flowers are blooming, winter showers have passed. Very quickly, however, Heurodis is stolen away from this idyllic backdrop. The Fairy King acts almost as a manifestation of fate and the inevitable, a *deus ex machina* to remove her from a setting of spring and fecundity. This abduction from a garden early in the poem foreshadows the conclusion of the text. When Heurodis returns, spring is never again mentioned. Indeed, any mention of seasons is absent, and likewise any allusion to gardens or anything else that suggests renewal or change. She comes back to a sterile urban setting at an indefinite time of the year. Ultimately this absence of references to nature and regeneration may be reflected in Orfeo's appointing of the steward as his successor, with its implicit suggestion that there will be no natural heir of his own to inherit the kingdom. The garden setting of so many romances establishes an expectation of love and, one assumes, eventually marriage and a family. That setting, with all of these connotations, disappears before ever being developed in *Sir Orfeo*.

J. Burke Severs makes a convincing argument that the author of *Sir Orfeo* was significantly influenced by Alfred's telling of the story of Orpheus in his translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. The Old English version has an opening

that is strikingly similar to the opening of *Sir Orfeo*.[187] The lengthy introduction to *Sir Orfeo* that introduces Orfeo, his genealogy, the fairness of Heurodis, and Orfeo's skill at harping is present in Alfred but absent in Virgil, Ovid, and Boethius.[188] After this introduction, Alfred writes:

> Ða ongon mon secgan be ðam hearpere, þaet he meahte hearpian þaet se wudu wagode, and þa stanas hi styredon for ðy swege, ond wildu dior ðaer woldon to irnan ond stondan swilce hi tamu waeren, swa stille, ðeah him men oððe hundas wið eoden, ðaet hi hi na ne onscunedon.[189] (Now men came to say of the harper that he could play the harp so that the forest swayed, and the rocks quivered for the sweet sound, and wild beasts would run up and stand still as if they were tame, so still that men or hounds might come near them, and they fled not.)[190]

Though not a garden, in Alfred's version the emphasis is also on the calming of wilderness, a change from a hostile and uncontrolled setting to a place that is benevolent and inviting. In both *Sir Orfeo* and in Alfred's version of the Orpheus myth, what is at stake is the taming of wilderness through artistry, whether the artistry

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[187] Severs, "The Antecendents of Sir Orfeo", *Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor Albert Croll Baugh*, ed MacEdward Leach (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961): 187-207

[188] See Severs for a detailed line-by-line comparison of these texts, "Antecendents of Sir Orfeo," 190-191.

[189] J. W. Bright, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader* (NY, 1917): 5-7.

[190] W. J. Sedgefield, *King Alfred's Version of the Consolations of Boethius Done into Modern English* (Oxford 1900), 116-18. Quoted in Severs, "Antecendents of Sir Orfeo," 188-189.

of gardening, music, civilization, or all of the above.[191]

Orfeo's time in the wilderness is an extension of Heurodis's lost springtime milieu. He is at the mercy of inhospitable changing seasons, and the precarious bounty they provide:

> In somer he liveth bi wild frut,
> And berien bot gode lite;
> In winter may he nothing finde
> Bot rote, grases, and the rinde.
> (256-60)

This wilderness represents the breakdown of the carefully cultivated environment where we first saw Heurodis.

As if to emphasize Orfeo's changed circumstances, he finds himself playing to an audience of wild animals in the woods rather than knights and ladies in a king's hall. Unlike his own subjects, who seem devoted and wish for Orfeo to stay, this court abandons him as soon as he has stopped playing. Seemingly benevolent but indifferent here, the next mention of wild animals is in Orfeo's report that they have torn the king to pieces.[192, 193]

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[191] If Dominique Battles' argument is correct that *Sir Orfeo* may in fact be about the Norman domination of English identity, then the disappearance of Alfred's verdant English setting may be another symptom of this loss. For a summary of Battles's argument, see "Sir Orfeo and English Identity," 181-2.

[192] See A.S.G. Edwards, *"Marriage, Harping and Kingship: The Unity of Sir Orfeo." American Benedictine Review*, 32.3 (1981): 287 for further discussion of playing to animals as indication of futility of Orfeo's sojourn and indicative of breakdown of social order.

In sum, both Heurodis's and Orfeo's worlds are defined by change or the implication of change. This change sometimes holds the promise of fruitfulness, other times the threat of deprivation, but always there is the vitality that comes with evolving seasons and the sense that Orfeo and Heurodis, at least initially, are living, breathing, struggling beings. In contrast, the fairy kingdom appears static and lifeless. For example, the weather is always fair enough for the king and his retinue to ride out and pretend to hunt. This incomplete gesture towards hunting – they never catch anything – is a clue in and of itself. Death, even for game, would imply change, and one of the most striking things about the fairy kingdom is that it seems not to reflect the effects of time and transition. This may also be why the courtyard figures seem dead but are not. To have them truly dead would imply that they were once alive, thus have undergone a metamorphosis from one state to another.[194] As we will see, this may also be why Heurodis seems immune to change, right down to wearing the same clothes when Orfeo finds her that she was wearing when she was abducted.

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[193] Peter Dronke discusses Orpheus playing to the animals and its link to Christ as shepherd in "The Return of Eurydice," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 23 (1962): 207. See also John Block Friedman for a discussion of how playing to animals supports classical as well as biblical associations, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970): 151-55.

[194] Felicity Riddy also comments on how the courtyard figures are emblematic of the unchanging fairy kingdom, while the seasons reflect the changeability of Orfeo's world. "The Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*." *Yearbook of English Studies* 6 (1976), 5-15.

3. The transformed king.

At risk in *Sir Orfeo* is not just the agricultural milieu of the *Georgics* and the romantic relationship between Orfeo and Heurodis, but also the stability of an entire realm. In the *Georgics*, *The Metamorphoses*, and Boethius, Orpheus is a musician and poet and Eurydice is a nymph, but in *Sir Orfeo* Orfeo and Heurodis are transformed into a royal couple. This change in social position alters the story substantially, because the events between Heurodis and Orfeo are no longer simply personal but instead affect the kingdom as a whole. Marriages and misguided passion have far-reaching national consequences in chronicles, and that is certainly the case in romances as well. In fact, the same disregard of the kingdom's best interests that Uther showed in his pursuit of Igraine is echoed in *Sir Orfeo's* abandonment of his kingdom after the loss of Heurodis. Orfeo's dismissal of the pleas of his court to stay subtly suggests that he is pursuing personal rather than national interests. Arguably, it might have been better for the kingdom as a whole if Orfeo had not abandoned his people to go into the wilderness but instead had found a new queen and raised a family.[195] As will be discussed below, Orfeo's eventual return with Heurodis does not lead to a conventionally stable succession based on patrilineal lineage.

No real explanation is given for why Orfeo abandons his kingdom after

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[195] Additionally, A.S.G. Edwards raises the question of whether a medieval audience would have endorsed such an abdication. *"Marriage, Harping and Kingship,"* 284.

Heurodis's abduction. In the Greek and Latin versions, Orpheus explicitly goes in

search of Eurydice, though sometimes after an interval of mourning. That clarity is

not present in *Sir Orfeo*. It has been suggested that Orfeo feels he can no longer rule

due to his grief, that he feels he must do penance, that he withdraws because he has

been proven ineffective as a king, or as a motif common to Anglo Saxon literature –

but none of these theories is explicitly endorsed by the text.[196] He explains to his

barons, lords, and earls that,

> For now ichave mi quen y-lore
> The fairest levedi that ever was bore
> Never eft y nil no woman se.
> Into wildernes ichil te
> And live ther evermore
> With wilde bestes in holtes hore;
> (209-214).

Orfeo's argument is essentially that he has lost the fairest lady, thus does not want to

see any other woman, and is therefore going off into the wilderness to live evermore

with wild beasts. And, in fact, this was the response of the Orpheus of Virgil and

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[196] For a detailed discussion of Orfeo's exile as penance, see Patrizia Grimaldi, "Sir Orfeo as Celtic Folk-Hero, Christian Pilgrim, and Medieval King" in M. W. Bloomfield ed., *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981): 147-161, and James Knapp, "The Meaning of *Sir Orfeo*," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 29 (1968): 273. See Dominique Battle, "Sir Orfeo and English Identity," 196-204 for discussion of Orfeo's exile as in keeping with Anglo Saxon tradition, and Oren Falk for a discussion of Orfeo's not having any choice but self exile due to his humiliation and failure to keep Heurodis safe and her situation secret in "Son of Orfeo: Kingship and Compromise in a Middle English Romance," *Journal of Medieval & Early Modern Studies*, 30, 2 (2000): 247-274.

Ovid, who forsook all women after losing Eurydice. However, as a king, one of

Orfeo's key responsibilities is to produce an heir and to ensure the stability of the

kingdom. Even more than that, as Edward Kennedy points out, "Although Orfeo

shows some responsibility in having a steward rule in his absence and in telling his

people to have a parliament choose a successor after his death, he nevertheless

ignores the primary responsibility of a king, his obligation to rule."[197] Perhaps Orfeo's

refusal to take a new wife could be justification enough for him to abdicate and make

way for a new royal couple, but he does not quite do so. The sequence of events in the

text makes clear that regaining the kingship follows regaining Heurodis, and if there

is anything in the text that suggests that Orfeo has some hope of regaining Heurodis,

it is that he does not immediately abdicate; the ten-year delay implies that Orfeo

believes there is still the possibility that they will be reunited and he will be king

again.[198]

Orfeo's physical transformation from being a king is a direct response to the

abduction of Heurodis. Orfeo attempts to protect the queen in a fashion one would

expect from a king, specifically by having his knights create a *scheltrom* (shield-wall)

around the Heurodis to protect her from the Fairy King. When this fails, as if to cast

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[197] Edward D. Kennedy, "Sir Orfeo as *Rex Inutilis*," *Annuale Mediaevale* 17 (1976): 93.

[198] As Oren Falk points out, "if he truly does not expect to return, why not settle the delegation of the crown at once and avoid the inevitable turmoil" once ten years has passed or his death has been established, "The Son of Orfeo," 269.

off a role that has failed him, Orfeo eschews being a king at all. He makes this clear

not only in his declaration but also by casting off all the apparel and comforts that

come with that rank:

> Al his kingdom he forsoke;
> Bot a sclavin on him he toke.
> He no hadde kirtel no hode,
> Schert, ne no nother gode,
> Bot his harp he tok algate
> And dede him barfot out atte gate;
> (227-232)

As time passes,

> Al his bodi was oway dwine
> For missays, and al to-chine.
> Lord! who may telle the sore
> This king sufferd ten yere and more?
> His here of his berd, blac and rowe,
> To his girdel-stede was growe.
> (261-266)

Very quickly, Orfeo becomes almost unrecognizable. The detail given in the

description of his transformation emphasizes its significance. The transition from king

to wanderer that was begun when Orfeo discarded his courtly attire, becomes more

intrinsic as his body dwindles away and his beard grows long and coarse. This

metamorphosis can be interpreted in various ways. Most concretely, it reflects

Orfeo's absence from civilization with its reliable meals and scheduled haircuts. But

this transformation also reflects changes that are ultimately useful to Orfeo; by the

time he meets the Fairy King, he looks completely unlike a king and is thus able to

pretend successfully that he is a traveling minstrel. These changes are also indicative

of Orfeo's physical vulnerability and instability. He survives deprivation and the

harsh elements, but at a cost to his health and appearance.[199] That he recognizes with

such surprise that the activities and belongings of the Fairy King are things he once

had reveals that his focus has been so much on survival that knowledge of his identity

has been lost even to himself.

Although it is never stated that Orfeo is going in search of Heurodis, his

regaining her ultimately depends on his abandoning the things that conventionally

define kingship and on leaving the court.[200, 201] It is only because Orfeo goes into the

wilderness that he catches sight of Heurodis; had he stayed at the castle he would not

have seen her and would not have had a chance to follow her. The appearance and

position of a king no longer suit Orfeo's goals. This is not unlike Uther abandoning

his role of king and transforming himself into the likeness of Gorlois in order to gain

admittance to Igraine in Tintagel. Were it not for Orfeo's disguise as a travelling

musician, he would not have been able to gain admission to the Fairy King's castle.

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[199] For a detailed discussion of Orfeo as a holy wild man, see Penelope Doob's
chapter "The Unholy and Holy Wild Man" in *Nebuchadnezzar's children:
Conventions of Madness in Middle English Literature* (New Haven, Yale 1974): 134-
207.

[200] See Kenneth Gros Louis, "Significance of Sir Orfeo's Self-Exile," *Review of
English Studies*, 18 (1967): 245-252.

[201] Seth Lerer writes, "Such a journey enacts the willing isolation of the hero from
society; it helps him come to terms with himself apart from the demands of feudal and
marital life." "Artifice and Artistry in *Sir Orfeo*," *Speculum*, 60 (1985): 98.

This also proves to be an effective role for regaining Heurodis; as a musician he is able to trick the Fairy King into giving her up, while as a king, even with the help of his knights, he was unable to protect and keep her safe. Ultimately, it serves Orfeo's overarching purpose to abandon the role of a king temporarily in order to regain that same position in the future.

Orfeo's worthiness to be with Heurodis, at least in the eyes of the fairy king, is assessed entirely on appearance. He is appalled at Orfeo's request, and asserts that someone so coarse ought not have someone as fine as Heurodis.

> "Nay!" quath the king, "that nought nere!
> A sori couple of you it were,
> For thou art lene, rowe and blac,
> And sche is lovesum, withouten lac;
> A lothlich thing it were, forthi,
> To sen hir in thi compayni."
>   (457-62)

But it is worth noting that the emphasis is not exactly on how awful it would be for them to be together; rather, it is on how awful it would be to *see* them together. Orfeo counters that worse than their seeming unsuitability would be the Fairy King not keeping his word. On the basis of this scene, it could be argued that the poem's agenda includes teasing apart the true nature of kingship: is it based on appearances or behavior or on some yet undefined intrinsic quality? The progression of events suggests that appearances are the most important factor in kingship. His recovery of Heurodis is predicated on his disguise and, rather than truly earning Heurodis's release, he wins her as a favor. As A.S.G. Edwards points out, Orfeo's prowess as a

musician is muted in comparison with his classical antecedents.[202] In contrast to

Orfeo, the Fairy King seems to embody kingship, and this impression is maintained

through this scene.[203] The Fairy King looks like a king, rules over a richly described

realm, has a beautiful queen by his side and, perhaps most significantly, he acts like a

king is supposed to act when he honors his word and returns Heurodis to Orfeo. There

is obviously a certain irony in Orfeo holding the fairy king to a standard of kingly

behavior that arguably he failed to meet when he abandoned his kingdom, but perhaps

his use of this tactic actually serves as a reminder to himself of what kingly behavior

entails. The first thing Orfeo does upon his return is to appoint an heir and, by doing

so, ensures the stability of the kingdom. This action suggests a recognition of

responsibility that he had not acknowledged when he abandoned the kingdom ten

years prior.

3. The silence of Heurodis and Alcestis.

 While Orfeo's transformation from king to vagrant to minstrel to king again is

overtly the focus of the text, Heurodis undergoes an equally striking metamorphosis

over the course of the poem. As with Orfeo, who voluntarily casts off the attire and

accouterments of a king, Heurodis's changed appearance is initially of her own doing,

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[202] Edwards,*"Marriage, Harping and Kingship,"* 288.

[203] See Edwards, *"Marriage, Harping and Kingship"* 288-289, for discussion of the Fairy King as more kingly than Orfeo.

though instigated by her dream of the Fairy King. We are first introduced to Heurodis

as:

> a quen of priis
> That was y-cleped Dame Heurodis,
> The fairest levedi, for the nones,
> That might gon on bodi and bones,
> Ful of love and godenisse -
> Ac no man may telle hir fairnise.
>
> (51-56)

This is a fairly conventional portrait, but it gives us context for the coming scene

when Heurodis expresses her despair by tearing at her face and clothing:

> Ac, as sone as sche gan awake,
> Sche crid, and lothli bere gan make;
> Sche froted hir honden and hir fete,
> And crached hir visage - it bled wete -
> Hir riche robe hye al to-rett
> And was reveyd out of hir wit.
>
> (77-83)

The narrator emphasizes this transformation by describing her through Orfeo's eyes:

> And bi-held, and seyd with grete pité,
> "O lef liif, what is te,
> That ever yete hast ben so stille
> And now gredest wonder schille?
> Thy bodi, that was so white y-core,
> With thine nailes is all to-tore.
> Allas! thy rode, that was so red,
> Is al wan, as thou were ded;
> And also thine fingres smale
> Beth al blodi and al pale.
> Allas! thy lovesum eyyen to

<div align="center">Loketh so man doth on his fo!</div>

<div align="center">(101-112)</div>

Orfeo loses his beautiful wife not when she is abducted but when she destroys the physical qualities he seems to admire most about her. Heurodis does not explain why she tears at her face and clothes. She wakes from a dream and immediately launches into this violent attack on herself. One possibility is that she is has lost her mind.[204] Another possibility is that this is her form of rebellion against the Fairy King. As becomes clear later in the poem, when the Fairy King balks at releasing Heurodis to the coarse and uncouth Orfeo, one of the things he values in Heurodis is her beauty. Whatever the motivation, Heurodis's actions are a gesture towards control over her fate; there is nothing she can do about her imminent abduction – she makes that clear – but she has some control over her own body. The irony of Heurodis's ravaging herself is that the Fairy King's threat was to tear her apart if she failed to appear at the appointed time; in fact, she has already made a good start on realizing this threat on her own.

Heurodis's actions are significant in the overall agenda of the poem. The queen's body is at the center of the text; her position as the presumed bearer of the next ruler of the kingdom effectively makes her a stand-in for the wellbeing of the

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[204] See Doob, *Nebuchadnezzar's Children*, for a detailed discussion on Heurodis's sanity.

realm.[205] Thus, Heurodis's self-destructive anguish presages the attack on the kingdom. The implicit target of the Fairy King's threat is Orfeo, since it is Orfeo's queen he abducts, and by implication, the kingdom.[206] And he succeeds: through the queen's abduction, Orfeo loses the realm. The paradox is that just as the queen executes the Fairy King's threat to tear her apart, it is Orfeo who abdicates the throne and abandons his kingdom. Though at first glance the Fairy King seems to be the danger and the cause for Orfeo and Heurodis losing their domain, in fact Orfeo and Heurodis are active participants in their fates. The agency that Orfeo and Heurodis demonstrate may speak to their choice to prioritize their relationship over the best interests of the kingdom. They are not entirely helpless; they preempt the Fairy King's goal of dissolving the kingdom by giving it away themselves first.

In the greater design of the poem, it is not entirely clear that Heurodis and Orfeo come out ahead. Does Orfeo truly regain Heurodis? It would seem so, and, as Edward Kennedy points out, a happy ending would be in keeping with the romance

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[205] For an examination of a queen's role as mother and the expectation for her to ensure the stability of the realm, see John Carmi Parsons ,"The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood" in *Medieval Mothering*, eds. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996): 39-61. See also *Medieval Queenship* for a collection of wide-ranging essays touching on the role of queen as mother. Ed. John Carmi Parsons (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

[206] Andrea G. Pisani Babich argues that the Fairy King sees Orfeo as a rival. "The Power of the Kingdom and the Ties That Bind in Sir Orfeo" *Neophilologus* 82, 3 (1998): 477-486.

tradition.[207] However, the happy ending presented here is shadowy and unfulfilling.

Sir Orfeo seems to omit the double loss of Heurodis, but perhaps the rescue is in fact

an illusion. It is here that some of the early Greek versions of the story start to cast

shadows over the medieval text. In particular, there are troubling echoes with

Euripides' play *Alcestis* throughout *Sir Orfeo*. The first known mention of Orpheus is

in *Alcestis*, though it seems clear that the story was reasonably familiar before the

play was produced in 438BC.[208] Given that the stories of Alcestis and Orpheus were

so frequently linked in classical literature, it is worthwhile to consider *Sir Orfeo* in the

context of *Alcestis* as well. Euripides's play was not known in the Middle Ages,

though Chaucer makes "Alceste" a queen in *The Legend of Good Women* and, in a

discussion of Griselda, Petrarch writes of Alcestis to Boccaccio in a manner that

suggests that her story was well known to audiences.[209] Nonetheless, there is a link

between *Sir Orfeo* and *Alcestis*, whether an inheritance of nuance, an alternative lost

text, or a parallel evolution: an instance of two literary traditions thinking through the

same problems of sovereignty and mortality and independently arriving at the same

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[207] Kennedy, "Sir Orfeo as *Rex Inutilis*."

[208] C. M. Bowra, "Orpheus and Eurydice," *The Classical Quarterly* 2, 3/4 (1952): 123.

[209] Petrarch writes, "Who is there who would not, for example, regard . . . as pure
fictions; … Portia, or Hypsicratia, or Alcestis, and others like them? But these are
actual historical persons. And indeed I do not see why one who can face death for
another, should not be capable of encountering any trial or form of suffering." From
H. Robinson and E.H. Rolfe, *Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters*.
(New York: G. P. Putnam 1899): 196. http://history.hanover.edu/texts/petrarch.html

conclusion. We think of *Sir Orfeo* as diverging from the Orpheus myth because Orfeo

is successful in regaining Heurodis, but in fact this outcome harkens back to a Greek

tradition used by Euripides where Orpheus does regain Eurydice, or at least seems to.

Orpheus's looking back and losing Eurydice for a second time was a Latin

intervention that was embraced and expanded on in the Middle Ages.[210] In at least one

Greek tradition, the outcome is somewhat different. Admetes says to Alcestis as she

prepares for her death:

> Had I the lips of Orpheus and his melody
> to charm the maiden daughter and
> her lord, and by my singing win you back from death,
> I would have gone beneath the earth, and not the hound
> of Pluto could have stayed me, not the ferryman
> of ghosts, Charon at his oar. I would have brought you back
> to life.[211]
>
>   (357-363)

The implication is that Orpheus's retrieval of Eurydice was successful. However, in

both *Alcestis* and *Sir Orfeo* there is the feeling that things are not quite right, that both

Alcestis and Heurodis only half return from their otherworld sojourns. This is

suggested by the fact that while Heracles seems to succeed in bringing Alcestis back

from the underworld, she never speaks a word after her return. If we are to take

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[210] See Peter Dronke, "The Return of Eurydice," *Classica et Mediaevalia* 23 (1962):
198-215.

[211] Euripides, "Alcestis," in *Euripides: Alcestis, The Medea, The Heracleidae,
Hippolytus*, trans. Richard Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955):
1-53.

Heracles at face value, this is because there is an injunction set by the gods against her speaking for three days. But Heurodis, too, is absolutely silent from the time Orfeo leads her away from the fairy kingdom, and no explanation is offered for her marked silence. In both cases, this absence of speech is striking given how extremely verbal and expressive both women were at the beginning of their respective texts.

What Heurodis's silence does more than anything else, is underscore that the text is most concerned with appearances. Perhaps it does not matter that Heurodis never speaks again; what is important is that she *looks* like the queen. In Euripides' play, Alcestis' identity is deferred, since she is veiled as well as silent. She has the shape of Alcestis, and Heracles swears it is she, but without hearing her voice or seeing her face, any sense of recognition is absent. This emphasis on clothing is present in *Sir Orfeo* as well; in the Fairy King's court, Orfeo does not recognize Heurodis by her face or her speech but instead identifies her by her clothes, returning us to the idea of veils and disguises. For all we know, she could be someone else entirely, but since she is wearing Heurodis's clothing, she will pass for the queen, at least to Orfeo.[212]

John Heath argues that Euridides' play should be read ironically, and that Admetus' allusion to Orpheus refers to his egocentric wish to have Orpheus' skills;

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[212] In making her argument that Heurodis might be a faerie, Grimaldi also notes that it might be significant that Orfeo only recognizes her by her clothes, and that nothing in her subsequent behavior confirms her identity. See Patrizia Grimaldi, "Sir Orfeo as Celtic Folk-Hero, Christian Pilgrim, and Medieval King" in Morton W. Bloomfield, *Allegory, Myth, and Symbol* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 153

the fact that Orpheus fails in his quest is secondary and forgotten.[213] However, that

Admetus would forget how the story of Orpheus and Eurydice ends seems a little

implausible; while certainly Admetus' ego dominates – after all, he asks his wife to

die in his stead! – he is not illiterate or unintelligent. In contrast, C. M. Bowra,

Friedman, Peter Dronke and others have argued unequivocally that there was an

earlier or parallel tradition of Orpheus successfully recovering Eurydice, and that this

is what Admetus is referring to.[214] Plato seems to seize on this uncertainty and the

ambiguous result of Orpheus's trip to the underworld in *The Symposium* when he

writes:

> When she [Alcestis] had gone through with it [dying in the place of
> Admetus] her deed seemed so beautiful, not only to men but to the
> gods, that they granted her the gift which very few of the many who
> have performed numerous noble acts are given: they brought her soul
> back from Hades – they admired her deed so. … But then again, they
> sent Orpheus, the son of Oeagrus, away out of Hades without success.
> They allowed him the shade of the woman for whom he had come but
> did not give *her* up, because he showed himself weak—he played the
> cithera—and lacking in the courage to die for his love, the way Alcestis
> had done, for he contrived to get down to Hades while still alive. It was
> on account of this that they made him suffer the penalty of death at the
> hands of women. [215,216]

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[213] John Heath, "The Failure of Orpheus," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 124 (1994): 174-5.

[214] Peter Dronke, "Return of Eurydice," and John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages,* 164-167.

[215] Plato, *The Symposium of Plato*, trans Suzy W. Groden, ed. John A. Brentlinger (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 1970): 46.

This seems to be a completely different reading of the Orpheus story from Euripides's play, leading Bowra to believe that Plato must be referring to another version of the story.[217] Another possibility might be that Heracles was indeed able to rescue Alcestis' body, but it was for the gods to release her soul. And perhaps this accounts for Alcestis' silence; Heracles has brought back her form, but her spirit has yet to be freed. The mysterious quality of Alcestis' reappearance points to the ambiguity of Eurydice's return. In the case of Heurodis, perhaps the Fairy King allows Orfeo to bring back the image of queen, but her soul is never set free.

The impression that Heurodis can never truly return is supported by the context in which Orfeo sees her in the Fairy King's castle. The figures in the courtyard are thought by some to be a mangled depiction of Hades.[218] With the exception perhaps of the person driven mad, the list in *Sir Orfeo* graphically emphasizes their physical suffering:

> Than he gan bihold about al,
> And seighe liggeand within the wal
> Of folk that were thider y-brought
> And thought dede, and nare nought.

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[216] Interestingly, although Plato has Phaedrus speak quite scathingly in this passage about Orpheus, in *The Apology* Socrates lists Orpheus along with Musaeus, Homer, and Hesiod as people he would like to converse with after death.

[217] Bowra, "Orpheus and Eurydice," 120-21.

[218] Davies, "Classical Threads in 'Orfeo'," 164.

> Sum stode withouten hade,
> And sum non armes nade,
> And sum thurth the bodi hadde wounde,
> And sum lay wode, y-bounde,
> And sum armed on hors sete,
> And sum astrangled as thai ete;
> And sum were in water adreynt,
> And sum with fire al forschreynt.
> Wives ther lay on childe bedde,
> Sum ded and sum awedde,
> And wonder fele ther lay bisides
> Right as thai slepe her undertides;
> Eche was thus in this warld y-nome,
> With fairi thider y-come.
>
> <div style="text-align:center">(389-406)</div>

This is a confusing moment, for although these figures are described as "And thought dede, and nare nought," they certainly seem to have injuries that would lead to their deaths. Dorena Allen sees this scene as decisive proof that what some readers perceive as death in *Sir Orfeo* is in fact the state of being "taken" by fairies.[219] This may be a more complicated explanation than is necessary; it could simply be that, just as in classical literature, the dead do not really have the reprieve of death. The description of these figures in some sort of limbo is followed by Orfeo's sighting of Heurodis:

> Ther he seighe his owhen wiif,

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[219] See "The Dead and the Taken" for Dorena Allen's discussion of the courtyard scene *Medium Ævum*, 33 (1964): 103-5. One difficulty with her analysis is that she also argues that a changling is left in place of the taken person; in *Sir Orfeo*, no one takes Heurodis's place

> Dame Heurodis, his lef liif,
> Slepe under an ympe-tre -
> Bi her clothes he knewe that it was he.
>
> (407-10)

Since all these other figures are described in the context of seemingly fatal

circumstances, for Heurodis to be described as asleep under the *ympe* tree suggests

that that her dozing off that afternoon under that tree was as perilous as battle or

childbirth.[220] Given that no one can return from death in the many instances listed,

why should we expect that Heurodis can truly return from that undiscovered

country?[221]

4. The king and the steward.

One of Alcestis' conditions for sacrificing herself was that Admetus not

marry; thus her self-sacrifice and intended death essentially put Admetus in the same

position as Orfeo is in when he vows never to look at another woman. However, a

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[220] C. R. H Jersa also sees the discovery of Heurodis under the *ympe* tree in the courtyard as suggestive of its danger, "In the Shadow of the *Ympe-Tre*: Arboreal Folklore in Sir Orfeo," *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature* 89.2 (2008): 148.

[221] Anne Marie D'Arcy discusses the scene in the courtyard in terms of statuary in "The Faerie King's Kunstkammer: Imperial Discourse and the Wondrous in Sir Orfeo," *Review of English Studies*, 58, 233 (2007): 10, and, in a striking coincidence, Mary Stieber writes that Alcestis should be considered in the light of contemporary statuary when she returns from the dead, "Statuary in Euripides' "Alcestis," *Arion*, Third Series, 5, 3 (1998): 69-97.

significant point of divergence is that Alcestis and Admetus already have children

while Orfeo and Heurodis do not. Heurodis's importance cannot simply be reduced to

childbearing, but the fate of the kingdom is very much an issue in *Sir Orfeo*. When

Orfeo goes into the wilderness, he directs the steward to take charge of the kingdom,

and instructs that if he does not return after ten years, they should choose a new king.

If Orfeo had never left, if Heurodis had never been abducted, it could be assumed that

they would have children, one of whom would inherit the kingdom. However, when

Orfeo and Heurodis do return, this implicit expectation seems to have been

abandoned. One of Orfeo's first actions is to make the steward his heir, as if he knows

that he and Heurodis will never have a family. The Scottish version of *Sir Orfeo*, *King

Orphius*, attempts to reconcile this unexpected line of succession by making the

steward the king's nephew. *King Orphius* and *Sir Orfeo* may share a common

antecedent, the *Lai d'Orphey*.[222] This raises the possibility that if the Scottish version

is not trying to correct an irregular succession, then the author of *Sir Orfeo* has

intentionally made the handing off the kingdom to the steward a provocative gesture.

　　The question of succession has social as well as political significance.

Returning to the image of the *ympe* tree, *Sir Orfeo* concludes with the grafting of the

aristocracy and the populace. Generally speaking, grafting trees involves growing a

desirable but fragile or unproductive bough onto a stronger or more productive plant.

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[222] See Felicity Riddy for a discussion of nephew in the Scottish *King Orphius* and
their possible common antecedent, "Uses of the Past in *Sir Orfeo*," *Yearbook of
English Studies* 6 (1976): 7-8.

Sometimes this works, but sometimes the rootstock takes over. In the case of *Sir Orfeo*, the hardier plant is the steward. Heurodis is retrieved, at least in some measure, but then she is set aside.[223] She loses her voice while the steward gains his. Elliot Kendall sees the succession of the steward as indicative of a change in social structure, and this may be an example of that shift.[224] He writes, "… if spousal relationships and their genealogical potential cannot be protected, they should be superseded in political reintegration by something less dangerous, for which the poem offers the service relationship."[225] In this light, Heurodis, and perhaps the aristocracy in general, is grafted onto the sturdier serving class, but ultimately the latter usurps the former.

For all intents and purposes, the outcome of the story in terms of the steward and the kingdom is essentially unaffected by the return of Heurodis (and perhaps even the return of Orfeo). To some degree, who is king does not matter. In 1561, the the case William v. Berkely, Justice Southcote wrote:

> The King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is
> a Body natural… and in this he is subject to Passions and Death as

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[223] Elliot Kendall notes that Heurodis is "marginalized, not rejected." "Family, Familia, and the Uncanny in Sir Orfeo," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, vol. 35, (2013): 293.

[224] "Family, Familia, and the Uncanny," 304.

[225] Kendall sees the succession of the steward as indicative of a change in social structure, and interprets this "happy ending" as anti-patrilineal; the family is decentered and lineage is excluded from the royal succession. "Family, Familia, and the Uncanny," 289-90.

other Med are; the other is a Body politic.... and this Body is not
subject to Passions as the other is, nor to Death, for as to this Body the
King never dies…. but that there is a Separation of the two Bodies, and
that the Body politic is transferred and conveyed over from the Body
natural now dead, or now removed from the Dignity royal, to another
Body natural.[226]

Thus, as long as there is a physical king, any king, the kingship goes on. Since the

mortal body of the king is secondary to the royal body, what happens to the king

himself does not really matter to the kingdom. There is also the suggestion that

appearances are what really make a king: Orfeo casts off the attire of a king when he

goes into the wilderness, but when he returns, before taking up the kingship again, he

is transformed again. It is worth noting that the very first thing that happens after the

steward declares that Orfeo is king is that he hurries to make Orfeo look the part.

> "Ye beth our lord, sir, and our king!"
> Glad thai were of his live;
> To chaumber thai ladde him als belive
> And bathed him and schaved his berd,
> And tired him as a king apert;
> And sethen, with gret processioun,
> Thai brought the quen into the toun
> With al maner menstraci-
>   (582-589)

The intervening years of hardship in the wilderness are washed and trimmed away in

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[226] Edmund Plowden, *Commentaries or Reports* (London, 1816), quoted in Ernst
Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*.
(Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957): 13.

a matter of hours. One implication of this easy metamorphosis is that all it will really take for the steward to become king is for him to dress the part. Whether or not Heurodis had been rescued, and despite the lack of a natural heir, the kingship is saved – not by Orfeo, but by the people. Orfeo is made king again not by his own agency but by the performative declaration of the steward – "Ye beth our lord, sir, and our king!" (582). The poem implies that only a subject's loyalty can truly create a king.[227] This may be the most critical moment in the text, for it attests to the dependency and bond between a king and his subject. This scene foregrounds that the kingship is based on the consent and support of his people.

Perhaps this eventual displacement of the aristocracy, at least in terms of Orfeo's familial line, lies behind the fiction Orfeo tells his steward about his own death. Orfeo assigns himself the fate that Heurodis was threatened with, being torn to pieces, but in his case by wolves and lions rather than by the Fairy King. This story of dismemberment seems to speak back to the Latin Orpheus myth, with Orpheus being torn to pieces by the Thracian women. Latin Orpheus was attacked for refusing to remarry, but the Middle English King Orfeo, making the same choice not to remarry, suffers only the fiction of this brutal fate. But this choice of deaths, even if only a fiction, is interesting for the way that it plays into the overarching themes in *Sir Orfeo*. One implication is that the idea of kingship has been torn apart, but by Orfeo himself. In light of Kantorowitz's paradigm of the king's two bodies, it could be said

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[227] Chris Chism made this observation in conversation, Feb 12, 2015.

that Orfeo abandons his sovereign body to grieve and ultimately regain Heurodis in his natural, mortal body. When that grief is assuaged, he reunites the king's two bodies, at least for the time being.

While *Sir Orfeo* seems to be a romance concerned with a king's quest to regain his abducted queen, it is actually a political poem about appearances and language. Early in the poem is Orfeo's lament at the loss of his beautiful wife, first at her own hands, and then through the fairy king's abduction. Orfeo seems to be successful in retrieving her, in that by abandoning the persona of a king and the institutions of kingship – by becoming wholly mortal and transformable, he is able at least to appear to rescue Heurodis from the fairy kingdom. However, if there is a true Heurodis, a person behind the appearance, she seems lost forever; what Orfeo rescues is a voiceless figure in the clothes of a queen. Her spirit, and along with it the kingdom, never returns with the promise they once held. And by choosing this ghostly wife rather than finding another, Orfeo makes his temporary abandonment of the kingdom and his people permanent; the steward instead of his own descendants will rule after his death. What cannot be recovered is the promising setting at the opening of *Sir Orfeo*. Instead of a garden, there is a town, and instead of a child, there is the steward. This movement away from possibility and abundance to a static sterility is mirrored in the transitions from springtime to tempestuous seasons to an unchanging magical landscape to an urban setting devoid of any reference to nature. The *ympe* tree, with its implications of contrivance and dependency, ultimately proves

to be a metaphor for the aristocracy and its subjects, with the aristocracy ultimately depending on the strength and support of the people they rule over. The internal threat of political upheaval is mirrored by the exterior menace of the Fairy King. However, the conflict between the Fairy King and Orfeo is never truly settled. Even though Orfeo seems to best him in their contest, there is no guarantee at all that the Fairy King will not return again to Orfeo's kingdom and wreak havoc once more should he choose to do so. Perhaps an implication of the scene in the Fairy King's castle is that Orfeo can be more successful with the use of artistry than with a show of strength; he loses Heurodis when he attempts to protect her with the shield-wall, but wins her back through music and the guise of a minstral. But it is a hollow victory, because the Heurodis Orfeo regains is not the Heurodis he lost. Ultimately, Virgil's text may throw the best light on how to interpret the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*. Virgil's ambivalence about the outcome of Book IV of the *Georgics* is palpable as he tells the story of Aristeaus, Orpheus, and Eurydice. On the one hand, he describes in glowing terms the industriousness of the bees and of farming, and Aristeaus is rewarded for doing penance for his pursuit of Eurydice. And yet, even though Virgil's message seems to be that we must follow the example of Aristeaus, and forsake individual desire for the good of all, his sympathy for Orpheus and his plight is clear. Though Orpheus is never able to set aside his own desires, even when they cost him Eurydice, his story seems intended to win our sympathy. Likewise, in the Middle English *Sir Orfeo*, our sympathy is with Orfeo, even though he puts his own desires before the

good of the kingdom. But in the end, despite the efforts of Orpheus in his many guises

through centuries of literature, whether successful or not in rescuing the presumably

dead, he is always torn apart by forces far beyond his control.

EPILOGUE

Early depictions of Richard III in the late fourteenth century did not show that he had quite pronounced scoliosis, and most reports do not mention any physical differences between him and other men. There are exceptions, of course, but the attitude towards his physical appearance seems to have been largely one of indifference. However, by the time we get to Shakespeare's play *Richard III* in 1592, this bodily difference has acquired sinister overtones and has become a metaphor for his perceived evil character. What changed views of impairment between the medieval period and the Renaissance is beyond the purview of this project, but it is worth noting that in 1592, and certainly in 2015, it would be inconceivable to have a leader who has leprosy or many frequently seen impairments. Fortunately for people in the Middle Ages, the appearance, health, or mobility of their rulers was of lesser importance; what mattered was whether or not they were good leaders. This is not to say that the body was not a concern in the Middle Ages, but rather that it had a different meaning than it does now or did in the Renaissance. In all of the texts examined in this project, the king's body does have symbolic value, but usually it reflects the state of the kingdom instead of the character of the king.

In *Beowulf* we see a recognizable and unresolvable concern with age and the loss of physical power it entails. In a heroic society, there is no solution to this problem; given the demands of kingship, once the king is no longer strong enough to fight his adversaries, whether enemy tribes at the borders or a dragon who has been disturbed by a runaway slave, his reign is over. The arc from a strong hero to a vulnerable king is vividly explored through a series of encounters with monsters --- Grendel, Grendel's mother, and finally the dragon. The confrontations with Grendel and his mother emphasize the value placed on strength, while linked stories to Sigemund and other heroic figures serve both to celebrate Beowulf's accomplishments and to warn of the perils of relying on physical power. The strength Beowulf finds by drawing on berserker or the less human aspects of himself must be put aside to be king, and it is as an all-too-human king that Beowulf must face the dragon. As Beowulf is confronted with the inevitability of his own death, he searches for ways to mitigate the loss for his people; his concern is not for himself but for those who look to him for protection and leadership. The solutions he finds – treasure for his people, a monument to warn off invaders, a valiant kinsman to succeed him – are efforts we see in many of the subsequent texts in this project.

In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanneae* (*The History of the Kings of Britain*) we do not see the same arc as we saw in Beowulf, where we follow one king from youth to old age. Instead we see king after king in what almost seems to be a desperate search for a model for effective rule. In Brutus and Vortigern we see

the inheritance of a heroic model of kingship where conquest and physical strength determine leadership. The killing of the native giants and the joy taken in their extermination is the first warning that the British are on a path to self destruction. With the arrival of Uther, there is a shift in focus as a king who is not physically powerful proves to inspire more loyalty and devotion from his people than any of the powerful kings who preceded him. Suddenly love for their king is found to be as strong as physical might in fighting off the enemy. Unfortunately, Uther's illness is ultimately a metaphor for the disease affecting the island of Britain, which is the Saxon invaders and internal strife. As the Saxons encroach on the borders of Britain, the king sickens and dies. King Arthur, Uther's son, is able to fight off the Saxons and to restore Britain for a short time to a pristine state that starts to be defined by chivalry rather than war. However, provoked by Roman emissaries and his own knights, Arthur returns to a leadership path based on warfare, and thus once again sets Britain on a ruinous course. Arthur's ambiguous death reflects that moment of hope, when Britain could have become a different sort of place where Arthur would be king and Britain would be at peace. Instead, the crown passes to Constantine and ultimately to Cadwallo. In contrast to Uther's drawing strength from his people and from fighting off the enemy Saxons, Cadwallo's health is restored by eating the flesh of his nephew, albeit unbeknownst to him. Not unlike Beowulf, or Vortimer earlier in the *History of the* Kings, there is an attempt to extend the power of the king past death through the creation of a monument. The monument for Cadwallo contains the body

of the king. The most promising reading is to consider Cadwallo's body in the same light as a saint's, where the body is capable of miracles, perhaps even fighting off the Saxons. Read another way, the monument contains a dead body reflecting the internal strife of the Britains. Ultimately, the island of Britain itself becomes so diseased as a reflection of the British propensity to war, that in the ultimate reversal, it is the Saxons who restore it to health. Geoffrey's *History of the Kings* gives a glimpse of effective kingship in the form of Uther and Arthur, but then closes off that possibility.

In Geoffrey's chronicle, the illnesses of King Uther reflect the illness of the country, but there is no sense that the king is any less effective a ruler than were he healthy. In fact, the Saxons learn a harsh lesson when they underestimate him on the basis of his physical strength. In William of Tyre's *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (*History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea)* we also have a sick king, and again there is little sense that this undermines his ability to lead. Baldwin IV became king of Jerusalem at least in part because there were no good alternatives. At the same time, it was very likely known that he had leprosy, but this does not seem to have been a deterrent. In fact, there is some suggestion that his disease enhanced his ability to rule. Certainly, his fortitude in leading his people despite being seriously ill earned the admiration of future readers and historians. Baldwin's illness also becomes a metaphor, representing to some critics the diseased state of the kingdom. At the same time, supporters of Jerusalem saw Baldwin's valiant leadership as a mirror for the efforts of the kingdom to survive. Like Uther, Baldwin had the love of his people

and inspired them on the battlefield despite the almost certain difficulty and pain he suffered to be there. Even more than Uther, since Baldwin was a real and well-attested leader, Baldwin proved that at least in the Middle Ages bodily difference could be set aside in the interest of effective leadership.

In Beowulf, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, and *History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, we have kings who set the interests of their people before their own personal agendas. In *Sir Orfeo* we have a king who puts his own desires before the needs of his people. Closely followed by Uther, Orfeo is perhaps the most mutable of the kings in this study. He transforms himself from a king into a wild man, and from a wild man into a musician, and from a musician back into a king. The queen, Heurodis, is perhaps not so lucky; once abducted by the Fairy King, she seems never to regain her former self. She looks the same, but loses the power of speech and the aura of springtime and cultivation that might once have led to an heir. Orfeo makes the steward his heir, and perhaps one of the conclusions in this study of kingship is that the aristocracy will always be unsuccessful, whether because of heroic expectations, as in Beowulf, or internal strife, as in *History of the Kings*, or death, as in *Deeds Done Beyond the Sea;* perhaps the solution is to turn to the serving class, as in the steward in Sir Orfeo.

One vulnerability seen again and again is the failure of successful kings to have children and thus direct heirs to the throne. This is not always the case; Uther had Arthur, though Arthur then had no direct heir of his own. There is a solution,

however, which is to find among subjects or more distant kin someone capable of taking over the kingship. In the case of Beowulf and Wiglaf, and Orfeo and the steward, that individual is tested in some way and found worthy. This is one of the most redemptive aspects of medieval kingship in these texts; the solution to the death of a king and to the unreliability of inheritance through direct lineage, is to find a valiant or trustworthy person to take his place. And more often than not, this proves to be possible.

In contrast, one vulnerability that is *not* seen is that having a king with an impairment or illness is a detriment to good rule, other than because of the mortality it might bring. Some of the best kings are the most impaired, for example Uther and Baldwin. It seems that society now disables rulers who might actually have an impairment that is irrelevant to leadership. This is a loss, for while we do not need leaders who rule by physical domination, we do need leaders who inspire us, and we might be excluding individuals with great potential simply on the basis of their appearance or health.

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