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“Of our own speech”: the dissonant voices in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth

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These were they who would have faced the ruin of their countrymen, if a prince speaking some foreign tongue were set in authority over them. Others would have offered the realm to your daughter and to some nobleman of our own speech who would have succeeded you after your death.

- *Geoffrey of Monmouth,* ***History of the Kings of Britain***

And so I will tell this tale. For one day the priests too will tell it, as it was known to them. Perhaps between the two, some glimmering of the truth may be seen. (...) And so, perhaps, the truth winds somewhere between the road to Glastonbury, Isle of the Priests, and the road to Avalon, lost forever in the mists of the Summer Sea.

- *Marion Zimmer Bradley,* ***The Mists of Avalon***

RESUMO

Este trabalho tem como objeto a obra *História dos Reis da Bretanha*, escrita por Geoffrey de Monmouth no século XII, buscando compreender o contexto no qual este livro foi elaborado e escrito. A obra apresenta diversos elementos que debatem a identidade galesa em relação à nobreza normanda, como a presença – ainda que sob uma ótica cristã – de figuras possuidoras de habilidades mágicas, que têm origem em manuscritos galeses anteriores. Este é um dentre muitos aspectos narrativos que indicam um diálogo entre as culturas galesa e normanda nesta obra. Por este motivo, este trabalho foca em Merlin, um personagem que teve sua primeira aparição como Myrddin, um profeta em histórias folclóricas do País de Gales, e que foi reinventado por Monmouth e inserido na tradição Arturiana. Merlin é uma figura central em *História dos Reis da Bretanha*, e por meio desta obra o personagem foi introduzido na tradição literária, o que proporcionou suas constantes aparições nas literaturas de língua inglesa. A partir de uma análise focada em Merlin, é possível examinar os discursos conflitantes dentro da obra de Monmouth. O conceito de polifonia, de Mikhail Bakhtin, constitui o suporte teórico deste trabalho. Este estudo busca contribuir para os estudos acerca da obra de Monmouth, na tentativa de compreender como esta apresenta conflitos de identidade na Grã Bretanha do século XII, e ao mesmo tempo auxilia no desenvolvimento da literatura britânica.

Palavras-chave: 1. Identidade galesa. 2. Geoffrey de Monmouth. 3. Lendas do rei Artur. 4. Memória coletiva.

ABSTRACT

This monograph addresses the work *History of the Kings of Britain*, written by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 12th century, so as to appreciate the terms in which the book was conceived and written. There are several elements there that tell us about Welsh identity in relation to the Norman nobility, such as the presence – within a Christian composition – of figures depicted as possessors of magical abilities, which appeared originally in earlier Welsh manuscripts. This is one among many of this work's narrative aspects that indicate a dialogue between Welsh and Norman cultures. For that reason, I focus on Merlin, a character who first appears as Myrddin, a prophet in Welsh folk stories, who was translated into Arthurian tradition by Monmouth. As Merlin is a central figure in *History of the Kings of Britain*, that book introduces the magician into the mainstream, opening the way to subsequent references in English literature. By centring the analysis on Merlin, I can examine some contradictory discourses present in Monmouth's work. These different voices are referred through the concept of Polyphony, as proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin. With this analysis I hope to contribute to the studies on how Monmouth's book simultaneously reveals conflicts of identity in 12th century Britain, and helps trace the course of development of British literature from then on.

Keywords: 1.Welsh identity. 2. Geoffrey of Monmouth. 3. Arthurian legend. 4. Collective memory.

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INTRODUCTION

I have been following the tracks of Arthurian Legend for years now, and my first readings on the subject often consisted of stories focused on a character other than Arthur or the knights. Contemporary novels such as *The Mists of Avalon* and *The Crystal Cave* have pointed me to the possibilities of rereading and reinterpreting the figures of Arthurian Legend. In those works, iconic characters from Arthurian tradition such as Morgana and Merlin take the role of narrators to tell their own stories, resulting in unique narratives.

Arguably, these novels share the common theme of deconstructing these legendary figures. They focus on showing an alternative view to contrast the widespread ideas that Morgana was an evil sorceress and that Merlin was only Arthur's wise counsellor. Once I was confronted with different perspectives about these characters, I began to wonder how they had been associated to certain specific roles, in the first place.

Set in that direction, I moved towards the Celtic and Welsh roots of these legends in search for the earliest appearances of Merlin and other figures, which led me to the *History of the Kings of Britain* — said to be the very first depiction of Merlin. It was fascinating for me to discover that even in Monmouth's work, which dates from the early twelfth century, the stories of King Arthur and Merlin were recreations of even older tales, and to find out that Merlin was not portrayed then as Arthur's wise old counsellor. He is, instead, a young boy, child to a nun and a demon, who has the power to predict events which were yet to come and the skills to influence future of Britain.

From those new insights emerged the questions which now guide this monograph. I wondered what the differences were between the child-prophet in *History* and the Welsh character Myrddin, and why had some of his traits been changed from one text to another. Then, I turned to the question of how Monmouth's creation eventually became the famous wizard which is constantly referenced by Arthurian tradition. Finally, as I began to understand the historical and social context surrounding the *History of the Kings of Britain*, I focused my interest towards the many divergent voices present within this narrative, in an attempt to understand how a work targeted towards a Norman audience portrays adaptations of characters from Welsh literature.

This monograph, then, aims at identifying and discussing the presence of contradicting discourses within Monmouth's narrative. This work will debate whether traits of Welsh identity can be found within a text that is permeated by Norman language and culture, and how they are presented by the narrative. In order to achieve that, this research consists of two

parts. The first one presents the social and historical context in which *History* was written, also pointing to documentation on the author's life and later works as a means of understanding what were the discourses surrounding this work's production. That discussion aims at outlining the many different influences which have shaped Monmouth's narrative, particularly those relating to the presence of Normans after their still recent invasion of Britain.

The first section also briefly discusses some of the many translations and adaptations of *History* that have been produced, some of them shortly after its publication. The mention of such translations comes with the purpose of aiding this monograph in understanding the different voices and discourses that come through in Monmouth's narrative. As those translations originate from diverse readings of the text, one could argue that this work contains some conflicting elements which allow for divergent interpretations.

A subsection within this part dwells on Monmouth's Welsh sources. As he himself describes, *History* refers to the texts of Welsh historians such as Nennius, and tales which he attributes to an "ancient tradition". Through that discussion, this work seeks to outline the Welsh presence among the varying voices which appear in *History*. Therefore, this section discusses the concept of identity, looking to understand Monmouth's place as an author as someone who was inserted into a Norman education and discourse, but also had some possible ties and knowledge of Welsh culture.

That part will also present Bakhtin's concept of polyphony as a means of supporting this analysis. A polyphonic text is that which is formed by more than one perspective; that is, the presence of independent and often divergent discourses within the same text. As it will be further discussed in the first section of this monograph, *History of the Kings of Britain* greatly contributed to the development of the romance tradition, which would in time influence the modern novel. The concept of polyphony was designed through the analysis of novels — specifically of the characters in Dostoevsky's books. Even though *History* belongs to a previous genre, the concept may still be applied to the study of this work, considering that the novel originated from chronicle and romance.

Then, by turning to the text, this analysis will point to *History*'s narrative structure looking to understand how the conflicting voices appear in this work. The second part of the present study consists on an overview of the textual aspects employed in the book, particularly on the transition between chapters three and four, in which the tale of Merlin and Arthur begins. Monmouth was an author, a translator, a *magister*, a cleric and, possibly, a Norman-Welsh man who wrote to a Norman audience in a time of political turmoil; all these

divergent voices are at play in his work. The second section of this monograph looks to discuss how these discourses entwine in *History of the Kings of Britain*.

Under that title, the last segment of this work will discuss the prophet and magician Merlin, which is, for the purposes of this monograph, one of the most interesting figures in *History*. Considering that Merlin sprung in part from a historical, Christian account, and in part from earlier Welsh poems, it is especially relevant to discuss the construction of this character and how Monmouth presents him to the readers. Merlin represents the conflicting voices in *History*, for he himself an ambiguous, multifaceted figure. This subsection will consist of a recollection of Merlin's creation through the joining of figures from varying sources, his representation within the narrative and the mystical aspects which surround his story.

Working with such an ancient text can be challenging. Before I properly turn to the discussion of the *History of the Kings of Britain*, it is important to make a note that I am working with a 1966 direct translation from Latin to English. Lewis Thorpe, the translator and author to the introduction of that edition, declares that it is difficult for one to find a reliable copy of the original text, as the printed versions that can be accessed today are often based on sixteenth century copies. Thorpe (1966) claims that most of these texts are not accurate versions of the twelfth century manuscripts; the author elects the manuscript 1706 from the Cambridge University Library (edited in 1929 by Acton Griscom) as the starting text of his translation, because of its many notes and comparisons to other versions.

Therefore, the text I have access to at the time of writing this monograph is a translation of an edited Latin version of *History* — and Thorpe describes many others which he deems worse in condition. Monmouth himself introduces his work as a translation of some ancient book in British language. I make these notes now in order to point that the text I analyze in this study has already been trespassed by many perspectives and discourses. The previous editors and translators of *History* constitute of yet another layer of voices in this narrative. Those, however, will not be addressed by this monograph, which focuses instead on the dynamics of Welsh and Norman cultures within the narrative.

1. WRITING *HISTORY*: GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH AND THE CONTEXT OF THE 12th CENTURY

The current section discusses the context in which Geoffrey of Monmouth produced the *History of the Kings of Britain* by pointing to some biographical facts, as well as possible sources and patrons to his work. This account aims at outlining the writing environment and intended audience of the book to aid in understanding how different voices are involved in the construction of this narrative.

Monmouth was born in the twelfth century Britain. In 1066, about seven decades before the publishing of his book, the Normans landed at the isle and proceeded to make war on the people who already inhabited the place, and William, Duke of Normandy — who became known as "the Conqueror" — took on the role of ruler. Norman incursions soon would begin to spread to west, into Welsh territory. In the thesis "A Walk Through Llareggub", Alan Fear describes that during the following centuries "the Anglo-Norman barons were given free rein by their king to raid and impose English law and punishments onto the Welsh towns and villages within their reach." (FEAR, 2012, p.17).

The author describes how castles were forbidden in South Wales by the end of the twelfth century, a Norman imposition which aided in establishing their rule. Fear (2012) points out that during the latter half of the thirteenth century, Edward Longshanks passed further legislation allowing the construction of Norman castles in Wales in a display of power and domination. Through the centuries, the Norman dynasty — which would eventually become a line of English rulers — would hold these and other measures as a means to subjugate Welsh culture and identity. According to Fear (2012), English kings went as far as officially annexing Wales to England, as Henry VIII erased the legal limits between the two. Alan Fear further discusses the implications of these acts in his dissertation "A Search for Identity and Memory in Sharon Kay Penman's Novel *Here be Dragons*", stating that,

> Although many would argue that Wales cannot be construed as an English colony, in the same way as, for example, India or Australia were part of the British Empire, the patterns of historical events show that it has been exactly that, i.e. invaded, colonized, a mass forced foreign immigration policy in order to "dilute" the native Welsh inhabitants, foreign – English – laws imposed and a series of Parliamentary Acts effectively absorbing Wales into England. (FEAR, 2016, p. 10-11)

That process was still at its early stages during the time Monmouth wrote *History of the Kings of Britain*. Monmouth's work influenced the development of British literature from

then on, and stands as one of the first texts of Arthurian tradition. This narrative, then, is a work of literature by a Norman-Welsh author which played an important role in presenting characters such as King Arthur, Merlin and King Leir to the public and, in a way, preserving their stories. The current section now seeks to investigate how *History* relates to this social and political context, in an attempt to understand why this text proved so successful on its own age and also remained a constant reference to other authors in later centuries.

1.1 Troubling times: Monmouth's work in the context of early 12th century Britain.

The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend presents Geoffrey of Monmouth as a "teacher, a cleric, and ultimately a bishop of St Asaph in Wales; but it was as a writer that he left a permanent legacy." (LUPACK, 2007, p.24). Monmouth was born in 1100 and lived approximately to the year of 1155, and his work *History* was completed in *c*.1136. Although there is some uncertainty about the exact place in which he was born, Lewis Thorpe, translator and author to the introduction of the 1966 edition of *History of the Kings of Britain,* mentions that "he must have had some vital connexion with Monmouth, probably that of birth. Everything in his writings and his thinly-sketched biography points to his having been a Welsh-man, or perhaps a Breton born in Wales." (THORPE, 1966, p.13).

Archibald and Putter (2009) describe, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, that Monmouth's connexions to Britain constantly shine through in his work, and it is part of how the author seems to identify himself. The passage transcribed below appears to equate "British" to "Welsh", and it seems that both are understood as being the same in Monmouth's work. It is important to note that such definition might not be the most appropriate according to modern conceptions, but for the purposes of this paper, the denominations will be used as they appear in Thorpe's translation,

> In all probability he was himself part 'Briton'. One of the many manuscripts of the *History* contains a passage (apparently authorial) in which Geoffrey, a 'bashful Briton', accepts the challenge of translating 'into Latin prose the metrical prophecies that Merlin uttered so sweetly in the British tongue'. Both here and in the epilogue to his *History*, he alleges 'British' sources; and whether or not he invented them, his self-presentation as someone capable of translating them must have been plausible. (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.39)

Along with the many instances pointed out by Thorpe (1966) in which the author of *History* refers to his own name and mentions some connexion to Monmouth, many Welsh

regions are featured in this work as important locations to the narrative. Caerleon-on-Usk would be the most prominent of them, being one of the places in which Monmouth describes King Arthur holding court. These aspects are further discussed in the third section of this monograph.

Thorpe (1966) also accounts for the biography of Geoffrey of Monmouth, describing the period of twenty three years (from 1129 to 1151) in which the author took residence in Oxford. Documents of that time often show that Monmouth would sign as a *magister*, indicating that he must have taken some sort of teaching role. The twelfth century Oxford, although not yet an university, was a place of trade and culture; Thorpe (1966) reports that the city's registers of the period show there were lectures being held there, and that there were other scholars describing themselves, as Monmouth did, as *magisters*. At that time, Monmouth was also in the process of writing the *History of the Kings of Britain* and some of his other works that can still be accessed, such as *The Life of Merlin*.

Thorpe (1966) claims that, it is possible to observe through the local historical registers that Monmouth held relations to nobility and high rank clerics during his stay in Oxford. Many of these figures are mentioned by name in the text itself, as Monmouth refers to them as his readers. He dedicates the book to Walter, the Archdeacon of Oxford, and on the very same page, writes directly to the illegitimate son of King Henry I, stating,

> "I ask you Robert, Earl of Gloucester, to do my little book this favour. Let it be so emended by your knowledge and your advice that it must no longer be considered as the product of Geoffrey of Monmouth's smaller talent. Rather, with the support of you wit and wisdom, let it be accepted as the work of one descended from Henry, the famous King of the English" (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.51-52).

The author proceeds to affirm the affection which the people of Britain hold for the king, and greets yet another government figure, Waleran, Count of Mellent. Monmouth opens the fifth part of his book declaring that many people urged him to publish that section, "The Prophecies of Merlin". He emphasizes the fact that he, in eagerness to please, sent an early version of that text in a letter to Alexander, the Bishop of Lincoln, as the cleric would have proven curious about Monmouth's work.

Thorpe's preface points to further evidence that Monmouth had the Norman nobility in mind as his intended audience for *History*, commenting on Oxford's signature registers during the 23 year period in which Geoffrey of Monmouth took residence there. King Henry I is known to have visited the area often; Stephen de Blois too had dealings within the city in

1136. There are also documents signed by Matilda and by Robert, Earl of Gloucester, indicating they were present there at some point.

Throughout the text, Monmouth mentions his sources as well as his audience, indicating that the account in *History* is taken in part from historical texts, such as Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*, the *Annales Cambriae*, and Gildas' and Bede's chronicles. Monmouth too grants credit to the oral tradition, and he claims that many of the stories depicted in his work were passed down orally through generations. In fact, the book is introduced to the reader as a translation from one ancient book, handed down to Monmouth by Walter the Archdeacon of Oxford. Thorpe (1966) comments on how the existence of such book has been debated by many authors, but also points to the possibility that this ancient tome might symbolically refer to the oral tradition itself.

Considering that hypothesis, one can argue that there are in fact different facets of translation in Monmouth's work: a possible textual translation (from Welsh to Latin, of a specific book that may or may not have existed), and a more verifiable cultural translation, which can be observed in the narrative construction of *History*. That aspect, however one may interpret it, can show the *History of the Kings of Britain* as a work which was structured and built on cultural transpositions. It further points to Monmouth's role as an author of creating bridges between the Norman and Briton cultures.

Even though Monmouth's sources are constantly referred to, Thorpe (1966) and Lawrence-Mathers (2014) — author to the book *The True Story of Merlin the Magician* — agree that his narrative and characters are, necessarily, an authorial creation. Still, one could argue that to translate a text means to create it anew. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in a process that may or may not have been wholly intentional, reinvented figures and stories in order to accommodate the expectations of the Norman audience, of his religious Benedictine environment, while also registering Welsh culture. These varying sources and social relations are ingrained into the writing process of *History*, and constitute some of the many different voices that are present within this narrative.

Thorpe (1966) points out that King Arthur and Merlin are the "two personages who were to give Geoffrey of Monmouth his place in the development of European literature" (THORPE, 1966, p.21). Both these characters had already been present in older Welsh sources; still, it becomes clear as one investigates Monmouth's text that these figures, as they appear in *History*, have been through several changes, most likely because they were expected to be read and accepted by the Normans. Thorpe's introduction offers great insight on Monmouth's writing process, as well as on his methods:

> Geoffrey's purpose in writing the book was to trace the story of the Britons through a long sweep of nineteen hundred years, stretching from the mythical Brutus, great-grandson of the Trojan Aeneas, whom he supposed to have given his name to the island after he had landed there in the twelfth century before Christ, down to his last British King, Cadwaller, who, harassed by plague, famine, civil dissention and never ending invasion from the continent, finally abandoned Britain to the Saxons in the seventh century of our era. Between these two extreme limits in time, he planned to relate for us the story of the British people, sometimes as a mere genealogy of royal primogeniture, sometimes in succinct chronicle form, more often as a dynastic sequence told with considerable detail, reign by reign (...) Geoffrey's essential inspiration was a patriotic one. (THORPE, 1966, p.9)

Thorpe's commentary on this book's purpose raises a relevant discussion: although the book is titled *History of the Kings of Britain*, it is in fact composed by a series of myths and legends, along with figures whose lives have been registered and documented. *History*, then, would be more of an authorial, fictional creation than a factual account. The creation of an identity through myth is often part of the collective memory of a people – in this case, of the Welsh – which is, in some ways, registered and adapted by Monmouth's work.

It is interesting that Thorpe would describe Monmouth's inspiration as patriotic. Though the author does not develop what "patriotic" would mean in this context, there seem to be two possible readings to that notion: it could either refer to *History*'s possible role in translating Welsh culture, or to its intent of allowing Normans some level of identification with the story through deliberate narrative resources. It can be argued that *History* does accomplish both of the above mentioned effects. When discussing a possible patriotic purpose on Monmouth's part, however, the first hypothesis would seem more plausible, considering Thorpe's following analysis about the ending section of the book,

> The vengeance of God and the domination of the Saxons have overtaken these last [British who stayed in the island], who are now called the Welsh, and they live precariously and in greatly reduced numbers in the remote recess of the western forests. Let these Welshmen remember their glorious past, cries Geoffrey towards the end of his story (...). Above all, let them remember the prophecies of Merlin, made to King Vortigern and set out in full in this book, which tell of the triumphs of the British people yet to come (...). (THORPE, 1966, p.10)

History ends with a note of grief over the British people, and their succumbing to war and disease. On the very last page of his book, Monmouth describes how the Britons became, by designation of the Saxon invaders, the "Welshmen" — even as he attributes that denomination to them "being so barbarous". The use of that word points to another interesting aspect of Monmouth's work, which is that of his intended audience. As previously mentioned, Oxford's twelfth century registers prove that the city in which the author lived was constantly

visited by members of the aristocracy, and Monmouth's own texts mentions some of those authority figures by name.

It should also be considered that *History* was first written in Latin. At the time, only people from the nobility and clergy would have been able to read in that language, and perhaps those groups would be the only ones with any degree of literacy; that medium restriction also speaks of Monmouth's intended readers. Besides these determinant textual characteristics, the content of the book is also known to be appealing to the Normans. Lawrence-Mathers (2014) presents the cultural context of the twelfth century; the author describes that period as a time of great development in scholarly and literature.

Lawrence-Mathers (2014) argues that the Normans would have shown particular interest in historical accounts, as a way of interpreting and understanding the world and attempting to fill any existing gaps in their knowledge of the past. Archibald and Putter (2009) demonstrate that other historical texts of the time such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* only account for events after the year of 597, in which St Augustine arrives in Britain. Monmouth's *History*, then "sought to answer the question of what had happened before recorded history began." (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.40)

The authors of the *Cambridge Companion* also claim that the newly established "Norman rulers, to whom Geoffrey dedicated his *History*, naturally took a proprietary interest in the history and culture of their newly acquired lands." (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.40). Along with that, they would also take interest in adventure stories which depicted warriors and kings conquering foreign lands. The authors argue that "conquest is central to the seminal early Arthurian texts of Nennius, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Geoffrey's first adaptors, Wace and Laʒamon" (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.12), which would meet a demand of the aristocratic audience.

Monmouth's portrayal of the kings of Britain, and particularly that of King Arthur, presented a story the Norman invaders could relate to. As they sought to divorce themselves from the Anglo-Saxon past ingrained in the island, *History*'s take on the British rulers was an appealing alternative to the many historical gaps the Normans encountered. According to Thorpe (1966), Monmouth had a clear political intent to offer some precedent to the Norman ambitions of conquest — while also gaining the favour of authority figures. Lupack (2007) echoes the same notion, describing how Monmouth's depiction of King Arthur as a conqueror was well received by the readers,

> The popularity of Geoffrey's work is due in part to its political usefulness, since it demonstrates precedents for rulers of Britain to claim authority in

> and allegiance from continental nations, as Arthur does when the Roman procurator Lucius demands tribute from him. Even more important are Geoffrey's additions to the story of Arthur, perhaps the most significant of which is to give Arthur a place in the line of British kings and to describe the glories of his court and the conquests that make him emperor of the civilized world. (LUPACK, 2007, p.24)

In an account about the cultural and political context of twelfth century Britain, Lawrence-Mathers (2014) claims that this was a time of research and scholarly development, as French bishops and abbots would focus their studies on the uncovering of historical documents about the British past which might have been dismissed or ignored by the Anglo-Saxons. The author states that "this was both in order to establish the credentials of their own institutions and to link them to the new history" (LAWRENCE-MATHERS, 2014, p.45).

Lawrence-Mathers (2014) brings forward another important aspect that should be considered when discussing *History*'s historical and social context. The third decade of the twelfth century was a time of political turmoil to the Norman dynasty. Henry I, who was the son of William the Conqueror, rose to the throne in 1100 as the second Norman king to rule over Britain. He married Edith-Matilda, who belonged to Anglo-Saxon nobility; however, Henry's place as a leader was still new and the status of "son of the invader" would still loom over his rule.

Henry I's only male son drowned in 1120, leaving his daughter Matilda as the direct heir, and thus endangering the Norman lineage. Stephen de Blois was Henry's nephew, and so had a claim to the throne that could threaten Matilda's position. The king had his nephew take an oath that he would accept Matilda as the ruler. However, when Henry I died in 1135, Stephen broke his vow and went to war with Matilda. That was the atmosphere of uncertainty in which *History of the Kings of Britain* came to public. About such context, Lawrence-Mathers explains,

> When Stephen de Blois broke his oath to accept Matilda as queen, and had himself crowned king of England in 1135, the search for both an acceptable explanation of the present and some insight into the future became even more pressing. Moreover, any such analysis had to be addressed to a political class which had changed radically since 1066. The Anglo-Norman aristocracy in no way identified with the Anglo-Saxon past. There was also a new interest in the writing of dynastic and national histories. Both political and intellectual developments therefore led to a pressing need for new accounts of "British" history and new ways of understanding the current situation. (...) Geoffrey's *History* thus filled and urgent gap, whilst Merlin's prophecies offered information (however hard to interpret) on the future of Britain. (Lawrence-Mathers, 2014, p.24-25)

According to the author, Monmouth's work thrived in this political environment, in which doubt and war were very pressing matters on the minds of the Normans. *History* describes an unbroken line of British kings, starting from Brutus, the mythical founder and first ruler of Britain. In such atmosphere of uncertainty, the presence of supernatural elements within the narrative tended to a certain need of the audience to receive answers about the future of the dynasty.

The supernatural and mystic events presented in *History* also speak of this book's historical context, and of its popularity. This aspect is one of the characteristics which tie this work to the romantic tradition and to the development of the courtly romance genre. Those elements further contributed to the book's success, as they not only met the thematic interests of its audience, but also fell in line with the blooming romantic, scholarly aesthetic.

Archibald and Putter (2009) point that *History* presents many aspects and themes that would later greatly influence the routes of Arthurian literature. Monmouth's work would be recalled and commented on — though not always in a positive manner — by contemporary writers. The authors state that "the *History of the Kings of Britain* made an immediate impact on its readers." (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.42); according to *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, the twelfth century historian Henry of Huntingdon received a copy of Monmouth's book, and found it fascinating that Monmouth had managed to gather that material.

History's reach was such that it would be translated into other languages only a couple decades after its publication. Wace, a Norman poet, translated the *History of the Kings of Britain* into vernacular French verse, utilizing octosyllabic couplets; Lupack (2007) demonstrates that Wace adapted several passages, adding or editing some descriptions, and leaving out the book's fifth section entirely, which consists of Merlin's prophecies. Archibald and Putter (2009) claim that this version was possibly dedicated to Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine; about this translation, the authors also state that,

> The anticipation of a court audience would explain Wace's refinements of his source. He tones down Arthur's ruthlessness, is enchanted by Guinevere's beauty and exquisite manners, and expands the account of the twelve years of peace, recording (for the first time) the Round Table and mentioning the marvellous adventures that occurred during peacetime and are now celebrated by storytellers. (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.42-43)

Shortly after Wace, another author took to reinventing Monmouth's text. *The Oxford Guide* presents Layamon (or Laȝamon), an English clerk who adapted Wace's version of *History* towards the end of the twelfth century. By choosing alliterative verse to perform his

adaptation, Layamon's text recalls the Old English form with the use of rhymes and alliterations. As Lupack (2007) states, "in vocabulary as well as in verse form, Layamon is typically English." (LUPACK, 2007, p.30), and he was the first author to translate the stories of King Arthur into English verse.

Lupack (2007) describes that there is another partially surviving French translation, a manuscript called the "*Harley Brut*" which contains fragments of books 5 to 10 of *History*; another known translation is the *Breta sôgur*, or Sagas of the British, written in Old Norse. The author also reports of several thirteenth century translations to Welsh and a few others which appeared in the fourteenth century, and those are "often known as *Brut y Brenhinedd*, 'the Brut of the Kings'" (LUPACK, 2007, p.28). *History* would only again be translated into English in the 18th century, by Aaron Thompson.

The wide variety of translations and adaptations of *History* which were produced through the years can indicate that divergent voices and discourses come through in Monmouth's narrative. These many different references to *History* by other texts, some of which were written within a short time of its publication, can demonstrate that there is a variety of potential readings contained in this work. There are elements in it that spoke to not only Norman audiences, but also to Norse and Welsh readers, and continued to be read and reinvented throughout the centuries.

Up to this point, this monograph has focused mainly on understanding the context in which *History of the Kings of Britain* was written, its impact on twelfth century audiences and later influence on Arthurian literature. Considering the studies of the many authors who have already dedicated themselves to discussing Monmouth's work, as those previously presented by this article, one could safely argue that *History* was produced with all the intent of pleasing a Norman audience, and tending to their expectations.

However, it is still important to consider the content of Monmouth's book; *History* brings forward many stories which can be related, at least in part, to earlier pieces of Welsh literature. Even if Monmouth's characters may have originally been written to ease the anguishes of Norman readers, they show resemblance to figures present in Welsh culture — deities, heroes, bards. Some of their names make, to this day, recurrent appearances in literature written in English: King Arthur, Merlin, and King Leir would become iconic figures, referenced repeatedly by authors of many different periods.

Considering this perspective, one could argue that Monmouth's work contributed to the preservation of some Welsh cultural and literary aspects. The author himself claims the role of a translator: and in fact, Monmouth took to the part of making some of the British

culture accessible to the Normans, which may have been an important factor in keeping it from disappearing through the cultural domination and repression that followed. Whether this role was performed consciously or not, it is near impossible to know. What can be observed, however, is a presence of conflicting voices within *History of the Kings of Britain*, interwoven discourses which, in a way, play out the dynamics of historical context in which it was written.

1.2 Writing from a middle ground: outlining Welsh identity.

In order to discuss which aspects of Welsh culture can be identified within Monmouth's work, this study will now debate what can be understood as "Welsh", and how that relates to the Norman people and culture, and the process of colonization they imposed from the eleventh century on. Alan Fear's dissertation, "A Search for Identity and Memory in Sharon Kay Penman's Novel *Here be Dragons*" makes a personal and historical account on the formation of Welsh identity by analyzing Penman's *Here be Dragons*. Through the study of that contemporary novel, Fear describes how Penman's work constructs Welsh identity, and recovers cultural aspects that have been nearly erased.

In tracing an outline of Welsh history through early medieval history, Fear (2016) describes how the Anglo-Saxon and later Norman invasions affected the political and cultural status of the British peoples. Through these processes, the Welsh were constantly pushed to the margins: quite literally, as the local people were made to retreat west into the territories which are now Wales and Cornwall, and later the invaders would place physical barriers between themselves and the Britons.

Alan Fear (2016) points to the construction of a ditch which is now called Offa's Dyke as one of the first established boundaries between the Anglo-Saxon and Briton peoples, sending the Welsh a "clear message to stay out" (FEAR, 2016, p. 46). It was build in the 8th century by a Saxon king named Offa — hence, how the ditch became known — and it lays almost to the length of the modern day frontier between Wales and England. However, this physical frontier was not the only one employed by the Saxons in placing themselves away from the Britons.

The breach between peoples was further established by psychological and linguistic barriers. In Monmouth's own words, "as the foreign element around them became more and more powerful, they were given the name Welsh instead of Britons" (MONMOUTH, 1966, p. 284). *History* equates, in its final pages, the people called "Britons" to the Welsh, and the

sentence is built as to declare the name was imposed to them, rather than a definition they would have chosen for themselves. The name "Welsh", then, was used as a means of further solidifying a distance between Saxons and Britons, as described by Fear (2016),

> Even before the construction of Offa's Dyke, the psychological frontiers were beginning to emerge, the sense of "them" and "us", the invader and the native. In the Germanic dialects, the native Britons were called *Waelas*, which originated the words Wales and Welsh, the proper noun and the adjective respectively; the original word has been interpreted as "foreigner", and the same root word can be found in names of the Walloons of Belgium, *Welschtirol* in Northern Italy, the Vlachs of Eastern Europe and in Cornwall, Southwest England. Meanwhile, the Britons began referring to themselves as *Cymry*, derived from a more ancient Brythonic word, *combrogi*, meaning "fellow countrymen". (FEAR, 2016, p. 46-47)

The distinction, as the author describes, of "us" and "them" soon arose with the Saxon invasion. The Britons, designated as foreigners, would undergo constant attempts at cultural erasure — an effort which the Norman rulers would increase significantly. Fear's account describes the process of colonization imposed on Wales by the Normans, and how it echoes in Welsh culture to the present day. At first, domination was established through physical means, similar to what the Saxons intended with Offa's Dyke; during the late twelfth century the construction of Welsh castles was forbidden in south-eastern Wales, which is where the city of Monmouth is located.

Political measures were also imposed as a part of the efforts on subjugating Wales. The rule of south Wales was given to "English" barons, meaning they would have control over the frontier. In the book *The Welsh Princes*, Roger Turvey describes that the Normans took advantage of the internal political conflict between the kingdoms of Wales to establish their hold over the southern and eastern regions, also called the Welsh Marches, along the frontier with England. The barons' expeditions into Welsh territory, through "staking their claim by erecting earth and timber castles as they went, transformed the power structure in Wales" (TURVEY, 2002, p.4).

By the end of the thirteenth century, in 1284, King Edward I had imposed English law over Welsh territory. Turvey (2002) claims that the only Norman ruler which made significant advances on Welsh territory and politics before Edward I was Henry I (1100-35). He was, according to the author, "a dominant figure who manipulated the destinies of the dynasties of Deheubarth, Gwynedd and Powys, and was the first to establish significant royal territorial holdings in Wales" (TURVEY, 2002, p.4). Alternatively, during the reign of Stephen de Blois (1135–54) in which the Norman dynasty was endangered and at its weakest, Welsh rulers could move more freely and alter the political situation more to their advantage.

That later period coincides with the time of publishing of *History* and, as previously discussed in this study, the turmoil among Norman rulers was the perfect environment for Monmouth's work to thrive. Interestingly enough, the reign of those two kings comprise the whole of Monmouth's life, meaning he lived during times of great Norman influence over Wales and witnessed some retreat after 1135. As argued, *History* is mostly aligned with the perspective of aristocracy and targeted to a Norman audience, addressing themes which would have sparked the interest of nobles seeking to solidify their power.

Monmouth's latest work, *The Life of Merlin*, was only published in *c.* 1150, around the time in which he was appointed Bishop of St Asaph. However, as Siân Echard points out in the book *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature*, "the ongoing turmoil in the region may have prevented him taking up his seat before his death, in 1154 or 1155" (ECHARD, 2011, p.46). Nevertheless, *Life*'s main focus is the figure of Merlin, whose characterization then is much closer to the Myrddin of Welsh poems than the prophet Monmouth first presents in *History*, as this monograph will seek to demonstrate in its third section. That could point to a possible interest on Monmouth's part of moving closer to his Welsh sources once he achieved high ranks of clergy and was already an established writer, rather than further pursuing the favour of Norman readers. It could also demonstrate Monmouth's tendency to insert his own creations and characters in his works.

The attacks on Welsh culture and identity, however, did not halt after Edward's reign. They would continue for the centuries that followed, often through legal means. On the sixteenth century, Henry VIII's Act of Union would declare the end of legal limits between England and Wales. Such legislations, then, considered Wales as a part of England, not as a separate political and cultural unity. About this long history of attempted cultural domination over the Welsh, Fear (2016) explains,

> By the time the Normans invaded in 1066, the "Welsh" and the "English" had established their territories, demarcated by a physical boundary constructed by an 8th century Saxon king. After the Norman invasion and subjugation of the Saxon peoples, they expanded their territories further west to include Wales and Ireland, both of which were absorbed into the Anglo-Norman empire. From the 13th century onwards, Wales was subjected to a series of events and social upheaval, with an imposition of English laws, language and culture that national identity has been mutated, possibly beyond recognition. (FEAR, 2016, p.13)

Those events were not met without resistance; and although other legislation would be passed by English rulers to restrict Welsh language and culture, it survived by re-inventing itself. According to Fear (2016) an influx of immigrants from European countries to Wales

through the nineteenth century may have contributed to the development of a new perspective on Welsh identity, as the local culture embraced some traits brought by the immigrants. The notion of local identity has been constantly transformed, as "Wales has been absorbing these settlers and the descendants of these settlers themselves have become, in a sense, Welsh" (FEAR, 2016, p.22).

Fear's dissertation further discusses the concept of national identity. By writing about his personal experiences and other author's depiction of Welsh identity — or rather, the feeling of not being "sufficiently Welsh" —, Fear brings up the question of being somewhere in between. He points to the recurrent theme of not being quite English, neither Welsh, which presents itself in the works of Welsh authors, contemporary and medieval ones alike:

> Furthermore, it appears that this "insufficiently Welsh" identity crisis is nothing new; the 13th century deacon and chronicler, Giraldus Cambrensis, Gerard of Wales, who wrote contemporary descriptions of Welsh people and society, was born in south-west Wales into a Welsh-Norman family. According to Davies, Giraldus 'complained that he was too much of a Norman for the Welsh and too much of a Welshman for the Normans' an almost exact sentiment to that expressed by Dylan Thomas some 800 years later. (FEAR, 2016, p.18)

Through the 19th and 20th centuries, Welsh identity was redefined by the contact with other cultures, and reinvented itself, as it had already been doing since the first invasions in the Middle Ages. The Welsh identity and culture, then, can be defined by multiple experiences, and is ever-changing. Though that notion of identity is a postmodern conception, the quote above demonstrates that such question was already present in thirteenth century texts. Therefore, one can look to these concepts as a means of debating the divergent voices present in *History*.

This discussion is particularly helpful in outlining where Monmouth stands as an author, and it can aid in the complicated task of understanding the purposes and effects of his work. Although Lewis Thorpe identifies Monmouth's birth place in Wales, other authors raise the possibility that he was originally from Brittany, or, at the very least, was born to a Welsh-Norman family. Scholars' stance about Monmouth's origins have varied with time, as "the epithet Monemutensis, meaning from Monmouth, in south Wales, was once taken as evidence that he was Welsh, though it is more common today to suggest he was of Breton extraction" (ECHARD, 2011, p.46).

Those aspects of Monmouth's biography are somewhat similar to Gerald of Wales; one could argue that both authors share, to some degree, the cultural position of not being "sufficiently" Norman or Welsh. As previously discussed, Geoffrey of Monmouth resided in

Oxford for a large portion of his life, and his relations to Norman nobility and clergy are widely registered — and are also shown to be the intended audience for his books. Therefore, it is clear that Monmouth has strong ties to Norman people and culture.

These traits are brought again into discussion now not as an attempt to outline Monmouth's identity personally, but as a means to understand his place of authorship. Fear (2016) discusses the concept of identity in the light of postmodern thinking, describing it as a fragmented and constantly transforming idea of the self, which is influenced by history, language and other cultural elements. This definition can allow one to consider Monmouth's place as an author as a multifaceted, plural one, constituted by both Welsh and Norman cultures.

Some of Monmouth's account and creations may have been harmful to the Welsh, by referring to the British people at times with words such as "barbarous". Monmouth does align his speech and writing to the expectations of a Norman audience; that intent is made clear from the start. Still, it is worth looking for traits of other voices which might have come through in his narrative, as some aspects of Welsh culture may have left marks on the language employed by *History* and in the tales it portrays, however transformed they might appear. As Echard (2011) declares,

> The argument over Geoffrey's origins matters in part because it may speak to his mobilization of British source materials, as well as to his probable attitude towards those materials. While there may not have been a 'British book', there most certainly was a tradition of Welsh Arthurian poetry and of Welsh nationalist prophecy, and Geoffrey's work, particularly his treatment of Merlin, clearly echoes some of this material. (ECHARD, 2011, p.46)

It is important to consider, as well, that matters of culture and identity often cannot be discussed on binary terms. Identity, as Fear (2016) describes in his dissertation, is an ever-changing narrativization of the self, which is built through many aspects of one's experience. It can be argued that Monmouth writes from a middle ground, trespassed by both Welsh and Norman culture, translating Welsh tales to Latin and essentially recreating them. One could debate, then, that these aspects of cultural translation make *History* a polyphonic text. This work is permeated by Norman language and discourse; however, traits of Welsh culture can still be identified in the narrative.

In order to further understand the voices presented in *History of the Kings of Britain*, this work will now discuss Bakhtin's concept of polyphony. The author outlines the idea of polyphony through the analysis of the modern novel in his studies of Dostoevsky's writing. The concept of polyphony refers primarily to the coexisting of many, varying voices.

Therefore, a polyphonic novel would be a work in which the characters display voices of their own, instead of being attached to the discourse of the author or of the narrator. About Dostoevsky's novels, Bakhtin states,

> What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.6)

Polyphony, then, is the idea that contradicting voices can come through within the same text. Bakhtin presents this concept in direct opposition to that of the monophonic novel; the author points out that a monophonic text is constructed from one sole perspective, which consumes and guides the voices of every character. *History*'s narrative structure and the writing process behind it point to a necessary presence of conflicting voices, as it presents Welsh tales and characters to a Norman public. Monmouth's writing also displays an attempt at creating a work that could grant the Norman readers a means of identification, that is, presenting a story they could relate with.

Bakhtin points out that the greatest achievement of Dostoyevsky's novels was their composition, orchestrated by the weaving of heterogeneous and divergent materials into a cohesive, unified artistic creation. A narrative unity founded on divergent points of view is essentially polyphonic. Bakhtin further describes the polyphonic text as one that "is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.18). In that sense, *History of the Kings of Britain* evades this definition; even though the narrative construction is a confluence of divergent discourses, one perspective is absorbed and adapted into the other.

Nevertheless, *History* finds possible connexions between Welsh and Norman cultures. Monmouth creates his material from an authorial middle ground; his work, then, is a transposition which does not simply absorbs, but instead reinvents cultural and literary aspects. The next part of this monograph will debate how Monmouth's narrative translates Welsh characters and stories, and how they are presented by the text.

2. OF OUR OWN SPEECH: THE CONFLICTING VOICES IN *HISTORY*

The current chapter will examine some textual samples in order to further discuss how divergent voices are presented by *History*. The following parts will dwell on the presence of the Welsh language and culture in the book, and will also look into how Monmouth brings Welsh sources to his work. Through the analysis of *History*'s narrative structure, this section also points to constructions which demonstrate how the work's voices align to the Church and to the Norman aristocracy ideals.

By analysing some of the episodes presented by *History*, the first subsection looks to understand how Monmouth first presents Merlin, a character whose design was inspired by Welsh tradition, to a Norman audience. This part also debates the presence of Welsh names in the text, Monmouth's depiction of Welsh locations, and how those are constructed within the narrative. These elements are a display of how *History* translates Welsh culture to the Norman readers, and can further help one understand how the dialogue between these two cultures plays out in the book.

A separate section is dedicated to the study of the construction of Merlin's figure. This character's representation in *History* consists of many blended sources, which in a way sum up the presence of divergent voices within this work. Monmouth's Merlin is also a mysterious and ambiguous figure, who dwells in between two realities. The last section of this monograph seeks to demonstrate how Merlin, in a way, encapsulates the divergent voices of Monmouth's work.

2.1 Interwoven discourses: examining *History*'s narrative structure

The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Legend points out that "the history of King Arthur, which makes up more than a third of the book, considerably more than is devoted to any other king. This section must therefore be seen as the narrative focal point." (LUPACK, 2007, p. 25). Monmouth constructs the narrative in a certain manner that sets the stage, in a way, for the introduction of Merlin, and later, of Arthur. The following quote describes the Anglo-Saxon invasions in Britain and the Romans' withdrawal from the island; it precedes *History*'s fourth part, in which Uther (Arthur's father) and Merlin are first mentioned:

> What more can I say? Cities were abandoned, and the high Wall too. For the inhabitants banishments, dispersions which were even more desperate than usual, pursuits by the enemy, and more and more bloody slaughters followed

> fast upon each other. Just as sheep are torn apart by the wolves, so were the wretched *plebs* maltreated by their enemies.
> (...)
> ‘The sea drives us into the hands of the barbarians, and the barbarians drive us into the sea. Between the two of them, we have two deaths to choose from: we can either be drowned or have our throats cut.’ (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.147-148)

This is how Monmouth creates the atmosphere for the introduction of the would-be King Uther and the prophet Merlin: displaying before the reader an image of a land in despair and chaos. The narrative build-up for these characters’ entrance is essential for Monmouth’s purposes. Both Merlin and King Arthur, as figures originated from British collective memory and Welsh literature, were being presented for the first time to the Normans, who Monmouth wished to enrapture with his *History*.

By describing the desolation the Britons faced with the Saxon attacks, the author makes Merlin appear a great figure, one who possesses knowledge and answers when all others seemed lost. The narrative is constructed as to show just how important Merlin’s role would be to the future of Britain. As previously commented on this monograph, the Norman aristocracy was eager for reassurance, as they faced political uncertainty and the possibility of witnessing the end of a dynasty.

This demonstrates the careful and precise organization of Monmouth's narrative. The timing of events and somewhat dramatic declarations on the narrator’s part are presented with the specific intent of making some characters, like King Arthur and Merlin, look bolder to the readers. Monmouth focuses a large part of his work on these figures, and makes it so that they look impressive within the story, thus attaching and drawing the interest of the Norman audience to these Welsh characters. The text is also filled with references to the Welsh language and culture on a more surface level. According to Thorpe (1966),

> Geoffrey’s text is larded with toponymic conundrums, made the more exciting by the interlocking of Celtic and English roots. The capital of Britain, for example, according to Geoffrey, was first called “Troia Nova”. This degenerated into “Trinovantum”, but Lud changed the name to “Kaerlud” or “Lud’s City”, from which last the name London was formed. (THORPE, 1966, p.23)

The quotation above brings only a few examples of this narrative resource, however, it is most present throughout Monmouth’s work. Many of the rulers whose lives are depicted in the book build cities, which are named after them. Most of these places are presented by their English or Latin names, as well as by their Welsh names. King Leir is said to have created a city on the River Soar which Monmouth identifies as Kaerleir, “in the British tongue”

(MONMOUTH, 1966, p.81), while its Saxon name was Leicester. The British leader Gallus surrendered after a battle in a city which became known as “Nantgallum in Welsh, or in Saxon Galobroc” (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.130). Yet another battle sites are mentioned, such as Kaerperis and the field of Maisuria, referred to only by these names “in the Welsh language” (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.133).

Welsh locations seem to be very prominent in Monmouth’s work. Many crucial events, particularly those related to King Arthur and Merlin take place across several regions in Wales. Thorpe (1966) identifies Snowdon as the region in which Merlin was first found by Vortigern’s soldiers; that same king took refuge in “certain parts of Wales” (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.166) attempting to build a fortress and make his last stand against the Saxons. Thorpe (1966) declares the location of Vortigern's stronghold as being Mount Erith, also in Snowdon. King Arthur’s court was held on Caerleon-on-Usk, located on southern Wales. Echard (2011) explains that the presence of those locations, usually accompanied by an etymological account on their names, is strongly attached to *History*’s narrative,

> That historical memory is, for Geoffrey, also written across the landscape, retrievable through its linguistic traces. The HRB is full of anecdotes about how geographical features, cities and regions got their names. Geoffrey is of course often inventing these stories, but the important point is his desire to root his history in the physical, often using the linguistic to do so. (ECHARD, 2011, p.48)

What Echard demonstrates through the analysis of several of these anecdotes is that Monmouth possessed at least some knowledge of cultural and geographical traits of the places he presents as central to his narrative. The small yet constant inserts of Welsh language in *History*, interwoven with Latin and Germanic languages, seem even more relevant when one observes how Monmouth relates language to identity. Part three of *History* describes long years of conflict between the Britons and the Romans. Here Monmouth tells the story of King Octavius of Britain, who had no male son and thus, in his last years, asserted his need to declare an heir. The king’s counsellors are divided, some holding the opinion that Octavius should marry his daughter to a Roman noble, while others suggested he leave his nephew Conanus to rule.

Caradocus, Duke of Cornwall, comes forward with a third option; he advises Octavius to declare Maximianus, who was son to a Briton father and a Roman mother and currently a Senator in Rome, as his heir so he could enjoy “lasting peace”. Caradocus brings Maximianus to Britain and, with the support of other leaders, convinces the king to make peace; the leader of Cornwall then addresses Octavius, saying,

> Some recommended that you should hand over the crown to your nephew Conanus, and marry your daughter off in a seemly way in some other land. These were they who would have faced the ruin of their countrymen, if a prince speaking some foreign tongue were set in authority over them. Other would have offered the realm to your daughter and to some nobleman of our own speech who would have succeeded you after your death. The majority, however, advised that someone of the race of the Emperors should be sent for (...). These men assured you that a firm and abiding peace would then follow, for the might of Rome would protect them. (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.138)

Caradocus' suggestion, and the way he presents it to the king, relates language — or the speech — to the idea of identity and belonging. The mentions of Welsh names and places in this narrative were likely not made with any explicit purpose of preserving the Welsh language; still, they have been registered in *History* and accessed by many readers through the centuries. Furthermore, Caradocus' proposal in this passage aims at finding middle ground by putting on the British throne a man who was "both from the family of the Emperors and from a British origin" (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.135). Octavius opts, in the end, for reaching a compromise and marrying his daughter to Maximianus, who was neither fully Roman nor British. The premise of meeting in between two options is declared to be a way of bringing peace to the land.

Monmouth's references of Welsh language are not made solely through name registers or region descriptions; Celtic symbols also come through in *History*, particularly through prophecies. The prophetic section of *History* will be further discussed later in this work, as it can be considered one of the main aspects of Monmouth's narrative. Their obscure nature has allowed many later authors to reinterpret the symbols presented in them, and to use them for their own purposes.

The Red Dragon is an iconic Welsh symbol, and relates to the country's national identity; *Y Ddraig Goch*, as it is called in Welsh, "has been the national flag of Wales since 1959 but has an ancient history stretching back to the Roman occupation of Britain" (FEAR, 2016, p. 28). The Red Dragon makes an appearance in Monmouth's work as a representation of the peoples of Britain. *History*'s fifth part describes the episode of "the tower, the pool and the dragons". It takes place almost halfway through the book, representing a point in which the narrative inevitably shifts, parting from its pretence of historical documentation and moving more freely into the realm of myth and literature. Thorpe (1966) describes,

> The first half of Geoffrey's book is a well-ordered chronicle of what might well appear to be remote but nevertheless historical events, were it not for their very strangeness, the imaginative treatment given to some of them, and their factual extravagance in certain fields of history where we are too well

> informed from other sources to allow ourselves to be misled. (THORPE, 1966, p.20)

At this point, Merlin's prophetic powers are unveiled; many medieval readers rejected *History*, and criticized Monmouth for his failing in registering real facts. In fact, the chronicler William of Newburgh was a harsh critic of Monmouth's work for its lack of veracity and obvious fictional and literary qualities. Both Thorpe (1966) and Lawrence-Mathers (2014) state that William of Newburgh believed Monmouth to be a liar, and refused to acknowledge him as a historian.

Nevertheless, more than 200 copies of *History* were made at the time. The *Prophetiae Merlini*, the book which describes Merlin's prophecies, was of particular interest to the twelfth century audience. These prophecies became so popular, in fact, that they would in time develop into a tradition of their own. Lupack (2007) describes how this character's prophetic powers would remain a recurrent aspect of his representation through the centuries, being present still even in twentieth century novels such as the works of T. H. White and Mary Stewart.

"The tower, the pool and the dragons" episode, then, is a major event in this narrative. In Monmouth's description, the tale goes: Vortigern, leader of Gewissei, had plotted and conspired for years to take the throne of Britain to himself. The previous king's eldest son Constans had become a monk, and the two other possible heirs (one of which was Uther) were at the time too young to rule. Vortigern convinced Constans to act as a shadow leader, so he could take control of the government.

But soon Vortigern grew tired of this arrangement; he allied with the Picts so they would murder Constans, and later, when the Saxons came to Britain, allowed them free entry in exchange for more power over the kingdom. Vortigern married Renwein, daughter to Hengist, his allied Saxon king, and so these invading warriors were granted even more lands and power. Eventually, Hengist decided that it was in his best interest to betray Vortigern, who, realizing he was now outnumbered, fled to "certain parts of Wales" in an attempt to defend himself.

It was then Vortigern called upon his magicians, who advised him to built a fortress in Mount Erith, which could be his last line of defence, should all other holds fall to the Saxons. However, the fortress would not stand: everything that was built during the day would fall apart at night. Vortigern again consulted with his magicians, who said he should look for a fatherless boy, kill him and sprinkle the child's blood over the tower's foundations so it would remain standing.

Vortigern's scouts soon find such a boy in "a town which was afterwards called Kaermerdin" (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.167); Merlin and his mother, a nun of St. Peter's Church and daughter to the king of Demetia, were brought before King Vortigern, where she explained that Merlin was the child of no mortal man, but of some otherworldly creature. As soon as Merlin learned of the king's intent, he commanded to be taken to the foundations of the tower. There, in a prophetic trance, he revealed that underneath the tower laid a pool, and inside two dragons fought viciously: a red, and a white one. Merlin then burst into tears, and began to speak,

> 'Alas for the Red Dragon, for its end is near. Its cavernous dens shall be occupied by the White Dragon, which stands for the Saxons whom you have invited over. The Red Dragon represents the people of Britain, who will be overrun by the White One; for Britain's mountains and valleys shall be levelled, and the streams in its valleys shall run with blood.
> (...)
> 'The race that is oppressed shall prevail in the end, for it will resist the savagery of the invaders.
> 'The Boar of Cornwall shall bring relief from these invaders, for it will trample their necks beneath its feet. (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.171)

In describing this episode, Monmouth evokes the image of the Red Dragon as a representation of the British and, though the prophecy speaks of the dragon's struggle and violence inflicted by the White Dragon, it is implied that the Red would live through these attacks. Some authors argue that those prophecies are fulfilled and enclosed in *History*, avoiding the implication of possible future Welsh rebellion or resistance (Faletra, 2000). The image of *Y Ddraig Goch* is, nevertheless, likely a nod to Welsh tradition. That and other lines of Merlin's prophecies would be widely referenced by later authors. *History*'s fifth book seems to have inspired a set of diverse texts, some of which present a very different purpose than Monmouth's.

As previously discussed by this monograph, Monmouth's sources have been studied in great detail and even registered within *History*'s narrative. The accounts of Welsh historians also echo in Geoffrey of Monmouth's work; the clear references to Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* appear not only on a large part of *History*'s narrative and plot, but his voice also granted more credibility to Monmouth's tale. However, much of his source material seems to be a part of Welsh collective memory. The "collective memory" of a people is what creates an idea of a shared historical past, which contributes for the formation of subjectivity, of individual identities, as well as of national identities (FEAR, 2016).

Colonized countries, however, undergo a process of cultural erasure in which the local memory is transformed, as the official history is documented according to the colonizer's

perspective. It can be observed that, "historically, a colonizing power imposes laws, prohibits native customs and practices, even language, and implements an education that effectively oppresses and alters the collective memory of the colonized nation" (FEAR, 2016, p.24). The Norman invasion caused much of Welsh memory to be lost and has, to this day, lasting impact on its culture. Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was a rising interest in recovering the history of Wales, Scotland and Ireland, which resulted in the creation of myth and legend to fill the gaps in culture and tradition.

At the very beginning of his tale, Monmouth claims that much of his work was translated from ancient tradition, thus, authors' names or book titles sometimes are not clearly stated. However, it is possible to relate some of the content in *History of the Kings of Britain* to previous Welsh tales likely originated from the collective memory, and registered in Welsh manuscripts. Some of those tales are poems which were collected and translated by Lady Charlotte Guest in the nineteenth century — a time in which the interest in Welsh culture and Arthurian Legend increased.

Guest's work was named *The Mabinogion*, and consists of a translation of the surviving medieval Welsh manuscripts *Llyfr Coch Hergest* (*The Red Book of Hergest*) and *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* (*The White Book of Rhydderch*). These texts date from a time period between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. When referring to *The Mabinogion*, Lupack claims that "some of the material contained in these poems, however, dates to a time significantly earlier than when the manuscripts were written" (LUPACK, 2007, p. 329), which indicates that Monmouth might have known of these stories of oral literature and taken them as sources for his own writing.

The collection of poems in *The Mabinogion* contains some of the first accounts of King Arthur and his court. Myrddin, a figure which would greatly contribute to Monmouth's representation of Merlin, is also featured in the poems. A few stories in *The Mabinogion* display some possible resemblance to the adventure episodes featured in *History*'s narrative, although it can be difficult to verify any direct relation. One of these tales is Culhwch *ac* Olwen, or "How Culhwch won Olwen". About the similar nature of those two texts, Lupack (2007) writes,

> Culhwch and Olwen presents a picture of the Arthurian court before it is transformed by Geoffrey and Chrétien. It also demonstrates that some of the material that these and later authors use has an earlier source. The picture of Cei, for example, as someone less than welcoming to strangers, as someone who is stubborn and yet valiant, is perfectly consistent with his later characterization. (LUPACK, 2007, p.17)

The story of Culhwch and Olwen is considered to be one of the oldest surviving Arthurian tales; it tells of a man named Culhwch who was cursed by his step-mother to fall in love with Olwen, the only daughter of the giant Ysbaddaden Bencawr. Culhwch was King Arthur's cousin, whose help he seeks in the quest of finding Olwen. Culhwch seeks to ask her to marry him, though her father would not allow her to be wed. Arthur calls on the warriors Cei, Bedwyr, Cynddylig Gyfarwydd, Gwrhyr Gwalstawd Ieithoedd, Gwalchmai and Menw to accompany them on the journey, all of which posses some kind of supernatural skill. In their path, they encounter all sorts of people who claim the giant is a terrible creature, who none could defeat.

When they arrive at the giant's court, Ysbaddaden gives the warriors many tasks which they should accomplish before Olwen could marry Culhwch, and through a series of adventures, hunts and battles, they seek and retrieve mystical items. Finally, the objects are brought back to the giant's court; Ysbaddaden is killed and decapitated, and Culhwch and Olwen can be wed. Sioned Davies, translator to the 2007 version of *The Mabinogion*, points out that "How Culhwch won Olwen" presents Arthur's court in a very different light than what is described in *History* and later texts. In her introduction to *The Mabinogion*, Davies (2007) argues that the earliest Arthurian tales recalled a past in which Wales was united under one leader; in those stories, Arthur is a more active and prominent figure than the character of later romance tradition.

However, *History* depicts some episodes which have a similar adventurous tone to that in "How Culhwch won Olwen". Arthur sets out in a quest to rescue Helena, Hoel's niece, who was kidnapped by a giant in the Spanish location of Mount-Saint-Michel; Hoel, like Culhwch, was Arthur's relative. The knights who accompany him are Cei and Bedwyr, now identified as Kay the Seneschal and Bedivere the Cup Bearer. Like their Welsh counterparts, they are capable of great displays of strength and courage, though more subdued. Arthur too, is described as "a man of such outstanding courage, he had no need to lead a whole army against monsters of this sort" (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.238).

In a similar fashion, the story ends as the terrible, undefeated and savage giant is found in his layer after a long search and has his head cut off by one of Arthur's knights. Helena, however, is killed before she could be saved. This episode translates many elements presented in *The Mabinogion*, such as the quest, the battles and adventures and victory over a monstrous creature. Arthur is looked at as a powerful and protective figure; Helena and Olwen are portrayed as idealized characters, almost unreachable, and are essentially the motivation and the ends of the knights' journey.

And yet, many aspects have been altered to fit Monmouth's purposes: Cei and Bedwyr are the only ones to go with Arthur, their names have been translated to more Latin forms and their abilities are not as super-human. The giant's name is omitted, and he is presented as a more animalistic figure than Ysbaddaden was. The knights' quest is also shorter, as the giant's tasks have been left out of the story altogether.

Up to this point, this study has described the social and historical context in which Geoffrey of Monmouth produced *History of the Kings of Britain*; it has also analyzed some of the narrative's episodes, pointing to connections to Welsh symbols and texts. This discussion serves as a means of understanding the different aspects that have influenced *History*'s creation, which come through as different voices in the narrative. Monmouth, as a Benedictine monk, was inserted in a religious environment, and so transcribed Catholic ideals into his writing — and so the Church's perspective too, is present in *History*. The quote below was taken from the *History* episode in which Vortigern, King of Britain, confronts the beliefs of Hengist, his allied Saxon king.

> "When he heard the name Mercury mentioned, the King looked them full in the face and asked them what their religion was. 'We worship the gods of our own country,' replied Hengist: 'Saturn, Jove and the others whom rule over this world, and more especially Mercury, whom in our language we call Woden.(...)'
> 'I am greatly grieved,' replied Vortigern, 'by your belief which, indeed, can better be called unbelief; but all the same, I am delighted that you have come, for either God Himself, or someone else, has brought you here to help me at the most convenient moment." (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.156-157)

Although Vortigern meets the Saxon's description with reprimands and disregard, an image of Saxon faith is still briefly registered through Hengist's declaration. The Saxon king describes Germanic gods — mostly Woden and Freia — by comparing them to Roman gods, which may have been a way to make them not seem so foreign to a Norman audience.

The Catholic outlook of Monmouth's text also appears in the characterization of prophecy and other supernatural events. Particularly through Merlin's acts, it can be observed that magic is described with care, and the narrative only demonstrates a few particular practices. Lawrence-Mathers (2014) declares that the twelfth century advancements in sciences such as medicine, mathematics and geography "helped to create an excited audience for the magical feats that Merlin had performed" (LAWRENCE-MATHERS, 2014, p.118), which also helps to explain Monmouth's rejoicing preface about the popularity of his book (incorporated into *History*), *The Prophecies of Merlin*.

The author states that recent discovery of Arab medicine, astrology, alchemy and philosophy caused great curiosity as well as worry to the medieval reader, and that would have placed Merlin on the limit between arts which were acceptable by the Church and those which were condemned. Lawrence-Mathers (2014) points out that Merlin's supernatural abilities and knowledge would have been understood as "natural magic" by the twelfth century standards; *History*'s publication came before the Church developed more hostile ideas towards magic. About that distinction, the author demonstrates,

> The fact that his magical feats were real, and that he could perform them without making use of talismans, summoning rituals or idolatrous offerings, were of key importance in making Merlin an universally recognized figurehead to the 'scientific' aspects of magic. The historical sources on Merlin powerfully suggested that he was not a sorcerer but a gifted practitioner of 'natural magic', the fashionable experimentation with the occult powers of the earth itself. (LAWRENCE-MATHERS, 2014, p. 119)

Merlin's domain over 'natural magic' and prophecy are presented in contrast to Bladud's necromancy. The polarizing portrayal of these two kinds of knowledge is also an indicator of the religious tone present in Monmouth's work. Merlin, however, is characterized precisely by the weaving of conflicting perspectives, and embodies ambiguous concepts. Considering that construction, the following section looks to further explore this figure's role within narrative.

2.2 The creation of Merlin

Geoffrey of Monmouth's work is most known for its depiction of the legends about Merlin and of King Arthur, describing their feats and influence in the history Britain. That is because Monmouth was the first author to connect the stories of these two characters, and his representation of Merlin in particular would be (and still is) referenced by many other works of literature. *History* essentially began the tradition that made Merlin the figure one may recognize at the present time. Lupack (2007) points out that "Geoffrey combines the figure of the youth Ambrosius Aurelianus from Nennius and the Celtic figure of Myrddin in his character Ambrosius Merlinus" (LUPACK, 2007, p.26).

Many sources point to the role Monmouth played in creating the figure which would continue to be referenced in many works of literature in the English language, and to this day is still recognizable by readers as an integral part of King Arthur's story. Lupack (2007) states that "*History* was tremendously influential in the development of the character of Merlin". Monmouth first outlined his Merlin in an earlier book, *Prophecies of Merlin* (*Prophetiae*

Merlini), which later was incorporated into *History of the Kings of Britain*; the section containing Merlin's prophecies is the one in which the Celtic elements that connect this character to Myrddin seem most present.

Gillian Sandeman, in the 1968 book *The Figure of Merlin in English Literature From the Beginnings to 1740* mentions divergent views on the subject of Merlin's origins, some arguing that the character would be solely a product of the writer's imagination, while others support the notion that Merlin is directly related to the figure of Myrddin in Welsh texts and Celtic oral literature. Sandeman (1968) describes some of the sources attributed to Monmouth's writing, which seem to echo in the *History the of Kings of Britain*, and later in *The Life of Merlin (Vita Merlini)*. About the texts which have influenced *The Life of Merlin*, Archibald and Putter (2009) describe,

> Geoffrey's last work, *The Life of Merlin*, fuses the Latin tradition of Ambrosius, Vortigern's prophet in the *Historia Brittonum*, with Welsh stories of Myrddin. In accordance with Welsh tradition, Merlin roams the northern forests, traumatised by the death of his friends in battle, and raves about the past and future. The time-span of Merlin's memory is improbably large, however. Not only does he recall how he prophesied to Vortigern on Mount Snowdon, but he also recounts from personal memory what happened to Arthur, his successor Constantine, and Conan (...). The explanation for the impossible longevity of Geoffrey's Merlin is that he is a composite of the Celtic bard Myrddin and the Ambrosius of Nennius. (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.40)

Although the authors mention Monmouth's latest work as the text which joined the characters of Myrddin and Ambrosius, it is clear that such configuration of Merlin was already developed in *History of the Kings of Britain*. Soon after the character's first appearance, the narrator refers to him as "Merlin, who was also called Ambrosius." (MONMOUTH, 1966, p.169); from that point onwards, the name repeats a few more times through the narrative.

Few Welsh manuscripts about Myrddin have reached the contemporary age, but those that did, date from the thirteenth to fifteenth century. Nevertheless, the stories they tell appear to have been a part of literature since earlier times; in fact, Archibald and Putter (2009) claim that some of the materials about Myrddin date from the eleventh century at the latest, and Lupack (2007) also points out that the tales they register are much older than the texts themselves.

Sandeman (1968) mentions the *Black Book of Carmathen*, the *Book of Hergest* and the poems *Afellannau* (Apple Trees), *Hoianau* (Greetings) and *Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd ei Chwaer* (The Conversation of Myrddin and his sister Gwenddydd) as some Welsh texts

featuring this character. In those works, Myrddin is depicted as a man who was driven mad by the death of his lord Gwenddolau which happened during the war (in the battle of Arfderydd). Myrddin is described as a hermit who lives wild in the woods, making several prophecies. In *The Cambridge Companion to Arthurian Legend*, this character is described as a bard "who went mad after a battle in the north in 585, and lived as a wild man in the forests of Celyddon, where he had prophetic visions of the future." (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009, p.38).

The first poems featuring Myrddin, according to Lupack (2007) likely relate to the Scottish tales of Lailoken; "then the legend is transferred from the north of Britain to Wales and Lailoken is identified with Myrddin; subsequently the legend develops in Wales and is associated with 'the national tradition of prophecy'" (LUPACK, 2007, p.331). Finally, Monmouth's draws inspiration from the texts about Myrddin to create a new character. Sandeman (1968) points out that,

> Geoffrey of Monmouth's Merlin in the *Vita Merlini* (c 1150) shares some of the characteristics of Myrddin but the Merlin of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c 1136) has a very different history, and Geoffrey went to some trouble in the *Vita* to combine the two. The Merlin of the *Historia* appears to have his origins in Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* (early ninth century) and perhaps in Talmudic and Apocryphal legend, and much may be ascribed to Geoffrey's own inventiveness. (SANDEMAN, 1968, p.7)

The figure of Myrddin, according to Sandeman (1968), has a closer resemblance to the character portrayed in Monmouth's *The Life of Merlin*; the Merlin presented in *History*, displays more similarities to Nennius' character, Ambrosius. Lawrence-Mathers (2014) points out that *Life* seems to present a different version of Merlin than that showed by *History*, characterizing him as "neither the child-prophet nor the master of magical technology, but rather an adult Welsh prince with magical and political powers" (LAWRENCE-MATHERS, 2014, p.54). However, the character which is portrayed in *History* is a prophet, like Myrddin was, and that is not a lesser trait. As previously argued by this monograph, Merlin's prophecies to Vortigern stand as a crucial section to the narrative, and his foretellings and schemes greatly influence the political scene of Britain.

Through the creation of Merlin, Monmouth in a way enabled the figure of the prophet, which is central to the stories and poems involving Myrddin, to further develop, to become known and referenced by other authors. As previously argued, Merlin's prophetic powers remained a consistent part of his representation through the centuries, in many different works. Monmouth's contribution to the prophecy tradition through his portrayal of Merlin

may even have influenced authors whose purposes greatly diverged from his original intent of a Norman-aligned discourse,

> Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* was tremendously influential in the development of the character of Merlin in several ways, including the popularization of a tradition of prophecies attributed to Merlin that often have political or religious implications for the time in which the prophecies were actually written. (...) Despite, or in some cases because of, their obscurity, Geoffrey's prophecies influenced other collections of prophecies attributed to Merlin, such as the *Prophecies de Merlin*, written in the 1270s and ascribed, probably spuriously, to Maistre Richart d'Irlande. The *Prophecies* commented on political and religious matters, as did many other prophecies from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when such predictions were used to support various causes, including Welsh nationalism and the Reformation. (LUPACK, 2007, p.333)

That many writers with such different perspectives would all find inspiration in *History* can point to the many possibilities contained within this work. Even if the narrative does not call for Welsh nationalism in itself, other texts which hold that intent have taken reference in *History*, as mentioned by Lupack (2007). This work's focus on prophecies could have been a helpful factor to such development, as it appears to be the aspect that most prominently ties Monmouth's text to the Welsh literary and cultural tradition. The reader's response to this story indicates that there was some element within the narrative which could be reinterpreted into supporting many different causes.

To the contemporary reader, Merlin's prophecies would have seemed very real, as they recalled historical events. That, along with the "suggestively equivocal" nature of Monmouth's composition, might have led readers to believe these prophecies to indicate future events as well (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009). Julia Crick, in the article "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition", further elaborates on the impact Merlin's prophecies had on the audience, and the subjects other authors would associate them with,

> The reception of the prophecies, both within Geoffrey of Monmouth's history and outside it, demonstrates the potency of prophecy and its ambivalence to medieval readers, within the Anglo-Norman realm and beyond: while still live, a source of arcane and illicit knowledge, morally and politically dangerous, attractive to the powerful, lapped up by the prelacy; once spent, widely accepted as a form of historical revelation, although matter inappropriate for casual rewriting or easy interpretation. Much more needs to be said. The manuscript-tradition preserves evidence of reader reaction not only in articulated form, as glossing, but as a host of textual juxtapositions which suggest something of reception. Merlinian prophecies occur in association with texts on rebellion, with astrology, with law and statutes or other constitutional documents. (CRICK, 2011, p.75)

Considering that, it can be argued that Merlin represents the translation and adaptation that Monmouth develops throughout *History*. In this character, the author gathered different sources and adapted them as to create a figure which could interest his audience. The political prophecies, which represent one of the major events related to Merlin in this narrative, generated real speculation and, as mentioned above, had great influence in later texts. The translation aspect of Monmouth's work is made even clearer in the book containing Merlin's prophecies, the *Prophetiae Merlini*. That section has a preface of its own, which is somewhat parallel to the book's presentation, as Echard (2011) points out,

> There are obvious similarities to the opening of HRB. Geoffrey figures himself as a humble translator, not an innovator. His role is that of mediator between British tradition and Latin readers, here in the person of Alexander, bishop of Lincoln. Both the history Geoffrey has hitherto been writing, and prophecies of all sorts with their attendant commentary traditions, are precisely the sort of reading material favoured by educated courtier-clerics. Geoffrey's own interest in this tradition is suggested, not merely by the Merlin section of the *Historia*, but also by the fact that he apparently returned to Merlin for his last work, the *Vita Merlini*. (ECHARD, 2011, p.51-52)

The author makes an important connexion between translating and mediating. The prefaces in *History* indicate that Monmouth saw himself as a translator. It could be argued, then, that his work is in a way an attempt at adapting, transposing elements of one culture so it can be accessed by those of another culture. In fact, most critics agree that Merlin's name is the result of a specific choice in Monmouth's translation, as "the Welsh 'Myrddin' would have yielded the name 'Merdinus' but that Geoffrey avoided this form because of its similarity to the French word *merde*" (LUPACK, 2007, p.460). This stands as an almost anecdotal display of cultural translation, as the author made deliberate choices in order to make a character more agreeable to his target audience, being mindful of the cultural background and aspects of the receiving language.

The change in this figure's name is a simple, however telling, aspect of his characterization and exemplifies the cultural "middle ground" presented by *History*. Monmouth's design of Merlin results from the intertwining of diverse sources; it can be argued that Merlin embodies the conflicting discourses within *History*'s structure. That aspect, as previously described, relates to the sources Monmouth referenced when inventing this figure, by drawing from both Myrddin and Ambrosius. In fact, Merlin seems to be constantly localized between two identities. When the character first appears in the narrative, he is immediately identified as a "boy without a father"; however, it is soon explained that he

was conceived by a mortal mother (who is both a nun and a Welsh princess) and an otherworldly being — often said to be a demon.

Merlin is an ambiguous creature from the start, half human and half supernatural being. This condition places him in a permanent state of being not quite here, nor there, and such characteristic shows through his actions and his powers. In his few (yet always crucial) mysterious appearances, Merlin employs both magic and engineering to perform feats that shape the future of Britain, such as aiding in the birth of Arthur and building the Stonehenge. When discussing this character's traits, Crick (2011) states,

> Was Merlin pagan or Christian? By what authority did he prophesy? If, as Geoffrey said, he was fathered by an incubus, then was his birth demonic? These were potent questions for readers throughout the Middle Ages but especially at the point at which Merlin made his entry into Latin literature, in the middle years of the twelfth century, at the intersection of monastic and scholastic culture, where patristic and scriptural authority collided with that of the pagan classics. (CRICK, 2011, p.67-68)

The collision described by Crick of Christian and pagan ideals, the clash between religious and scholarly texts — and also, in Merlin's case, of Norman and Welsh cultures — is one of the core characteristics of *History of the Kings of Britain*. Merlin represents the intersection of many discourses, which is perhaps the reason why this character remains a recurrent figure of Arthurian literature, appearing, reinvented, time and time again, wearing different faces and personalities.

CONCLUSION

History of the Kings of Britain is a fascinating text, which has been subject of study to many authors: centuries upon centuries of different readings and perspectives about this work have already been published. This monograph sought to contribute to this long tradition by discussing the conflicting discourses present in Monmouth's work, and how they are interwoven into a narrative unity.

By recalling the historical context in which *History* is inserted, it becomes clear that it was produced at a time which witnessed the rise of many divergent discourses. During the early twelfth-century the Norman rule expanded westwards, invading Wales, and Henry I's reign started many of the legal and military measures which would be employed to subjugate that region. Just as the Normans, on one hand, developed the scholarly and the courtly tradition, they also campaigned to colonize Wales, attempting to erase the local culture and language.

Shortly after King Henry's death, the Norman dynasty itself would face a period of crisis and infighting, as Matilda and Stephen went to war for the throne of Britain. By the time *History* was published, the Normans were still in the process of settling in the isle, and in search for some historical source which could help justify their rule and fill historical gaps left by Saxon chronicles.

The author too was placed among conflicting positions. Geoffrey of Monmouth's birth place is assumed to have been south-eastern Wales, or maybe Brittany: some consider him a Welshman, while to some he was a Breton born in Wales, and others still claim him to have been of entirely Norman birth. His scarcely documented biography indicates that Monmouth spent most of his life in England; his first literary work demonstrates that he had strong connexions with the Norman nobility and their culture, and that they were the book's intended readers.

Nevertheless, some versions of *History* show that Monmouth presented himself as a Briton, and many authors would argue he had knowledge of the Welsh language and geography. His mobilization of Welsh poems and historical sources is made clear throughout the narrative, as the content in Moumouth's writing recalls Welsh literary tradition. The discussion on Monmouth's origins, as stated by Echard (2011), can aid in understanding how the writer treated these Celtic sources, how he related to them and his position as an author.

It appears that Monmouth stands on a cultural middle ground, in between Norman and Welsh identities. *History* has the Norman aristocracy as a target audience; however, the

narrative is permeated by Welsh names, locations and characters — even if those have been altered and at times recreated. In many ways, these elements have been preserved in *History*, and through this work characters such as King Arthur and Merlin were further developed as a part of British literature, joining what would become the romance tradition. The narrative is constructed as to introduce these Welsh-inspired characters in a favourable light, to a public which would likely not have known about them before.

The interweaving of conflicting voices, sources and perspectives constitutes the very narrative concept of *History*. This aspect can be verified particularly in the character Merlin, as he is a multifaceted figure constantly pressed between two realities. Monmouth creates him from the joining of Welsh and Latin manuscripts, writes him as the child of a demon and a nun, one who shapes the political future of Britain. It is also Merlin who provides the obscure prophecies which would be reinterpreted by later authors. Some of these texts appropriated the prophecies to discuss Welsh nationalism; even if that was not Monmouth's intent, the text provided enough elements so they could be read as such.

It then becomes clear that Merlin's character holds a great potential to being adapted; as other authors identify the possibilities this figure contains, a wide range of texts can, and has been, produced, with each new creation standing as a unique take on a recognizable tale. There is much in Merlin's character that can be appropriated by the readers to develop their own stories and bring different perspectives into this narrative. Merlin's figure was created by a confluence of conflicting voices, and it resulted in centuries of reinterpretations, which Monmouth's text invites through its own narrative construction.

In *History*'s preface, Monmouth claims his work to be a translation of an ancient text in the Briton's language; even if such ancient text never existed, Monmouth does take on the role of a translator. In his purpose of writing a tale the Normans would take interest in, one they could identify with, Monmouth also registered elements of Welsh culture. Still, much of *History*'s material originates from reinterpretations and cultural transpositions. A translation might be seen as a betrayal to the starting text, for it is impossible to transpose ideas and not make any cultural and linguistic adaptations to it – however, translations also have the potential of creating bridges between cultures. *History of the Kings of Britain*, then, is a work that manages to articulate different cultural elements, mediating them even as they diverge.

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