

blowing horns. This was seen and heard from the time he came here all that Lent up to Easter. This was his arrival. Of his departure we cannot yet speak. May God provide!

[THE REIGN OF KING STEPHEN]

[1135] In [King Stephen's] time all was warfare, wickedness, and robbery, for right away all the powerful men who were traitors rose up against him⁵
 * * * [1137] When the traitors discovered that he was a mild man, and gentle and good, and did not enforce justice they committed every sort of atrocity. They had done homage to him and sworn oaths, but they kept no faith. They were all forsown and broke their oaths, for every powerful man built castles and held them against him. And they filled the land full of castles.

They oppressed the wretched people greatly with forced labor on castle works. When the castles were built, they filled them with devils and evil men. Night and day they seized anyone who they thought possessed any wealth (both men and women), and put them in prison, and tortured them with unspeakable tortures to get their gold and silver. For never were any martyrs so tortured as these were. They were hung up by the feet and smoked with foul smoke. They were hung up by the thumbs or by the head with armor attached to the feet. Knotted cords were tied around their heads and twisted till they cut into the brain. They were incarcerated with adders, snakes, and toads and killed in that way. Some were put into a torture box—that is, in a chest that was short, narrow, and shallow—into which they put sharp stones, and pressed the man in it so that all his limbs were broken. Many of the castles had a “strangle-trap”: that was a device made up of chains so heavy that it was all two or three men could do to carry one of them. It worked like this—they fitted a sharp iron, which was fastened to a beam, around a man’s throat and neck so that he could not move in any direction, nor sit, nor lie down, nor sleep but had to bear up all that iron. Many thousands they starved to death.

I do not know how nor would it be possible to tell all the atrocities and tortures they inflicted upon the wretched people of this land. And that lasted nineteen winters for as long as Stephen was king. And the whole time it went from bad to worse. They were constantly making the villages pay taxes, which they called “protection money.” When the wretched people had nothing more to give, they pillaged and burned all the villages so that you could easily do a day’s journey without ever seeing an inhabitant in a village or land under cultivation. Then grain was expensive, and meat and cheese and butter, for there was none in the land. Wretched people starved to death. Some, who had once been wealthy, went begging. Some fled the country. Never before in the land had there been more misery, nor did ever heathens do worse things than they did.

Contrary to civilized behavior, they spared neither church nor churchyard but took all the valuables therein and then burned church and all together. They did not spare bishop’s land, nor abbot’s nor priest’s, but robbed monks and clerics, and every man robbed the other if he was the stronger. If two or

5. Though dated the year of Stephen’s accession, these entries, which later refer to the entire reign of nineteen years, were written after 1154. In fact, Stephen at first had considerable support from the

three men rode into a village, the entire village would flee them because they thought they were robbers. The bishops and clergy kept excommunicating them, but they did not care about that since they were all totally accursed, perjured, and abandoned.

Wherever the ground was tilled, the earth bore no grain, for the land was ruined by such acts. It was openly said that Christ and his saints were asleep. Such things—and more than we can tell—we suffered nineteen winters for our sins.

LEGENDARY HISTORIES OF BRITAIN

During the twelfth century, three authors, who wrote in Latin, Anglo-Norman French, and Middle English, respectively, created a mostly legendary history of Britain for their Norman overlords (see pp. 7–8). This “history” was set in the remote past, beginning with a foundation myth—a heroic account of national origins—modeled on Virgil’s *Aeneid* and ending with the Anglo-Saxon conquest of the native islanders, the Britons, in the fifth and sixth centuries. The chief architect of the history is Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was writing his *History of the Kings of Britain* in Latin prose ca. 1136–38. His work was freely translated into French verse by Wace in 1155, and Wace in turn was translated into English alliterative poetry by Layamon.

Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace wrote their histories of Britain primarily for an audience of noblemen and prelates who were descendants of the Norman conquerors of the Anglo-Saxons. Geoffrey wrote several dedications of his *History*, first to supporters of Matilda, the heiress presumptive of Henry I, and, when the Crown went instead to Stephen of Blois, to the new king’s allies and to Stephen himself. Layamon tells us that Wace wrote his French version for Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen of Stephen’s successor, Henry II. The prestige and power of ancient Rome still dominated the historical and political imagination of the feudal aristocracy, and the legendary history of the ancient kings of the Britons, especially of King Arthur, who had defeated Rome itself, served to flatter the self-image and ambitions of the Anglo-Norman barons. Perhaps the destruction of Arthur’s kingdom also provided a timely object lesson of the disastrous consequences of civil wars such as those over the English succession in which these lords were engaged.

The selections from Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace are translated by Alfred David. The Layamon selections are translated by Rosamund Allen.

GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH

The author of the *History of the Kings of Britain* was a churchman, probably of Welsh or Breton ancestry, who spent much of his life at Oxford. One of his motives in writing the work was undoubtedly to obtain advancement in the church. In the dedications of the *History*, Geoffrey claims that it is merely a translation into Latin of “a very old book in the British language [i.e., Welsh],” which had been loaned to him by his friend Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, but scholars have discounted this story as another one of Geoffrey’s many fictions.

Geoffrey began his history with a British foundation myth modeled upon Virgil’s

Aeneid. Out of legends that Rome had been founded by refugees from the fall of Troy, the poet Virgil had created his epic poem the *Aeneid* for Augustus Caesar. Aeneas, carrying his father upon his back, had escaped from the ruins of Troy and, fulfilling prophecies, became the founding father of a new Troy in Italy. The Britons had developed an analogous foundation myth in which a great-grandson of Aeneas called Brutus had led another band of Trojan exiles to establish another Troy, which was named Britain after him. Geoffrey drew upon earlier Latin chronicles and Welsh oral tradition, but he himself provided his history with a chronology, a genealogy, a large cast of both historical and legendary characters (among many other stories, he is the first to tell of King Lear and his daughters), and a cyclical sense of the rise and fall of empires. The longest and most original part of the work (over one-fifth of the *History*) is devoted to the birth and reign of King Arthur. In the first part of Arthur's reign, he defeats and drives out the pagan Anglo-Saxon invaders. At the end of his reign the Saxons return at the invitation of the traitor Mordred and, though defeated again by Arthur in his last battle, they ultimately triumph over his successors.

The historicity of Geoffrey's book, although questioned by some of Geoffrey's contemporary historians, was widely accepted and not fully discredited until the seventeenth century. In the course of time Arthur was adopted as a national and cultural hero by the English against whose ancestors he had fought, and his court became the international ideal of a splendid chivalric order in the past of which contemporary knighthood was only a faint imitation. Geoffrey of Monmouth himself already declares that in Arthur's time, "Womenfolk became chaste and more virtuous and for their love the knights were ever more daring."

In the following selections, Geoffrey relates the British foundation myth, which he historicizes, amplifies, and fleshes out with details that he regards as classical.

From The History of the Kings of Britain

[THE STORY OF BRUTUS AND DIANA'S PROPHECY]

After the Trojan War, Aeneas with his son Ascanius fled from the destruction of the city and sailed to Italy. Although King Latinus would have received him there with honor, Turnus, the king of the Rutuli, was envious and made war on him. In their rivalry Aeneas prevailed and, having slain Turnus, obtained the kingdom of Italy and Latinus's daughter, Lavinia.

At the end of Aeneas's days, Ascanius was elevated to royal power and founded the city of Alba on the banks of the Tiber. He fathered a son whose name was Silvius. The latter had a secret love affair with a niece of Lavinia's whom he married and got with child. When his father Ascanius learned about this he ordered his wise men to find out the sex of the child that the girl had conceived. When the wise men had made sure of the truth, they said that she would bear a son who would be the death of his father and mother. After travelling through many lands as an exile, he would nevertheless attain to the highest honor. Their prophecies did not turn out to be mistaken. For when her time had come, the woman bore a boy and died in childbirth. The boy was handed over to the midwife and named Brutus. At last, after fifteen years had gone by, the boy went hunting with his father and killed him with a misdirected bowshot. For as the servants were driving some stags into their path, Brutus, believing that he was aiming at them, hit his father below the breast. On account of this death, his relatives, outraged that he should have done such a deed, drove him from Italy.* * *

[The exiled Brutus travels to Greece, where he discovers descendants of Trojan prisoners of war living in slavery. He organizes a successful rebellion against their Greek masters and, like Aeneas before him, leads them on a quest for a new homeland.]

Driven by favorable winds, the Trojans sailed for two days and one night until they made land on an island called Leogetia, which was uninhabited because long ago it had been devastated by pirate raids. So Brutus sent three hundred armed men to explore the island and see whether anything was living on it. They found no one but they killed several kinds of wild animals that they came across in the woods and thickets.

They came to a deserted city where they found a temple of Diana in which a statue of the goddess rendered oracles if someone should consult it. At last they returned to their ships, loaded down with game, and told their comrades about the land and the city. They suggested to their chief that he go to the temple and, after making propitiatory sacrifices, inquire of the goddess what land might afford them a permanent home. When everyone agreed, Brutus with the soothsayer Gero and twelve elders set out for the temple, taking along everything necessary for the sacrifice. When they got there, they bound their brows with headbands and, in preparation of the most ancient rite, they erected three hearths to three gods, namely to Jupiter, Mercury, and Diana. They poured out libations to each one in turn. Before the altar of the goddess, Brutus himself, holding a sacrificial vessel filled with wine and the blood of a white doe in his right hand, raised his face to her statue and broke the silence with these words:¹

Mighty goddess of woodlands, terror of the wild boar,
Thou who art free to traverse the ethereal heavens
And the mansions of hell, disclose my rights on this earth
And say what lands it is your wish for us to inhabit,
What dwelling-place where I shall worship you all my life,
Where I shall dedicate temples to you with virgin choirs.

After he had spoken this prayer nine times, he walked four times around the altar and poured out the wine he was holding upon the hearth. Then he spread out the hide of the doe before the altar and lay down on it. He tried to doze off and finally fell asleep. It was now the third hour of the night when sweetest slumber overcomes mortals. Then it seemed to him that the goddess was standing before him and speaking to him like this:

Brutus, where the sun sets beyond the kingdoms of Gaul
Is an isle in the ocean, closed all around by the sea.
Once on a time giants lived on that isle in the ocean,
But now it stands empty and fit to receive your people.
Seek it out, for it shall be your homeland forever;
It shall be a second Troy for your descendants.
There kings shall be born of your seed and to them
All nations of the round earth shall be subject.

When the vision vanished, Brutus remained in doubt whether what he had seen was only a phantom or whether the actual voice of the goddess had

1. Brutus's prayer and Diana's prophecy are written as Latin poetry and employ a more formal diction than the prose narrative. The entire episode is meant to show off Geoffrey's classical learning and familiarity with pagan ritual.

foretold the homeland to which he was to travel. Finally he called his comrades and told them point by point what had happened to him while he slept. Waves of great joy swept over them, and they urged that they return to the ships and, while the wind blew behind them, head with swiftest sail toward the ocean to seek out what the goddess had promised. Without delay they rejoined their comrades and set out on the high seas.

WACE

Wace (ca. 1110-ca. 1180) was a Norman cleric, born on the island of Jersey in the English Channel, which was then part of the dukedom of Normandy. Although educated for the church, he seems to have served the laity, perhaps in a secretarial function. All of his extant works, which include saints' lives, *Le Roman de Brut*, and *Le Roman de Rou*, were written in French verse for a lay audience that would have included women like Eleanor of Aquitaine, to whom he dedicated the *Brut*, and Marie de France, who drew on that work in her lays. *Roman* in these titles refers to the fact that they are, respectively, chronicles in French verse about the dynasties of Brutus (first of the kings of Britain) and Rollo (first of the dukes of Normandy).

The *Roman de Brut* is a very free translation in eight-syllable couplets of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin prose *History of the Kings of Britain*. Wace has cut some details and added a good deal, including the first mention of the Round Table. He is far more interested than Geoffrey in creating an atmosphere of courtliness—in the way his characters dress, think, speak, and behave. The following selection covers a challenge delivered to Arthur by the Roman emperor Lucius and Arthur's response. This climactic sequence follows an elaborate coronation scene attended by a large gathering of kings and dukes from Britain and overseas who owe allegiance to Arthur and whose lands comprise what might be called the Arthurian Empire. At the feast following his coronation, Arthur's authority is challenged by ambassadors who present an insulting letter from Lucius. Arthur's reply is a masterpiece of feudal rhetoric that would have been admired by Wace's audience.

From Le Roman de Brut

[THE ROMAN CHALLENGE]

Arthur was seated on a dais surrounded by counts and kings when a dozen white-haired, very well-dressed men came into the hall in pairs, one holding the other's hand. Each held an olive branch. They crossed the hall very slowly in an orderly and solemn procession, approached the king and hailed him. They said they had come from Rome as messengers. They unfolded a letter, which one of them gave to Arthur on behalf of the Roman emperor. Listen to what it said:

"Lucius who holds Rome in his domain and is sovereign lord of the Romans, proclaims to King Arthur, his enemy, what he has deserved. I am disdainful in amazement and am amazed with disdain at the inordinate and insane pride with which you have set your sights on Rome. With disdain and amazement I ask myself at whose prompting and from what quarters you have undertaken to pick a quarrel with Rome as long as a single Roman remains alive. You have acted with great recklessness in attacking us who

have the right to rule the world and hold supremacy over it. You still don't know, but we shall teach you; you are blind, but we shall make you see what a great thing it is to anger Rome, which has the power to rule over everything. You have presumed beyond your place and crossed the bounds of your authority! Have you any idea who you are and where you come from—you who are taking and holding back the tribute that belongs to us? You are taking our tribute and our lands: why do you hold them, why don't you turn them over, why do you keep them, what right do you have to them? If you keep them any longer, you will be acting most recklessly. And if you are capable of holding them without our forcing you to give them up, you might as well say—an unprecedented miracle!—that the lion flees from the lamb, the wolf from the goat, the greyhound from the hare. But that could never happen, for Nature would not suffer it. Julius Caesar, our ancestor—but maybe you have little respect for him—conquered Britain and imposed a tribute that our people have collected since that time. And we have also been receiving tribute for a long time from the other islands surrounding you. And you have foolishly presumed to take tribute from both of them. Already you were guilty of senseless behavior, but you have committed an even greater insult that touches us still more closely than the losses we have sustained: you killed our vassal Frollo¹ and illegally occupied France. Therefore, since you are not afraid of Rome nor its great power, the Senate summons and orders you—for the summons is an order—to come before it in mid-August, ready, at whatever cost, to make full restitution of what you have taken from them. And thus you will give satisfaction for the wrongs of which we accuse you. But if you delay in any fashion to do what I command you, I will cross the Alps with an army and will deprive you of Britain and France. But I can't imagine that you will await my coming or will defend France against me. I don't think you will dare to face me on this side of the Channel. And even if you stay over there, you will never await my coming. You won't know a place to hide where I won't flush you out. I'll lead you to Rome in chains and hand you over to the Senate."

At these words there was a great uproar, and all were greatly enraged. You could have heard the Britons shouting loudly, calling God as witness and swearing by his name that they were going to punish the messengers. They would have showered them with abuse and insults, but the king rose to his feet and called out to them, "Silence! Silence! Don't lay a hand on these men. They are messengers; they have a master, they are bringing his message; they can say whatever they like. No one shall do them the slightest harm."

When the noise quieted down and the retainers recovered their composure, the king ordered his dukes and counts and his personal advisers to accompany him to a stone tower called the Giant Tower. There he wanted to seek advice on what to reply to the messengers. Side by side the barons and counts were already mounting the stairs, when Cador, the duke of Cornwall, with a smile spoke to the king, who was in front of him, as follows: "I've been afraid," he said, "and have often thought that leisure and peace might spoil the Britons, for leisure is conducive to bad habits and causes many a man to become lazy. Leisure diminishes prowess, leisure promotes lechery, leisure kindles clandestine love affairs. Through prolonged repose and leisure

1. Roman governor of France.

youth gets preoccupied with entertainment and pleasure and backgammon and other games of diversion. By staying put and resting for a long time, we could lose our reputation. Well, we've been asleep, but God has given us a little wake-up call—let us thank him for encouraging the Romans to challenge our country and the others we have conquered. Should the Romans find it in themselves to carry out what they say in that letter, the Britons will still retain their reputation for valor and strength. I never like peace for long, nor shall I love a peace that lasts a long time."

"My lord," said Gawain, "in faith, you're getting upset over nothing. Peace after war is a good thing. The land is better and more beautiful on account of it. It's very good to amuse oneself and to make love. It's for love and for their ladies that knights perform chivalrous deeds."

While bantering in this way, they entered the tower and took their seats. When Arthur saw them sitting down and waiting in silence with full attention, he paused for a moment in thought, then raised his head and spoke:

"Barons," he said, "you who are here, my companions and friends, you have stood by me in good times and bad; you have supported me when I had to go to war; you have taken my part whether I won or lost; you have been partners in my loss, and in my gain when I conquered. Thanks to you and your help, I have won many a victory. I have led you through many dangers by land and by sea, in places near and far. I have found you loyal in action and in counsel. I have tested your mettle many times and always found it good. Thanks to you the neighboring countries are subject to me. You have heard the Romans' order, the tenor of the letter, and the overbearingness and arrogance of their demands. They have provoked and threatened us enough, but if God protects us, we shall do away with the Romans. They are rich and have great power, and now we must carefully consider what we can properly and reasonably say and do. Trouble is dealt with better when a strategy has been worked out in advance. If someone sees the arrow in flight, he must get out of the way or shield himself. That is how we must proceed. The Romans want to shoot at us, and we must get ready so that they cannot wound us. They demand tribute from Britain and must have it, so they tell us; they demand the same from the other islands and from France."

"But first I shall reply how matters stand with regard to Britain. They claim that Caesar conquered it; Caesar was a powerful man and carried out his will by force. The Britons could not defend themselves against him, and he exacted tribute from them by force. But might is not right; it is force and superior power. A man does not possess by right what he has taken by force. Therefore, we are allowed to keep by right what they formerly took by force. They have held up to us the damages, losses, humiliations, the sufferings and fears that they inflicted on our ancestors. They boasted that they conquered them and extorted tribute and rents from them. We have all the more right to make them suffer; they have all the more restitution to make to us. We ought to hate those who hated our ancestors and to injure those who injured them. They remind us that they made them suffer, got tribute from them, and demand tribute from us. They want us to suffer the same shame and extortion as our ancestors. They once got tribute from Britain, and so they want to get it from us. By the same reason and with equal cause we can challenge the Romans and dispute our rights. Belinus, who was king of the

Britons, and Brennus,² duke of the Burgundians, two brothers born in Britain, valiant and wise knights, marched on Rome, laid siege to the city, and took it by assault. They hanged twenty-four hostages in plain sight of their families. When Belinus returned from Rome, he entrusted the city to his brother.

"I won't dwell on Belinus and Brennus but will speak of Constantine. He was British by birth, the son of Helen; he held Rome in his own right. Maximian, king of Britain, conquered France and Germany, crossed the Alps and Lombardy and reigned over Rome. These were my ancestors by direct descent, and each one held Rome in his possession. Now you may hear and understand that we have just as much right to possess Rome as they do to possess Britain. The Romans had our tribute, and my ancestors had theirs. They claim Britain, and I claim Rome. This is the gist of my counsel: that they may have the land and tribute who can take it away from another. As for France and the other lands we have taken from them, they have no right to dispute them since they would not or could not defend them, or perhaps had no right to them because they held them in bondage through force and greed. So let he who can hold all. There is no need to look for any other kind of right. The emperor threatens us. God forbid that he should do us any harm. He says that he will take away our lands and lead me to Rome as a prisoner. He has small regard or fear of me. But, God willing, if he comes to this land, before he leaves again he'll have no stomach to make threats. He defies me, and I defy him: may he possess the lands who is able to take them!"

When King Arthur had spoken what he wanted to his barons, the others spoke in turn while the rest listened. Hoël, king of Brittany, spoke next: "Sire," he said, "in faith, you have spoken many just words; none could have said it better. Send after and mobilize your forces along with us who are here at court. Without delay pass over the sea, pass through Burgundy and France, pass the Alps, conquer Lombardy! Throw the emperor who is defying you into confusion and panic so that he will not have the chance to cause you harm. The Romans have begun a suit that will ruin them. God wants to exalt you: don't hold back and lose any time! Make yourself master of the empire, which is ready to surrender to you of its own will. Remember what is written in the Sibyl's prophecies.³ Three Britons will be born in Britain who shall conquer Rome by might. Two have already lived and been sovereigns over Rome. The first was Belinus and the second, Constantine. You shall be the third to possess Rome and conquer it by force; in you the Sibyl's prophecy will be fulfilled. Why delay to seize that which God wants to bestow on you? Increase your glory and ours to which we aspire. We may say truly that we are not afraid of blows or wounds or death or hardship or prison so

2. Brennus was not a Briton but a Gaulish chief who sacked Rome in the 4th century. Belinus is fictional. Constantine I, who adopted Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, was believed to be British. Maximian (Maximus) was a 5th-century Roman general serving in Britain who abandoned the island when his army proclaimed him emperor and usurped the imperium in civil wars that weakened Rome and left Britain at the mercy of attacks by the Picts,

Scots, and Germanic tribes. Geoffrey of Monmouth's earlier accounts of these personages had conflated a tiny amount of fact with a great deal of fiction.

3. Reference to the Sibylline books containing prophecies of the Roman Sibyl of Cumae, but these no longer existed and could have been known only by reputation. This prophecy was probably invented by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

long as we strive for honor. As long as you are in danger, I will lead ten thousand armed knights in your host, and if that should not be enough, I shall mortgage all my lands and give you the gold and silver. I won't keep back a farthing so long as you have need of it!"

LAYAMON

Layamon, an English priest, adapted Wace's *Roman de Brut* into Middle English alliterative verse. His *Brut* (ca. 1190) runs to 16,095 lines, expanding on Wace and adding much new material.

After winning the continental campaign against Lucius, Arthur is forced to return to Britain upon learning that his nephew, Mordred, whom he had left behind as regent, has usurped Arthur's throne and queen. The following selection, a passage added by Layamon, presents Arthur's dream of Mordred's treachery.

Layamon employs a long alliterative line that harks back to Old English poetry, but the two halves of his line are often linked by rhyme as well as by alliteration. Layamon reveals his ties with Germanic literary tradition in other ways. In Arthur's nightmare, the king and Gawain are sitting astride the roof beam of a building like the mead hall Heorot in *Beowulf*—a symbol of the control a king wields over his house and kingdom. On the ground below, Mordred is chopping away at the foundations like the gigantic rodent in Norse mythology that is gnawing away at the roots of Yggdrasil, the great tree, which holds together earth, heaven, and hell.

From Brut

[ARTHUR'S DREAM]

Then came to pass what Merlin spoke of long before,
13965 That the walls of Rome would fall down before Arthur;
This had already happened there in relation to the emperor
Who had fallen in the fighting with fifty thousand men:
That's when Rome with her power was pushed to the ground.

And so Arthur really expected to possess all of Rome,
13970 And the most mighty of kings remained there in Burgundy.

Now there arrived at this time a bold man on horseback;
News he was bringing for Arthur the king
From Modred, his sister's son: to Arthur he was welcome,
For he thought that he was bringing very pleasant tidings.
Arthur lay there all that long night, talking with the young knight,
13975 Who simply did not like to tell him the truth of what had happened.
The next day, as dawn broke, the household started moving,
And then Arthur got up, and, stretching his arms,
He stood up, and sat down again, as if he felt very sick.
Then a good knight questioned him: "My Lord, how did you get on
13980 last night?"

Arthur responded (his heart was very heavy):
"Tonight as I was sleeping, where I was lying in my chamber,

There came to me a dream which has made me most depressed:
I dreamed someone had lifted me right on top of some hall
13985 And I was sitting on the hall, astride, as if I was going riding;
All the lands which I possess, all of them I was surveying,
And Gawain sat in front of me, holding in his hands my sword.
Then Modred came marching there with a countless host of men,
Carrying in his hand a massive battle-axe.

13990

He started to hew, with horrible force,
And hacked down all the posts which were holding up the hall.
I saw Guinevere there as well, the woman I love best of all:
The whole roof of that enormous hall with her hands she was

pulling down;

The hall started tottering, and I tumbled to the ground,
13995 And broke my right arm, at which Modred said 'Take that!'

Down then fell the hall and Gawain fell as well,
Falling on the ground where both his arms were broken,

So with my left hand I clutched my beloved sword
14000 And struck off Modred's head and it went rolling over the ground,

And I sliced the queen in pieces with my beloved sword,
And after that I dropped her into a dingy pit.

And all my fine subjects set off in flight,
14005 And what in Christendom became of them I had no idea,
Except that I was standing by myself in a vast plain,

And then I started roaming all around across the moors;
There I could see griffins and really gruesome birds.

"Then a golden lioness came gliding over the downs,
As really lovely a beast as any Our Lord has made.

The lioness ran up to me and put her jaws around my waist,
14010 And off she set, moving away towards the sea,

And I could see the waves, tossing in the sea,
And taking me with her, the lioness plunged into the water.

When we two were in the sea, the waves swept her away from me;
Then a fish came swimming by and ferried me ashore.

Then I was all wet and weary, and I was sick with sorrow.
14015 And upon waking, I started quaking,

And then I started to shudder as if burning up with fire,
And so all night I've been preoccupied with my disturbing dream,

For I know of a certainty this is the end of my felicity,
14020 And all the rest of my life I must suffer grief.

O alas that I do not have here my queen with me, my Guinevere!"

Then the knight responded: "My Lord, you are mistaken;
Dreams should never be interpreted as harbingers of sorrow!

You are the most mighty prince who has rule in any land,
14025 And the most intelligent of all inhabitants on the earth.

If it should have happened—as may Our Lord not allow it—
That your sister's son, Lord Modred, your own queen might have

wedded,

And all your royal domains might have annexed in his own name,
Those which you entrusted to him when you intended going to

Rome,
14030 And if he should have done all this by his treacherous deeds,
Even then you might avenge yourself honorably with arms,

And once again possess your lands and rule over your people,
And destroy your enemies who wish you so much evil,
And slay them, every one alive, so that there is none who survives!"

Then Arthur answered him, most excellent of all kings:
"For as long as is for ever, I have no fear whatever,
That Modred who is my relative, the man I love best,
Would betray all my trust, not for all of my realm,
Nor would Guinevere, my queen, weaken in her allegiance,
She will not begin to, for any man in the world!"

Immediately after these words, the knight gave his answer:
"I am telling you the truth, dear king, for I am merely your
underling:

Modred has done these things: he has adopted your queen,
And has placed in his own hands your lovely land;
He is king and she is queen; they don't expect your return,
For they don't believe it will be the case that you'll ever come back
from Rome.

I am your loyal liegeman, and I did see this treason,
And so I have come to you in person to tell you the truth.
Let my head be as pledge of what I have told you,
The truth and no lie, about your beloved queen,
And about Modred, your sister's son, and how he has snatched
Britain from you."

Then everything went still in King Arthur's hall;
There was great unhappiness for the excellent king,
And because of it the British men were utterly depressed;

Then after a while came the sound of a voice;
All over could be heard the reactions of the British
As they started to discuss in many kinds of expression
How they wished to condemn Modred and the queen
And destroy all the population who had supported Modred.

Most courteous of all Britons, Arthur then called out aloud,
"Sit down quietly, my knights in this assembly,
And then I shall tell you some very strange tales.
Now tomorrow when daylight is sent by our Lord to us,
I wish to be on my way toward entering Britain,
And there I shall kill Modred and burn the queen to death,
And I shall destroy all of them who gave assent to the treason."

THE MYTH OF ARTHUR'S RETURN

Folklore and literature provide examples of a recurrent myth about a leader or hero who has not really died but is asleep somewhere or in some state of suspended life and will return to save his people. Evidently, the Bretons and Welsh developed this myth about Arthur in oral tradition long before it turns up in medieval chronicles. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace, and Layamon, and subsequent writers about Arthur, including Malory (see p. 434), allude to it with varying degrees of skepticism.

GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH: From History of the Kings of Britain

But also the famous King Arthur himself was mortally wounded. When he was carried off to the island of Avalon to have his wounds treated, he bestowed the crown on his cousin Constantine, the son of Duke Cador in the year 542 after the Incarnation of our lord. May his soul rest in peace.

WACE: From Roman de Brut

Arthur, if the story is not false, was mortally wounded; he had himself carried to Avalon to be healed of his wounds. He is still there and the Britons expect him as they say and hope. He'll come from there if he is still alive. Master Wace, who made this book, won't say more about Arthur's end than the prophet Merlin rightly said once upon a time that one would not know whether or not he were dead. The prophet spoke truly: ever since men have asked and shall always ask, I believe, whether he is dead or alive. Truly he had himself taken to Avalon 542 years after the Incarnation. It was a pity that he had no offspring. He left his realm to Constantine, the son of Cador of Cornwall, and asked him to reign until his return.

LAYAMON: From Brut

Arthur was mortally wounded, grievously badly; To him there came a young lad who was from his clan, He was Cador the Earl of Cornwall's son; The boy was called Constantine; the king loved him very much. Arthur gazed up at him, as he lay there on the ground, And uttered these words with a sorrowing heart: "Welcome, Constantine; you were Cador's son; Here I bequeath to you all of my kingdom, And guard well my Britons all the days of your life. And retain for them all the laws which have been extant in my days And all the good laws which there were in Uther's days. And I shall voyage to Avalon, to the fairest of all maidens, To the Queen Argante, a very radiant elf, And she will make quite sound every one of my wounds, Will make me completely whole with her health-giving potions. And then I shall come back to my own kingdom And dwell among the Britons with surpassing delight."

After these words there came gliding from the sea What seemed a short boat, moving, propelled along by the tide And in it were two women in remarkable attire, Who took Arthur up at once and immediately carried him And gently laid him down and began to move off. And so it had happened, as Merlin said before: