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Reading Vice: The Christian Text in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*

Nancy S. Bell

Grand Valley State University

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Reading Vice:
The Christian Text in Geoffrey of Monmouth's

Historia regum Britanniae

Nancy S. Bell

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

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Department of English

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Dedication

To Jim: Thanks for your love, support, ideas, and discussions and for believing in me.

To Aislinn, Caitrin, Eamon, and Treasa: Thanks for your love and support. You made it easier to keep going.

And thanks to all the friends and associates who told me that I could do this.

Abstract

Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed his purpose for writing *Historia regum Britanniae* was to record a history of the British kings and their great deeds. On the surface, his book is indeed a chronicle detailing the reigns of several important kings and glossing over many more. However, below the surface, Geoffrey includes layers of Christian text to motivate his audience to avoid vice. To clue his readers into the Christian meaning, Geoffrey makes use of shared beliefs, such as that vices should be avoided, that a king's behavior affects his people, that disease can be a manifestation of sin, and that God is involved in the rise and fall of nations. Also to add in additional Christian layers, Geoffrey uses Biblical language and makes several allusions to Biblical characters, events, and teachings.

Though a history, Geoffrey's text follows the pattern of a narrative which functions as a means to pass on a moral meaning and to preserve a society's beliefs. Geoffrey chooses the kings and events that will best express his moral message and show the audience the need to live a moral life. He also follows a narrative pattern in constructing a plot that invites the audience into the story. His plot comes through his exempla of the kings, and with these stories, Geoffrey exhibits the dangers of indulging in vice because of the punishment and suffering that come as a consequence of sin. By the end of *HRB*, not only are the kings sinning but the Britons are as well, and their sins eventually lead to more severe punishment. With all this layering of shared beliefs, Christian text, and narrative form, Geoffrey is emphasizing the need for people to avoid vice and is hoping to inspire them to do so.

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Introduction

Of few authors could it be said that their “works have been many things to many people: history, fiction, folklore, mythology, satire, epic, tragedy and comedy,” (Curley xi), but with just three known works, this epithet fits Geoffrey of Monmouth. Because of the far-reaching influence of his *Historia regum Britanniae* (*HRB*), Geoffrey has engendered much discussion over the centuries since it first appeared around 1139. Common topics of research have related to how much of *HRB* is truth or fiction, how Geoffrey obtained his sources, and his purpose in writing. Even with all this scholarship in relation to Geoffrey and *HRB*, few scholars have addressed the Christian nature of his text or how he correlated his Christian text with his narrative structure to impart a moral meaning. What I will argue in this paper is that Geoffrey purposefully connects with his audience through shared beliefs and shapes his narrative to convince his audience of the necessity of to avoid vice through the Christian text within the layers of his story in order to preserve the foundational beliefs of his society.

When *HRB* first appeared, it was tremendously popular, being read in both England and on the continent. There are at least 200 surviving manuscripts. Because of its popularity, Geoffrey gained some notoriety during his time, and his importance continues to be acknowledged even today, mostly because of his treatment of the Arthur legend. First, he is known to have defined the “Matter of Britain,” those legendary stories of Arthur that give shape to the identity of Britain’s past (Faletra 20; Paton, Introduction vii). Second, Geoffrey is known as the “father of Arthurian romance” (Paton, Introduction viii). The influence of the Arthurian text has extended through the centuries. In just looking at the literature that has stemmed from Geoffrey’s Arthur story, we have the works of Wace, Layamon, Chrétien de Troyes, and Marie de France and such stories as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Spenser’s *The Fairie Queene*,

Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, to name just a few. And still after all these centuries, the legends of Arthur and his knights have a presence in popular culture with such things as the founding of the International Arthurian Society (Thorpe 30), a host of books, musicals like *Camelot* and *Merlin*, movies like *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*, and TV shows like *Merlin* and *Once Upon a Time*. Going beyond the Arthurian influence, Shakespeare's characters of King Lear and Cymbeline make an appearance in *HRB*. What is often considered a history of kings has had long-lasting influence for more than 800 years.

Despite its popularity or maybe because of its popularity, scholars have not shied away from criticizing Geoffrey or his text. Many scholars have noted how Geoffrey's contemporary historians criticized *HRB*'s veracity when it first appeared. Lucy Allen Paton tells of the disbelief of William of Malmesbury and Henry Huntingdon, both of whom had written histories of their own (Introduction xix). Michael Curley remarks that Gerald of Wales, who in his own writing employed his "vivid imagination," was quick to criticize Geoffrey for not being accurate (ix). Lewis Thorpe and Valerie Flint as well as Paton all show that William of Newburgh, just forty years after *HRB* appeared, accused Geoffrey of a love of lying (Thorpe 17; Flint 447; and Paton, Introduction xix). His contemporary historians studied *HRB* to determine if it was fact or fiction—did the events that Geoffrey recounted actually occur? They all concluded that it was a fabrication and therefore implied that it was not valid as a history and perhaps not worth reading.

Since the negative reception of these earlier historians, other scholars have taken a more balanced approach in looking at whether *HRB* is accurate as a history or not. For example, Alison André admits that some of *HRB* comes from Geoffrey's imagination but also suggests that there is some truth in what he has written, particularly in his description about the arrival of

Christianity to Britain. André shows that Geoffrey was correct in his version of the pagan church before Christianity arrived, the names and existence of two missionaries, and the conversion of Lucius. André concludes that in matters of religion Geoffrey took “pains to write what he considers to be the truth” (12). For another, Lewis Thorpe also describes some elements of *HRB* that are shown to be accurate based on archaeological evidence: Ogham stones with Vortigern’s name found in Ireland; a story of bluestones carried by sea and overland from West Wales that is supported by modern archaeologists and is parallel to Geoffrey’s story of how Stonehenge was made of huge slabs transported from Ireland; and a large number of skulls that were found with few other bones to support Geoffrey’s story that the Venedoti decapitated a whole Roman legion (18-19). In addition, J.S.P. Tatlock points out that Geoffrey’s knowledge of the Roman empire and various Crusades shows in his use of place and character names. Ultimately, however, Tatlock concludes that Geoffrey “took far more pains to be easy and vivid” to read than to “fend off doubt in the critical” and that “most of his readers never weighed the question of authenticity at all” (223). I would argue that perhaps what is most important is not whether Geoffrey wrote an accurate history but how skillfully and purposefully he used fact and imagination to construct his narrative.

Besides judging its veracity as history, scholars also have debated Geoffrey’s claim that *HRB* is actually a translation of a Welsh book given him by Walter the Archdeacon. Thorpe in his introduction to *HRB* explores how various historians in the 1900s viewed this matter. Thorpe explains that Sir John Lloyd stated that no such Welsh book existed (15). Similarly, Thorpe presents Jacob Hammer’s proposal that there was a variant version that Geoffrey simply adapted (15-16). For another, Thorpe observes that Acton Griscom believed that even though we no longer have the exact book, we might have evidence of its existence in the form of other Welsh

histories (15). With little evidence of a single Welsh book, most scholars conclude that Geoffrey used a number of sources that he adapted for his narrative: commonly recognized sources are the histories of Gildas, Bede and Nennius; episodes from the chronicles of his contemporaries William of Malmesbury and Henry of Huntington; the Bible; Celtic records and legends; and universal folk tales to name just some (Paton, Introduction xvii). Paton portrays Geoffrey as an “adroit combiner” who could “weave his facts together in a narrative embellished by interesting material in reality drawn from countless sources” (Introduction, xx). In the end, it doesn’t matter so much that Geoffrey didn’t have a single Welsh book but instead used multiple sources; what matters is that he wrote a book that helped define a nation and started the great Arthurian tradition and that people still read.

Scholars have also debated Geoffrey’s purpose in writing that goes beyond his stated one to record the great deeds of British kings. Paton claims that Geoffrey was aiming to “flatter the Norman conquerors” and to “satisfy their curiosity” about this race that they had conquered (Introduction, xx). In looking at Geoffrey’s immediate audiences, Curley states that for the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, *HRB* “was a reminder of the fragility of human institutions and culture” and that for the Welsh and Bretons *HRB* was a “promise of restoration” (x). For a darker political motive, Michael Faletra describes how Geoffrey helped define the “Matter of Britain” which then influenced how the medieval Britons thought about themselves which then led to the “subordination of Wales” (20-22). Faletra contends that Geoffrey was aware of the ways in which his creation could have “contemporary significance and consequences” and concludes that Geoffrey’s representation of Wales “perpetuates the subordination of the Welsh people . . . and the annexation of the geographical territory of Wales into the Norman polity” (22). From Faletra’s perspective, Geoffrey’s motivation in writing *HRB* was to subject the

Welsh to the Normans. Yet another political motivation is described by Allen Mendenhall. Because a king “was never fixed in Geoffrey’s lifetime,” Mendenhall asserts that *HRB* “treats law as transcending any particular sovereign” (paragraph 9) and that Geoffrey “celebrated law with his text because the British legal order was beset with factions and divisions leftover from the Norman Conquest” (paragraph 7). Mendenhall tells how “Geoffrey maps the continuity of British customary law” (paragraph 5) and “champions legal theory” (paragraph 9), thus providing “a model for government” (paragraph 12). Mendenhall concludes that Geoffrey is suggesting that “law, rather than king, is sovereign” (paragraph 29). It is not surprising that in a chronicle that covers 1900 years of kings and their deeds, various political motives can be suggested but not fully determined.

In considering yet another motive for Geoffrey, Thorpe and Flint both look at *HRB* as entertainment. For Thorpe, *HRB* is a great story because it “has a wonderful shape,” including individualized characters, varying tempos from page to page, and specific details of battles, landscapes and seascapes. He also notes Geoffrey’s skill in using literary devices such as references to contemporary events, allusion and direct speech (22-26). On a similar note, Flint asserts that “Geoffrey’s desire to display his literary gift is indeed the motive most in evidence” but that his real purpose was to “mock” the literature of histories written at the time (449). Flint refers to the number of jokes about William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntingdon, and Caradoc of Llancarfan and explains how Geoffrey’s humor appears in how referred to these historians in his epilogue and also in how he used them as sources but changed their stories (452-459). Flint also suggests that Geoffrey parodies the policies and practices of the church in an effort to exalt virtues and a way of life that were threatened by the literature and the monastic way of life (460-463). With his literary gifts and sense of humor, Geoffrey entertains and enlightens.

In addition to the previously mentioned research, Geoffrey's text offers other avenues of research that have recently been studied. Christine Chism compares the treatment of war and nationalism in Geoffrey's *HRB* and the *Vita Merlini*. Paul Stevens discusses how *HRB* influenced Milton and his idea of national identity that informed his early works. Edwin Pace continues traditions of the past in searching for the sources for some of Geoffrey's narratives. And even more recently, Elizabeth J. Bryan published an article that about Geoffrey's use of astronomy and astrology in relation to Uther's Pendragon star. The breadth and depth of *HRB* and Geoffrey's sources, skills and tools are still offering fruitful opportunities for research. What has not been adequately examined, however, is the way in which *HRB* functions as a Christian text.

Background to Geoffrey of Monmouth and his *Historia regum Britanniae*

For all the study that has been done on *HRB*, little is known about the life and career of Geoffrey. He was born in Monmouth Wales sometime before 1100. Varying sources show that he spent the years between 1129-1150 at Oxford where his name appears seven times on various charters. During these twenty years, it is not exactly clear what he was doing, but evidence shows that he could have been a magister which could indicate that “Geoffrey taught in one of the Oxford clerical schools of the day, possibly as a secular canon at Saint George’s College” (Curley 2). The signed charters not only indicate his presence at Oxford but also that he “belonged to a close-knit group of scholars, prelates, and noblemen connected to Oxford and Lincoln,” such as Bishop Alexander of Lincoln, Archdeacon Walter of Oxford, and Robert, Earl of Gloucester. These associations also gave him access to books and information, knowledgeable colleagues, and opportunities to obtain patrons. As a clerk, he sought patronage from the learned and noble and also “likely harbored ambitions of ecclesiastical advancement” (Faletra 22). Given the intellectual activity at Oxford, Geoffrey most likely composed *HRB* during his time there. Curley also comments that Geoffrey’s dedications illustrate his “doggedness in seeking patronage” as his “dedicatees were some of the principal players among the Anglo-Norman aristocracy in the civil dispute over succession to the throne of England following the death of Henry I” (9). Geoffrey dedicated his first work *Prophetiae Merlini* (sometimes referred to as *Libellus Merlini*) to Alexander, the Bishop of Lincoln, as a “bid for the prelates’ favor” (Paton xvi) and from whom he “expected some reward” (Thorpe 11). One of the dedicatees of *HRB* was Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who was a well-known patron of literature (Paton xvii). In his later life, Geoffrey did achieve the advancement he sought when he was ordained and consecrated as bishop of St. Asaph. His continued importance in his political circle

is also evidenced by his being a witness to the Treaty of Westminster in 1153. He died in 1155, leaving us the *Prophetiae Merlini*, *HRB*, and *Vita Merlini*.

Though not much is known about Geoffrey's personal life, we know much about the political milieu in which he wrote. Geoffrey was born during a time of political upheaval when Henry I was fighting to get the throne from his brother Robert who had inherited it from their father, William the Conqueror. Henry I was crowned in 1100 and reigned until 1135. With the death of his son in 1120, there was question as to who would succeed Henry I, but his daughter Matilda was likely to take the throne. However, upon his death in 1135, his nephew Stephen took the throne. Following this was a civil war of nearly 20 years spear-headed by Stephen and Matilda. In 1153, the Treaty of Westminster¹ (to which Geoffrey was a witness) declared peace between Stephen and Matilda's son Henry (who became Henry II) which gave the throne to Henry when Stephen died. Also during this time of civil strife, Welsh princes started to fight to regain control of "Norman-controlled territories in lowland Wales starting in 1136" and had made significant inroads towards regaining ancestral territories" that had been "held by the Normans since the days of the Conqueror" (Faletra 20). So during much of his life, the succession of the crown was in question, and there was a civil war just beginning as Geoffrey was most likely writing *HRB*.

The exact date of composition is unknown, but *HRB* likely first appeared between 1136-1138 and was in circulation by 1139². In his dedication, Geoffrey describes how he had been thinking of the history of British kings and there should be more than just oral history and the brief histories that were written before by Gildas and Bede. He felt that "the deeds of these men

¹ This treaty is also known as the Treaty of Wallingford and the Treaty of Winchester.

² In *The Life and Career of Geoffrey of Monmouth*, Michael Curley discusses the evidence for different dates for when *HRB* first appeared. He employs Geoffrey's various dedications as evidence for supposed dates.

were such that they deserve to be praised for all time” (51). And coincidentally about that same time his friend Walter the Archdeacon gave him a “very ancient book written in the British language” and requested that Geoffrey translate the book into Latin (51). And so we have Geoffrey’s version of how his history of the British kings came into being. It is commonly agreed that there was not such a book and that *HRB* is a narrative constructed by Geoffrey using various sources and his imagination to accomplish his purpose in recording great deeds. As Curley observes, Geoffrey’s “manipulation of his known sources shows a certain uniformity of purpose” (13). Moreover, with “Geoffrey’s keen sense of narrative technique and dramatic structure, his revisionist strategies imparted a certain plausibility to his history” (Curley x). While revising histories and manipulating sources about kings, Geoffrey had political turmoil around him. Faletra suggests that these events provide the background to the writing of the *HRB*, a story about legitimate kings and usurpers, good kings and bad kings, and civil war (Faletra 20). The players in his books can be seen as mirrors to the current political actors.

With the political background, the various sources, and Geoffrey’s own imagination, *HRB* has layers of story and meaning and a sense of plausible history; all of these combine into layers that lead to discussions and attempts to define the work’s genre. According to Curley, the *HRB* is “history, fiction, folklore, mythology, satire, epic, tragedy and comedy” all at once (xi). In addition to all these descriptors, I would like to suggest that Geoffrey is also constructing an historical narrative with the purpose of imparting to his audience a moral message. To ensure that this moral message is understood, Geoffrey draws on common medieval beliefs to connect with his audience. He also includes Biblical text and allusions to give *HRB* scriptural resonance. In building this foundation, Geoffrey draws in his audience and gets them to believe his message

that it is a necessity to avoid vice for the well-being of the individual and the preservation of their society.

Shared Beliefs from the Middle Ages

To see how Geoffrey's Christian perspective shapes *HRB*, it is pertinent to look at how the textual layers could have been perceived by his readers. People in the Middle Ages had common beliefs and knowledge that influenced how they lived and how they read texts. These common beliefs would have helped them recognize the Christian threads woven into the text. Some of these beliefs related to a common understanding of vice, the behavior of kings influencing the society, disease being a manifestation of sin, and God directing the rise and fall of nations. By drawing on these shared beliefs, Geoffrey is better able to connect to his readers and lead them along through his narrative, his goal being to uncover the moral lesson that is there.

Over time what is considered as a vice or a virtue has changed. During Geoffrey's era, the most influential discussion of the vices came via St. Gregory the Great (540-604). Though writing in the sixth century, Gregory continued to be influential throughout the Middle Ages; in fact, without Gregory, "the evolution of the form of mediaeval Christianity would be almost inexplicable" since "almost all the leading principles of the later Catholicism are found, at any rate in germ, in the Gregory the Great" (Dudden vi). In his writings about vice, Gregory took previous thoughts on the vices and codified them into a list of eight³. In his *Morals on the Book of Job*, Gregory identifies the vices and defines the nature of each and how they take over a

³ Tucker explains the antecedents to Gregory's list of vices. Prudentius (348-413 CE) listed eight main vices; Evagrius (345-399 CE) also defined eight vices though he occasionally added a ninth; John Cassian (360-435 CE) was a student to Evagrius and elaborated on his teacher's definitions of the vices in his book *Institutes*. This book took these vices from "Egypt to France, and it became required reading for Benedictine monks" (76). Gregory took the lists of the vices from these predecessors and "shuffled those lists to form one with pride as the principal vice followed by seven sinful attendants" (4). Discussing pride being the queen of all sins, Kiril Petokov argues that God delegates power, but pride stands in the way of that delegation as humans claim power for themselves. Since "God worked for a moral world, illicit claims on power constituted immorality" (45). So pride, since it seizes power from God, became known as the root of all evil and the chief sin for people of the Middle Ages.

person's heart and mind. Rarely does a single vice occur alone as one evil brings on others; in Gregory's words, they are "so closely connected with other, that they spring only the one from the others" (VI.XXXI.89). For example, when pride "the queen of sins, has fully possessed a conquered heart, she surrenders it immediately to seven principal sins," which are vainglory, envy, anger, melancholy, avarice, gluttony, lust (VI.XXXI.87). Not only are these vices evil in themselves, but they also cause people to commit various other kinds of sins. For example, stemming from vainglory come the sins of "disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contentions, obstinacies, discords, and the presumptions of novelties" (VI.XXXI.88). Because of these close connections, "the first vices force themselves into the deluded mind as if under a kind of reason, but the countless vices which follow, while they hurry it on to every kind of madness, confound it, as it were, by bestial clamour" (VI.XXXI.89-90). Indulging in one sinful act soon leads to more wickedness, leading a person to become corrupt and immoral. And with sin, punishment is inevitable. Writing about *Morals on the Book of Job*, F. Homes Dudden states that Gregory concludes that "the real cause of all trouble is sin. Drought, tempest, and famine are all of them the consequence of sin, and sent for our chastisement" (387). Siegfried Wenzel also observes that Gregory's explanation of the vices linking together like a chain "became commonplace among medieval theologians. It was still very much in currency in the twelfth century" (4). With *HRB* being written in the twelfth century, Geoffrey's understanding of the vices and their inter-relatedness would have come from Gregory, and Geoffrey and his readers would therefore have had common understanding of the vices.

People in the Middle Ages didn't simply identify the vices; they also used them as behavioral guides. Shawn Tucker observes that "the virtues and vices are also meant to establish certain public norms for proper and safe conduct and character" for "to the degree that this

standard of virtue and vice is of divine authorship or inspiration and authority, it can also establish one's 'rightness' with God" (4). So by understanding vices to avoid and virtues to develop, a person could know how to behave socially as well as spiritually. In this same vein, Wenzel asserts that the categorization of the vices and virtues, though a religious scheme, "served primarily a very *practical* purpose" as "a guide for life directed toward moral perfection," gave people a way to talk about the vices during "confession and penance," and afforded preachers commonplace topics for sermons (12-13). It is difficult to imagine that readers of Geoffrey's history would not have recognized the vices and virtues of the characters or have been able to detect the religious messages infusing the narrative.

Given the focus of Geoffrey's text, it is important to point out that medieval readers would also have believed that kings' vices affect the populace. Kings, by virtue of their position, influence the realm, whether for good or ill by their actions. And when kings go bad, the kingdom suffers. Rob Meens remarks on "how closely politics and religion were connected" in that a "ruler had a duty to keep his subjects on the right moral path" (345). For undergirding his argument, Meens uses the text "On the Twelve Abuses of the World" which is attributed to Cyprian, a bishop from the third century. Cyprian tells of an unjust king whose actions produce "consequences on a truly cosmological scale" (350), some of which are "a breach of peace . . . natural disasters, such as the diminishing of the fruits of the earth, [and] . . . enemy raids destroying great tracts of land" (351). A king who should be exercising justice is sinning and so "[sets] the whole cosmos in disorder" (351). Though Cyprian is from the third century, Meens is able to trace his influence through the Middle Ages and even shows how Cyprian "continued to influence mirrors of princes up to the Renaissance" (357). Through Geoffrey's time and beyond, readers would have recognized the influence of good and bad kings on the lives of the people.

Another belief in the Middle Ages that is related to sin is that physical disease is a manifestation of sin or vice. Walter De Gruyter specifically states, “Internal vice leaves its mark on the outer man” (317). He describes how these ideas stem from the Greeks and specifically refers to Seneca who related these diseases to passions and taught “that when they are uncared for they can cause a state of disease” (317). Due to the commonness of this belief, Geoffrey’s medieval audience would thus have recognized that a king’s disease was evidence of some sort of vice related to uncontrolled passion.

Besides the common knowledge of vice, kings’ influence on society, and disease as a manifestation of sin, people in the Middle Ages also believed that God is involved in the rise and fall of nations which is a theory known as Orosiun historiography, defined by Paulus Orosius who composed his own history of the world in the 5th century. Orosius posits “that God’s plan for the world is quite manifest” and “that God endorses (and likely even causes) the rise and fall of peoples and empires on a large scale” (Faletra 38). In addition, as empires rise and fall, then progress and order are part of a “divine plan made increasingly manifest” in which the world has “in fact been getting better, ever more amenable to Christian peace” (Faletra 38). The influence of Orosius was felt among medieval historians, including those who provided source material for Geoffrey, like Gildas, Bede, and Nennius. Not surprisingly, then Orosiun historiography threads its way through *HRB*. Throughout its 1900-year history, Geoffrey’s text shows the rises and falls of kings and kingdoms and God’s interference in those kingdoms through punishment of evil and the eventual complete decline of the Britons and their loss of Britain to the Saxons, whose last behavior is more just and good than that of the Britons (Faletra 28). Because Geoffrey shows God rewarding the obedient and punishing the wicked, Faletra asserts that the Saxon rise “seems a clear endorsement of the English rise to supremacy” while “Britons slide into Welsh barbarity”

(28). Because of the common knowledge of Orosiun historiography, readers would see how Geoffrey purposely places God the *HRB* to direct the fate of kingdoms. As God punishes the corrupt and blesses the moral, He is leading the nation on to greater confluence with Christian ideals. As Geoffrey maps God's involvement in the rise and fall of the Britons, readers can see illustrated the idea of Orosiun historiography and can identify this as another Christian layer within the *HRB*.

In summary, shared beliefs during the Middle Ages gave Geoffrey common ground with his audience. Geoffrey used this commonality to connect with his readers and guide them to see his moral message. Geoffrey could describe kings and their vices and know that his readers would see the inherent dangers of succumbing to vice, especially for kings since their actions influenced the prosperity or decline of their people. Geoffrey could tell of a king's illness and know that his audience would make a connection between disease and sin. In describing the cyclical rise and fall of the Briton civilization according to whether the kings morally or not, Geoffrey could depend on his readers seeing this as God's involvement in their nation. Geoffrey purposely constructed his narrative, trusting the connections his readers would make, and this allows Geoffrey to use his narrative to lead his readers to understand the imperative of living a good life.

Geoffrey's Use of the Bible

Not surprisingly, Geoffrey took great care to include Biblical text to make his historical narrative more scriptural and more didactic. His use of the Bible adds in Christian context and layers and meaning that further his lesson and provide motivation to avoid vice. Hammer explores how the language of the Bible left an imprint on Geoffrey that shows up in *HRB* through his changes to other texts that reflect Biblical influence. To provide evidence that Geoffrey used Biblical language, Hammer provides Latin quotes from the *HRB* and the Bible. Hammer concludes that “the Bible exerted a powerful influence upon Geoffrey” and “was an integral part of Geoffrey’s spiritual background and consciousness” (311). In the *HRB*, Geoffrey uses the chronology of the Bible as a timeline for his own history, Biblical language as a mirror to show that his own text is scriptural, and allusion to Biblical events as way to reinforce his Christian lesson.

In writing this lengthy chronicle, Geoffrey grounds the timeline of Britain’s history through Biblical events and people. That is, the timeline in *HRB* is frequently matched by its Biblical counterpart, offering readers a way to track the development of their own nation according to a tradition with which they would already have been familiar. For example, a reader may not know when Brutus reigned as the first king of Britain; Geoffrey’s reference to it being at the same time that Eli was a judge in Israel helps the reader to better situate Brutus historically. Over the course of the work, Geoffrey includes references to other important figures, like Samuel, King Saul, King David, King Solomon, Elijah, Isaiah, the infant Christ, St. Peter, and St. Mark. Not only do these references allow the readers to better follow the chronology of the kings, they add realism and scriptural authority to his text.

In addition to using Biblical people and events as time markers, Geoffrey also uses language that is close paraphrase in order to remind his audience that *HRB* is a Christian text. For example, in *HRB* in a battle against Caesar, the Britons are said to have fought hard and “God favored them and victory was theirs” (*HRB* 110). Likewise, when the Israelites were fighting against the Philistines, Eleazar fought with the sword until his hand was weary, “and the Lord wrought a great victory that day” (2 Kings 23:10). In both cases, God is shown as ensuring victory for his favored people. In a second example in *HRB*, the Romans are trying to instruct the Briton peasants how to fight in order to defend themselves, but their instruction is like “throwing a pearl before swine” (*HRB* 146), meaning that it is not worth the effort for the Romans because the common people are too ignorant to understand war craft. This is similar to Jesus’ teaching, “neither cast ye your pearls before swine” (Matthew 7:6), meaning that one should not give something holy or valuable to one who will denigrate it. By using this near quotation, Geoffrey is equating the Romans’ instruction with God’s word and the common Britons as swine who don’t know how to value this life-saving instruction. In addition, Geoffrey uses language from the New Testament when he describes how evil Vortigern has become; he tells how Vortigern lusted after a pagan woman and says that “Satan entered his [Vortigern’s] heart” (160). In the New Testament, one of the most infamous figures is Judas. Before Judas betrays Christ, Luke states that “Satan entered in Judas” (Luke 22:3). Geoffrey thus paints a very clear picture of Vortigern’s betrayal of his people and his evil. To cite a final example, Geoffrey directly quotes from the New Testament. In the last days of the Briton’s rule, the people were often embroiled in civil war. Geoffrey reprimands them: “Keep on with your civil squabbling and forget what the Gospel says: ‘Every kingdom divided against itself shall be brought to desolation, and a house divided against itself shall fall’” (*HRB* 264, Luke 11:17). By directly reciting Luke, Geoffrey

emphasizes the importance of this passage and the danger of social fracture. By often using Biblical language, Geoffrey tacitly asserts that if people should read and learn from the Bible, then they should read and learn from his text. If it sounds like the Bible, then it is like the Bible. In this way, Geoffrey gives *HRB* scriptural authority and reinforces that there is a lesson to be learned from it.

In addition to using the Bible as a timeline and to add scriptural authority to his text, Geoffrey also alludes to Biblical events to add more Judeo-Christian and Christian significance to *HRB*. Specifically, Geoffrey alludes to events related in Exodus, the general history of the Israelite nation and King David, and Christ's parabolic teachings and his crucifixion.

Geoffrey uses allusions to the Biblical events as told in Exodus to demonstrate the power of God. In Exodus chapters 3-14, God sends Moses to free the Israelites who were currently slaves to the Egyptians. The Pharaoh refuses to free them, and by the power of God, Moses curses the Egyptians by changing the Nile to blood, giving them three days of darkness, killing their cattle, and afflicting them with various plagues, such as flies, locusts, frogs, and lice. The curse that convinces the Pharaoh to free the Israelites is the death of all firstborn sons, including his own. In *HRB*, Geoffrey's allusions to the events of Exodus are also used to show the power of God. During the reign of one of the last Briton kings, the people engage in a dreadful civil war. Reminiscent of Exodus and in a show of God's power, Geoffrey describes that "a grievous and long-remembered famine afflicted the besotted population," and then "a pestilent and deadly plague followed this famine" (280-1). Geoffrey specifically attributes both the famine and the plague to the vengeance of God as "He made up His mind to punish" the Britons (281). In the section known as the "Prophecies of Merlin," Geoffrey again alludes to Exodus through the voice of the pagan Merlin who is prophesying to the pagan-loving Vortigern of upcoming events.

Merlin tells of a time when “‘religion shall be destroyed,’” “‘a shower of blood shall fall and a dire famine shall afflict mankind ‘” (172). And again, through Merlin’s prophecy, “‘The Ass of Wickedness will come next’” and “‘London shall mourn the death of twenty thousand and the Thames will be turned to blood’” (177). From the prophecies, we cannot be sure when “religion shall be destroyed” nor who “The Ass of Wickedness” represents, but we can tell that by these events there is a loss of Christian ideals and that because of this, the Britons will suffer similarly to the Egyptians. In this third example, Geoffrey shows the rare instance when tragic events occur during the reign of a good king, and again brings to mind the plagues of the Egyptians. Geoffrey writes, “it rained blood for three days and men died from the flies which swarmed” (87). Though there is nothing else said about this event, Geoffrey still reminds his readers of the power of God, even in a time when a good king reigns. In Exodus, God is intent on convincing the Pharaoh of His power, and Geoffrey, by alluding to the plagues and curses that God sends, is intent on reminding his readers of the power of God as well.

Geoffrey also alludes to the general history of the Israelite nation as seen in the Old Testament and the story of King David. In fact, Geoffrey draws parallels between the Israelites and the Britons and particularly between King David and King Arthur. Both the Israelites and the Britons established a promised land, endured wars, suffered punishments from God due to disobedience, and lost the promised land as a consequence of vice. M. Victoria Guerin declares that Geoffrey “sees the Britons, like the Israelites, as a people with a divinely ordained destiny including both glory and defeat” (19) and that he shows that they have a “special relationship with divine providence, but only so long as they recognize their debt” (20). This is one example through which readers can see Orosiun historiography illustrated. Because the Israelites were God’s chosen people, God expected them to obey his commandments. When they were

obedient, He blessed them; when they were disobedient, He punished them. Geoffrey knew that his contemporary readers would be familiar with the story of the rise and fall of the Israelites, and thus he uses it that to his benefit in constructing his narrative. If the Israelites were rewarded or punished according to their obedience or wickedness, then too would the Britons. In drawing these parallels, Geoffrey is expecting his contemporary audience to draw these same parallels to themselves. At the time of writing *HRB*, it had only been about 70 years since William had conquered their nation, and they were currently involved in a civil war. Geoffrey is thus warning his contemporaries that they should be obedient as well, or their nation will continue to suffer instead of prosper.

Continuing the parallel between the Israelites and the Britons, Guerin more specifically examines comparisons between King David and King Arthur. Some of their most obvious similarities are that they both defeat giants, have wonderful swords, are successful in battle, and establish great cities (see Appendix for a more complete list). Both are kings of destiny; both save their nations in a time of crisis. Both are called to help their nations when young and then grow into great kings, and yet both have terrible falls due to sin. Their downfalls are different, but the results are similar. David lusts for Bathsheba which leads to adultery and the murder of her husband Uriah. David repents, but there are still consequences for his uncontrolled lust. His first son dies. His second son, Solomon, is likewise sinful, and the kingship is lost to their line, left to evil successors. Arthur's downfall is his pride. He would rather go out and conquer than stay home and defend against threats to his sovereignty. While off warring on his way to Rome, Arthur's throne is usurped by Mordred, so Arthur returns to Briton and is killed in battle. The Britons are then ruled by several evil kings. Geoffrey's readers would have known the story of David, his start as a shepherd defeating the great Goliath, to great king, to sinner that causes the

eventual downfall of the Israelites, but Arthur's story as Geoffrey tells it would most likely have been unfamiliar to them. By using David as a type for Arthur, Geoffrey is able to lead his audience to foresee Arthur's own downfall and the Britons ending up under the reign of evil king kings as a result of Arthur's sin. Through use of this parallel between Arthur and David, Geoffrey effectively makes *HRB* a cautionary tale against vice, showing that even the great and good and honorable fall, like David and Arthur; how much more easily might his readers succumb to temptation.

For more layering of Christian text, Geoffrey alludes to Christ's sacrificial death and one of his parables to further motivate his readers to live like Christ and to avoid vice. During a time when the Christians in Briton are being persecuted, Geoffrey tells how churches were knocked down, scriptures burnt, and priests killed. One monk named Albanus trades clothes with a man who is being hunted down, and so Albanus is taken instead and then killed. Albanus gives his life so the other man could be free. Geoffrey writes that Albanus was "thus emulating Christ who laid down His own life for His sheep" (131). Geoffrey's phrasing here echoes Christ's proclamations, "I lay down my life for my sheep" (John 10:15) and "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Geoffrey equates Albanus to Christ and emphasizes the greatness of his sacrifice during a dark time in Britain's history.

Geoffrey also alludes to Christ's parable of the fruitful vineyard to foretell the eventual downfall of Britain. In the New Testament, vineyards are often used to illustrate the fruitfulness of the Christ's followers; one can know the type of tree depending on the fruit it produces. Matthew writes, "By their fruits you shall know them" and says that "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit shall be cut down and shall be cast into the fire" (Matthew 7:16-19). So when Geoffrey describes Britain as being a "fruitful vineyard which has gone sour," he is using

Matthew's teachings to foretell that the Britons will be destroyed (264). And then, the reader discovers that they were destroyed and lost their birthright to the island. Geoffrey's immediate audience were those living in the very places where these events happened and are being warned as well to not succumb to vice. Because he uses Christ's parable, Geoffrey could influence Christian followers to more strongly feel his message and desire to live in a better way and be fruitful.

Taken together, all of Geoffrey's uses of the Bible—the chronology, the language, and the allusions—give *HRB* scriptural resonance and authority. He reinforces the point that there is a message to be learned. By scattering the Judeo-Christian and Christian elements throughout his text, he continually reminds his readers that this is like a scriptural text. But it doesn't really matter that he includes these Christian elements if the readers don't absorb them and learn from them. Geoffrey purposely includes these Christian elements to engage his readers in seeing *HRB* as Christian text that they should believe and follow, and with the terrible punishments that result from wickedness, he is motivating them to live a more Christian life and to avoid vice.

***HRB* as Historical Narrative**

In addition to Geoffrey connecting with his audience through making use of their beliefs, he also connects with them through how he constructs his narrative. Hayden White discusses the form and function of historical narratives to carry meaning. First, he argues that narrative is not just used to “represent real events” but that the historiographer makes choices “with distinct ideological and even political implications” (ix). When looking at the choices that the historiographer includes, White shows that the “dominant social groups” are interested in controlling what passes for a particular historical narrative and foundational myth because they also want to ensure that “the social reality itself can be both lived and realistically comprehended as a story” (x). It is believed that stories adequately reveal an intended meaning from how the reality of the story is portrayed. When people no longer believe in this meaning, White states, “the entire cultural edifice of a society enters into a crisis, because not only is a specific system of beliefs undermined but the very condition of possibility of socially significant belief is eroded” (x). Historiographers in crafting their narratives choose what events to include and how to tell about them to reflect their purposes—to pass on ideology, ensure that their society is understood, and to preserve their society by passing on meaning through the story form.

This theory of narrative discourse directly applies to Geoffrey’s writing of *HRB*. As noted earlier, Geoffrey was writing during a time of political upheaval with civil war and questions of succession. In writing *HRB*, he is reminding his audience of their foundational narrative. By infusing it with Christian narrative, he is fortifying his audience’s Christian roots and beliefs, and hence inspiring them to live better and motivating them to avoid vice. With the kings and vices he chooses to depict, he is controlling the message that comes through his text. With his society in chaos, Geoffrey uses *HRB* as a means to preserve beliefs and prevent increasing crisis.

Geoffrey ends *HRB* with a particularly strong message against the dangers of getting involved in civil war, and with the Norman rulers fighting for the crown, Geoffrey is particularly warning them to resolve the conflicts; otherwise God could evict them as He did with the earlier Britons. By writing *HRB*, Geoffrey is protecting the foundational narratives and the Christian beliefs that have been central to their island's story for centuries.

In addition, White also discusses the composition of historical narratives. They are more than accounts of supposed real events given in some sort of chronology. They are also constructed to show that they are “possessing a structure, an order of meaning” (5). Historiographers purposely give the narratives a structure that leads to the intended meaning. White shows how historical narratives are representations of social systems and are attempts to moralize events; he says that if every story “is a kind of allegory, points to a moral, or endows events, whether real or imaginary, with a significance that they do not possess as a mere sequence, then it seems possible to conclude that every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events of which it treats” (14). Historical narratives then do not just tell a sequence of events but add meaning to them by how the historiographer structures them and chooses which events to include; all that is included helps the historiographer to pass on the intended meaning, the moral purpose.

This theory of narrative structure fits *HRB*. With the stories of kings and their associated events that Geoffrey includes, whether real or imaginary, he is using them to teach his audience the significance of living a good life and resisting the temptations of vice. He orders the events and selects which kings to expand on and which to merely list. If his purpose is to get his audience to live a more moral life, in line with developing virtues and avoiding vice, then his

choice of kings needs to fit that purpose, so he often expands on stories of kings characterized by their vices who then suffer from some terrible punishment.

Besides preserving society and passing on meaning, White also shows that narrative history is appealing because “the reality represented . . . displays to us the formal coherency to which we ourselves aspire” and “reveals to us a world that is putatively ‘finished,’ done with, over, yet not dissolved” (21). In our own lives, we go from moment to moment, event to event, interactions with one to interactions with others. It is hard to define the story or meaning of our lives, and our own stories are not ever done. Each action leads to another to another and sometimes takes us down a path with an unknown destination. But with the historical narrative and its fixed beginning and ending, we get coherence, meaning and closure. As White says, in the world of the narrative, “reality wears the mask of meaning, the completeness and fullness of which we can only imagine” (21). Further, “the demand for closure . . . is a demand . . . for moral meaning, a demand that sequences of real events be assessed as to their significance of a moral drama” (21). The narrator in telling the story has “moral authority” as s/he uses the sequences of events to provide a moral meaning, and this moral meaning gives the reader the needed closure. These sequences of events, also known as plot, are also important to the moral meaning of the historical narrative. White writes that the plot is more than just a telling of “happenings in the past”; they are “images of that authority that summons us to participations in a moral universe that but for its story form, would have no appeal at all” (21). In creating this narrative, the writer is making it appealing for the reader to participate in the moral universe that has been created. Because it functions as a story, the historical narrative creates a moral world that invites the reader’s participation, and the plot and closure give the necessary moral meaning.

In using White's theories of the function of the historical narrative, we can see how *HRB* works as an historical narrative. Geoffrey's moral meaning in the universe of his history is to reinforce the well-known lesson to avoid vice. He uses his plot to motivate his audience to not sin because of the dangerous consequences and punishments that come whenever a character sins. His plot contains characters and events that show the benefits of virtue and the dangers of vice, which then gives moral meaning to his universe and leads to the closure of the narrative. As noted before, Geoffrey's particular choices of which events and kings' stories to include are part of the narrative structure that help tell the story and pass on the intended meaning. So because Geoffrey gives us a story with a plot and a conclusion, *HRB* has the appearance of reality and carries meaning and closure. Geoffrey, in building his plots along the lines of stories about sinful kings, is inviting his reader to become less like these kings and live a more Christian life.

In the *HRB*, Geoffrey constructs his narrative like one would in writing a fictional story with an exposition, rising events, a climax and a conclusion. Each of these elements leads to and emphasizes Geoffrey's moral meaning. To briefly show Geoffrey's story structure: Part One is the exposition, and Geoffrey tells here of the founding and settling of Britain. Parts Two-Four are the rising action as Geoffrey tells stories of kings and a few queens. He particularly focuses on the bad kings as he describes their vices, sins, and punishments. As these parts progress, Geoffrey's descriptions of people, events, consequences become more vivid and larger. Rather than seeming repetitive, the deepening and widening of vices and consequences continue to draw the reader in. Part V is more of a subplot as it does not directly affect the telling of events but reinforces his moral message. Part VI has the last rising action with the death of one king and Arthur's father coming into power. The story of King Arthur comes in Part VII and is the climax for *HRB*. It is the longest story of any one king, and Geoffrey carefully constructs it to show a

comparison between the good Arthur and the sinful Arthur. With this climax, Geoffrey continues to build toward his moral meaning. There is great sadness in Arthur's fall because he could have always been great. Geoffrey hits home with his conclusion in Part VIII. In this part, Geoffrey shows that not only are the kings sinning, the Britons are as well. Geoffrey draws a complete conclusion that because of the people's sins, the Britons can no longer inhabit Britain. With his stories of kings placed within a narrative framework, Geoffrey brings his moral message to fruition to motivate us to avoid vice; it is a moral imperative to do so since otherwise there will be suffering.

Geoffrey's Plot Constructed Through the Exempla of Wicked Kings

But to see how Geoffrey's plot works in service of his moral, it is necessary to show how Geoffrey uses the stories of individual kings and their vices and punishments to create meaning and coherence. This is a valuable way to view Geoffrey's text because it gives us the ways and means to understand how he constructed *HRB* to instruct his audience in matters that he felt vital.

To begin, Part One is Geoffrey's exposition. He describes the setting for *HRB*, the island of Britain and its pureness and richness of resources. He tells the story of Brutus and his gathering of displaced Trojans, his vision of Diana directing him to Britain to build a second Troy, and his conquering of peoples and gathering of wealth in his travels to Britain. Geoffrey tells of Brutus' arrival, the settling, dividing land, and the building cities. It is the foundation of Geoffrey's story. He starts with the lovely uninhabited and unsoiled Britain, which will be a stark contrast to its condition after famine, disease, and destruction when the Britons must leave it at the end. Geoffrey gives us the arrival of the first Britons and their hopes for a new life and land which will also be a stark contrast to the defeated and despairing last Britons.

With Part Two, Geoffrey starts the rising action with his stories of kings and begins building his moral meaning. Geoffrey covers about 1000 years of history in this section⁴. Geoffrey does not lump all his bad kings together but shows how bad kings keep surfacing throughout these 1000 years. As far as his plot goes to lead us to his meaningful conclusion, the seriousness of the vice grows as does his description of it. With his first couple of bad kings, Geoffrey tells a pretty simple story without a lot of detail and shows a pretty obvious cause and

⁴ As I discuss Geoffrey's vicious kings, I am going in chronological order, but not consecutively. In the *HRB*, there are often many years and many kings between the kings that I use as exempla. Also, Geoffrey tells of a few queens, but he portrays them as good rulers and so don't make it into my text about vice. I also don't mention all of the bad kings but instead focus on the ones that best illustrate Geoffrey's narrative arc and also exhibit the vices of pride, lust, greed and wrath.

effect: the king sins against a family member and is killed as a punishment for his crimes. In the next two examples, Geoffrey continues to show how vice affects a family group, but the consequences of the sins vary from the earlier examples. For the last king of Part Two, Geoffrey is very descriptive about the violence that king causes because of his vice. It is bloody and vivid and keeps the reader engaged until the violent death of the king. Geoffrey continues to engage the reader with the stories of vice by gradually worsening the vices, their effects, and direct punishments.

The first king of Part Two is Locrinus, who is a son of Brutus, so the second king of Britain supplies Geoffrey's first example of vice. Locrinus is depicted as lust incarnate. He had promised to marry Gwendolyn, but when first seeing Estrildis, who is so beautiful that "no precious ivory, no recently fallen snow, no lilies even could surpass the whiteness of her skin," Locrinus is so "overcome with passion for her" that he is "determined to make love with her" (76). He marries Gwendolyn as he had agreed but lusts for Estrildis. Locrinus secretly keeps Estrildis in a cave for seven years during which time both Gwendolyn and Estrildis have children. When Gwendolyn's father dies, Locrinus deserts her and makes Estrildis queen. Gwendolyn, desiring revenge, gathers troops in Cornwall and battles Locrinus, who is killed by the shot of an arrow. As victor, Gwendolyn becomes queen and has both Estrildis and her daughter drowned. Because of Locrinus's lust for Estrildis, he, Estrildis, and their daughter suffer violent deaths. With this story about a king and his sexual lust, Geoffrey begins his narrative arc and gives us a pretty simple cause and effect.

Geoffrey's second king also succumbs to vice. Memprius is characterized by his lust for power and sexual lust. Memprius has a brother Malin, and both want to be king after their father dies. Memprius, pretending peace with Malin, invites him to a conference. However,

because of his lust for power, Mempricius is “eaten up with a burning treachery” and kills his brother and seizes the kingship. Mempricius becomes a tyrant who even “hated all his own whole family; and, by main force or by treachery, he did away with anyone who he feared might succeed him in kingship.” Besides this lust for power, “he abandoned himself to the vice of sodomy, preferring unnatural lust to normal passion” (78). Like Locrinus, Mempricius is punished for his sins with a violent death: Geoffrey tells that while on a hunting expedition, Mempricius is separated from his companions and “surrounded by ravening wolves and eaten up in miserable circumstances” (78). In Geoffrey’s story of lusts, he creates a parallel in that just as Mempricius satiated his unnatural hunger, the wolves satiated their hunger.

In both of these stories of lust, Geoffrey gives blanket descriptions. He doesn’t tell us much about Locrinus and Estrildis or give us many details about the battle; he doesn’t describe exactly how Mempricius killed his brother or people or the savagery of his death. Instead, Geoffrey, to set up his plot, gives us direct examples and causal relationships: if you commit sin, you will be punished. With this simple cause and effect structure, Geoffrey is beginning the rising action and starting to impart his moral message.

In addition to showing cause and effect, Geoffrey also portrays problematic family relationships as both Locrinus and Mempricius betray a close family member. With the next two examples, Geoffrey continues to explore how vice distresses family relationships and the resultant consequences. He first shows three generations affected by vice followed by another story of fratricide. He moves his plot along by looking at more situations that involve more characters and are more complicated than the first stories.

Geoffrey’s first expanded family story is that of King Leir, whose family shows the effects of pride, wrath, and avarice over three generations. Leir was a good king for sixty years,

during which time he established a great city, commanded a huge army, and defeated his enemies. But at the start of Geoffrey's story, he gives in to pride and wrath. His pride appears as he requests proclamations of love from his daughters to determine how much of the kingdom to give to each. Goneril and Regan want as much of the kingdom as they can get, and their avarice leads them to proclaim an unholy amount of love for their father. Cordelia only professes to love him as a daughter should, and Leir's wrath surfaces. He disinherits her, and later, still angry, he refuses any sort of dowry for her when a king wants to marry her. These instances of pride and wrath result in later consequences for himself and his kingdom as well as for Cordelia who loses her position and family. Though he doesn't realize it yet, his anger gets in the way of sound judgement as he punishes the daughter that truly loves him and punishes himself as he puts himself and his kingdom in the hands of daughters who only love themselves and power.

Leir keeps half the kingdom for himself, marries Goneril and Regan off to dukes and gives each a quarter of the kingdom. Leir rules his half well for a few years until his sons-in-law revolt and usurp Leir's place. Although they each now have half the kingdom, their avarice does not dissipate. When Leir lives with each of them in turn, Goneril and Regan gradually reduce his retinue as well as his wealth and station. So Leir's anger separates him from the one daughter who actually loves him, and he comes to suffer shame and poverty because of Goneril's and Regan's greed. In these humble circumstances, Leir finally realizes that Cordelia had been correct and that Goneril and Regan had only really loved his gifts. He also recognizes that his pride and anger had caused him to over-react and disinherit Cordelia and allowed the greed of Goneril and Regan to rule the situation. He ends up with no throne and no one to care for him; his attitude changes enough that he can seek for Cordelia's assistance, and yet he still yearns for

revenge. Cordelia comes with troops, defeats the armies of Goneril and Regan and restores Leir to the throne where he rules the entire kingdom well for a few years more.

Later after Leir dies, Cordelia inherits the whole kingdom and rules in peace for five years. But this can't last as Cunedagius and Marganus, the sons of Goneril and Regan, succumb to their own vices of pride and avarice. Marganus and Cunedagius are not satisfied with only their dukedoms and refuse to have Cordelia as queen and so assemble troops to take the kingdom from her. In the process of battle, Geoffrey describes that "they refused to stop their outrages; and in the end, they laid waste to a number of provinces"; it seems bit ridiculous that they are destroying the lands they want to rule. With this destruction, Geoffrey shows how their greed gets in the way of sound judgment. After they defeat Cordelia, she commits suicide. With Cordelia gone, Marganus and Cunedagius divide the kingdom between them. But because half a kingdom is still not enough for Marganus, he "led his army through the lands of Cunedagius and began to set light to one place after another" (87). This, of course, results in a battle, and Marganus is killed. Again, Geoffrey shows that greed results in foolishness and death. In this third generation of Leir's family, Cunedagius and Marganus submit to the same vices as their forebears. As they destroy land, the people suffer because of these men's sins. Once Cunedagius rules the entire kingdom, he becomes a good king and rules in "great glory for thirty-three years" (87). Cunedagius ends the cycle of wrath, pride and greed in this family, and the Britons benefit from his kingship.

With Leir's family, Geoffrey explores how vice affects successive generations. Vice gets in the way of sound judgment. For even typically good kings, and people suffer in various ways. Geoffrey constructs this story slowly, depicting the pride and wrath of the first generation, and the pride and avarice of the second and third and how these vices lead to foolish actions. Their

vices do not result in death, except for Marganus, so this example stands unique from the others. Significantly, Geoffrey gives them time to change: both Leir and Cunedagius rule the throne well after sinning. With this narrative, Geoffrey furthers his moral message of the necessity avoid vice.

Geoffrey's second family story about vice is the story of the brothers Ferrex and Porrex who desire to inherit the kingship. However, Porrex is in fact greedy and is "the more grasping of the two" and because of his avarice "planned to kill his brother by setting an ambush for him" (88). Ferrex learns of the plan, escapes to Gaul, recruits soldiers, and returns to battle Porrex. In the battle, Ferrex and all his troops are killed. Judon, their mother, is "consumed with hatred for Porrex" and decides to avenge the death of Ferrex. Judon "chose a time when Porrex was asleep, set upon him with her maid-servants and hacked him to pieces" (88). So Porrex's greed for the kingship is punished with his own violent death. But this is not the end of the punishments: Porrex's greed and Judon's wrath lead to consequences for all of Britain. With the death of both brothers, there is no one to inherit the throne. Geoffrey explains, "As a result of this the people of Britain were for a long time embroiled in civil war; and the island came into the hands of five kings who kept attacking and massacring each other's men in turn" (88). In this family story of a brother murdering a brother and mother killing a son, Geoffrey shows how violent actions come about because of vice, and in turn, they bring a more immediate punishment for the sinner and greater suffering for the people. This is different from the tale of Leir's family where we get to see three generations and the effects of vice over time. Also, Leir's story is a contrast to Porrex's because the vices don't lead to such serious sins as murder. Instead, Geoffrey uses Leir's story to show slow-acting effects, and by the end, the vices are conquered, and the people end up with a good king. With the story of Porrex and Ferrex, Geoffrey makes the action and the results

much more immediate and the punishments much more widespread; because of the fratricide, the people are left with only bad kings and death.

In the rising action of the overall narrative, Geoffrey uses the family stories to explore how vice affects family relationships. With Locrinus and Mempricius, Geoffrey illustrates direct causal relationships: a king sins against a family member and is killed. With Leir, Geoffrey expands the time and number of family members affected; he also shows how kings can forsake sin and improve the situation for their people. This story slowly adds to the rising action. But with the violence and immediacy of Porrex's story, Geoffrey quickly increases the pitch of the rising action to lead into the story of his next bad king, Morvidus, known for his wrath and blood lust. And with these vices, Geoffrey becomes even more descriptive with the violence of Morvidus and his own violent death.

Morvidus has promise to be a good king, being handsome, generous and brave. However, these noble traits cannot compensate for his tendency toward wrath and blood lust, for, as Geoffrey writes, "once he lost his temper he spared no one, committing mayhem on the spot, if only he could lay his hands on weapons" (102). Geoffrey relates one story to illustrate the extent of Morvidus's wrath: A king from Moriani and his troops land in Northumbria and begin "ravaging the countryside" (102). Morvidus assembles his troops to resist the invaders. Being a great fighter, Morvidus is victorious, but instead of being satisfied with his victory, his wrath and blood lust show in "outrageous cruelty": "Once he had proved victorious not a soul was left alive whom he did not slaughter, for he ordered them all to be dragged before him in turn and he satiated his lust for blood by killing them one by one." Even though he becomes exhausted, his wrath and cruelty propel him further, as he "ordered the remainder to be skinned alive and in this state he had them burnt" (102). Of course, indulging in these vices and committing these savage

acts will not go unpunished. “A monster of unheard-of savageness” appears and devours inhabitants living by the sea. When Morvidus hears of this monster, he goes to the coast to do battle, but his weapons are no good against this monster, and “she rushed at him with her jaws wide open and swallowed him up as though he had been a tiny fish,” and, as Geoffrey describes it, she “put an end to his iniquity” (102). With this story, Geoffrey escalates the details and violence that go along with Morvidus’s lusts. He describes vividly the cruelty of individually killing the already defeated troops and the skinning and burning and then tells us exactly how Morvidus is killed by being swallowed. Geoffrey strikes a great contrast to less explicit stories of Locrinus and Mempricius and to the slow story of Leir but continues with shocking violence similar to that of Porrex and Judon. With these extra details and violent images, Geoffrey is continuing to raise the pitch of the rising action to further engage the reader in his story of vice as he leads to his moralizing conclusion that vice must be avoided.

Moving onto Part Three, Geoffrey continues the rising action in his story of vice with the kings Carausius and Maximianus. Carausius’s story comes first, and Geoffrey illustrates the great lengths that he will go to satisfy his lust for power and pride. Maximianus’s story is similar but broader in scope and punishment. Maximianus has more vices, conquers more territory, more people are killed, yet both lead to the Britons being massacred and both are killed by their enemies in revenge. By expanding on Carausius’s story, Geoffrey multiplies the consequences for vice with Maximianus’s.

Carausius is a Briton born of “humble parentage” and becomes a soldier. But being a soldier is not enough for him as he craves power; he devises a plan that will gain him what he desires. He travels to Rome and asks for ships to help defend the coasts of Britain. Given the necessary permission to gather a fleet, Carausius soon sets sail with a great number of men. His

lust for power drives him to “attack neighboring islands” during which he “laid waste to the open fields, sacked the cities and the towns, and plundered those who lived there of all they had” (128). Because of his plundering and looting, “all those who lusted after someone else’s possessions flocked to join him” (128). With this great and greedy force, he defeats whatever place he chooses to attack, and his lust for power and his pride for his greatness balloons: he set his sights on the kingship of Britain. To gain the crown, he cleverly bribes the allies of the king . However, he does not keep it because as soon as the Roman Senate learns of Carausius’s betrayal and “usurpation,” they send three legions with Allectus who “fought with Carausius, killed him and took over the government of Britain. Then Allectus massacred as many of the Britons as he could, on the plea that they had broken their alliance with the State of Rome” (128). Geoffrey uses this story to show the ballooning effects of vice. Not only does Carausius indulge his avarice, he encourages it in others as they flock to join his troops. By expanding the number of greedy people, Geoffrey shows that vice spreads easily and continues to build towards his moral ending. In the Britons being massacred, Geoffrey is also widening the number of people who suffer. The consequences are growing, and so Geoffrey is better able to use his story to motivate his audience to avoid vice.

As stated before, Geoffrey gives us an even more corrupt version of Carausius with Maximianus whose impact on society increased as well. By the end of his life, Maximianus embodies the vices of greed, pride, lust and wrath. At the start of his story, Maximianus has been denied a portion of the Roman throne and accepts an invitation to go to Britain to marry the king’s daughter, which would enable him to become king. He is tempted by “the treasure-house of gold and silver which exists in Britain and the horde of warlike soldiers” and agrees to the plan (136). While traveling to Britain, he sacks cities, collects a fortune and rallies soldiers to his

side. Early in the story of his quest for power, Maximianus shows the first signs of a single vice, his greed.

Arriving in Britain, he is crowned king as planned; however, after only five years, Maximianus “developed an obsession with power, because of the enormous amount of gold and silver that flowed into him daily. . . . The kingship of Britain was not enough” (139): his greed becomes linked to lust for power; it’s not just a single vice anymore. Leaving Britain, he attacks the Gauls and Franks and “was delighted at the fact that he had slaughtered so many men.” But “when he realized what a source of terror he was, Maximianus became even bolder” (140). To increase his army, he offers bribes and “enlisted the help of all who wished to steal the possessions of others” (140). At this point, not only is Maximianus greedy, he is also lusting for power and blood and is proud of the fear he inspires. His vices are growing and also encouraging greed in others.

Once Maximianus conquers all this territory and has soldiers enough to conquer more, he has a problem. How will he keep this new territory in his control and people it with Britons? His solution is to create a second Britain by collecting 100,000 ordinary men and women from the island and 30,000 soldiers to protect them (141). Once the additional people arrive, Maximianus leaves to conquer more territory, get to Rome and exact revenge on the two current emperors.

Tragically for Britain, Wanius and Melga, the leaders of the Picts and Huns, learn that Maximianus has taken all the soldiers, leaving the Britons completely unprotected. Wanius and Malga easily invade the kingdom: “They cut the unthinking country-folk to pieces” and “slaughtered them wholesale, continuing to ravage the cities and provinces” (143). Geoffrey’s description illustrates the complete savagery of Wanius and Malga because they slaughter

innocents who have no hope of fighting back. Because of his greed, pride and lust for power, Maximianus leaves the Britons open to invasion and slaughter, but that is still not the end to their suffering.

Maximianus is successful in conquering more territory, eventually making it to Rome where he vents “his fury upon the two Emperors” (141). While in Rome, Maximianus learns how the Britons have been slaughtered by Wanius and Melga, and he sends Gracianus and two legions of soldiers to help the island Britons. However, shortly thereafter, Maximianus is killed by friends of the emperors, and his soldiers are slain or scattered. Geoffrey thus reminds his audience of the danger of giving in to vices with this pithy statement, “God avenges for past sins” (147).

While this is happening in Rome, Gracianus and his legions successfully drive off the Picts and Huns that are in Britain. When Gracianus learns of Maximianus’s death, his own lust for power takes over, and he “seized hold of the royal crown of Britain and made himself King . . . [and] began to exercise such tyranny over the people” (144). As a result, Gracianus is assassinated. This leaves the Britons once again without a king and without a force to protect them, and once again, their enemies take advantage of this situation. They return and “ravaged the kingdom with sword and fire from sea-coast to sea-coast” (144). Geoffrey continues the rising action of his narrative, showing how even the peasants are being slaughtered.

The Britons appeal to Rome for help. One Roman legion arrives and repels the enemy, but they inform the Britons that they will no longer help them; the Britons must learn to fight their own battles and defend their own country. But they are only peasants and have no knowledge of fighting. In consequence, “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” (147). Through this, Geoffrey shows that the consequences for Maximianus’s sins are long-lasting and terrible—even continuing after Maximianus has already been killed.

With the broad scope of Maximianus’s story, Geoffrey continues to develop his evidence for the serious consequences of vice. With this story, he shows more of the conquering, more of the greed, more of encouraging greed because a king is not satisfied with the wealth or kingship of Britain. But as well, Geoffrey widens the scope of the tragic suffering of the Britons because of Maximianus’s vices. Left completely without protection, the peasants are slaughtered by any enemy who invades Britain. With the tragic situation of the peasants, Geoffrey is bringing the suffering down to the people’s level and making more connections to his story: anyone is vulnerable to vice, and multitudes can suffer because of vice. This amount of suffering should help Geoffrey’s audience see the necessity of avoiding vice and inspire them to do so.

Geoffrey slows down his narrative with Part Four as he focuses the story on one evil king, Vortigern. By giving us such an extended story with multiple episodes from Vortigern’s life, Geoffrey continues to use his plot to emphasize the dangers of vice. Vortigern, though not in line for the throne in any way, deeply covets the crown. He manipulates the current king, Constans, to give him power and money to quell rebellions. At the same time, he manipulates the Picts to kill Constans; after which, Vortigern “realized that there was now no one at all in the realm who was his equal [and] he set the kingly crown upon his own head” (155).

As king, Vortigern has to work to keep this ill-gotten crown, so his vices of pride and avarice will lead him to commit even more sins. Because he obtains the crown through devious means and isn’t a respected ruler, Vortigern has to worry about a Pict rebellion and the revenge

of Constans's brothers. To help prevent trouble, Vortigern befriends the Saxon leaders Hengist and Horsa in exchange for helping him fight the Picts and other possible enemies. In similar fashion to what Vortigern did to Constans, Hengist cunningly manipulates Vortigern to allow even more Saxon troops to come over to Britain. Vortigern's pride in his own cleverness and love for these Saxons blinds him to Hengist's motives. Later, when Vortigern meets Renwein, Hengist's beautiful sister, he immediately lusts for her, and in his desire to marry her, gives Hengist the province of Kent. Because of his pride, Vortigern is blinded to the machinations of Hengist, and because of his lust, Vortigern marries a pagan and gives a portion of the kingdom to the Saxon invaders.

Once the Britons see how much their king loves the Saxons, they band together against Vortigern and the pagans, under the leadership of Vortigern's own son Vortimer. Vortimer is successful in driving the Saxons from the island and begins to restore the lands to the Britons. Renwein, jealous of Vortimer's success and desirous that Vortigern remain king, poisons Vortimer. Vortigern is restored to the throne, but he hasn't learned from his mistakes, as his pride and greed keep him working with the cunning Saxons. Once again, he invites Hengist and a few of his men back to Britain. But Hengist, with his own ideas of taking over, brings more than a few and deceives Vortigern with the idea that he brought the troops to help defend his throne. Hengist takes advantage of a supposed peace conference to kill many unsuspecting Britons and capture Vortigern. Hengist demands that Vortigern give them cities and fortresses in exchange for his life, and Vortigern "immediately conceded everything" and escapes with his life to Wales where he has a tower built as a place of retreat. Interestingly, Geoffrey interrupts the narrative and suspends the action in the midst of Vortigern's tower building and moves into Part Five. So far in this part, Geoffrey has steadily been building the action. At first he shows Vortigern's

avarice and pride steering him to get the crown in whatever way he can. The plot rises with Vortigern's vices compelling him to do whatever is needed to keep his ill-gotten crown, including making friends with and aiding the enemy. Because of his pride, he believes that he can do anything with few consequences. After leading us along as he builds his case against Vortigern, Geoffrey leaves us hanging and waiting for the inevitable punishment.

At the end of Part Four, Geoffrey introduces a sub plot with the character Merlin. In the story, the earth swallows the tower foundation each day, and Vortigern's magicians can't explain why. Geoffrey uses this to bring in Merlin to identify the source of the problem—a pool underneath the earth. Merlin also explains that under the pool are two hollow stones with dragons sleeping inside. The earth is removed, the pool is drained, and Merlin's prophecy of the dragons is proved to be correct. Geoffrey writes, "all those present were equally amazed at his knowledge, and they realized that there was something supernatural about him" (169). Geoffrey manipulates the story to bring in Merlin so that he can next include the "Prophecies of Merlin" as part of *HRB*. Geoffrey halts the rising action and suspends the outcome in Vortigern's story to take a detour into this subplot.

Geoffrey begins Part Five with Merlin's prophesied dragons emerging and then fighting against each other. With a request from Vortigern to interpret the meaning of the dragons, Merlin begins to prophesy, and it is this prophecy that makes up the bulk of this section. Rife with symbolism, it is difficult to understand. Paton asserts that this section tells "in cryptic terms the resistance and subjugation of the Britons to Saxons, Danes, and Normans" but also to "presage the restoration of the British rule" ("Notes" 90). Kimberly Bell notes that "Merlin becomes a shaper of history himself, whose prophetic text mirrors Geoffrey's own historical narrative" (14). Geoffrey uses Merlin to foretell fictional events that will come in *HRB* as well

as historical events, like the Norman conquest, that have actually occurred in Geoffrey's past. In doing so, Geoffrey gives veracity to Merlin as a character and to the prophecies he is including.

Although functioning as a subplot, Part Five actually helps to highlight Geoffrey's theme. Besides the mirroring of events in the book to actual events, Geoffrey also goes beyond his time with the prophecy as Merlin foretells of the Britons returning to power. With the Normans currently in power, Geoffrey is also using the prophecy to say that the Normans might not always be in power. In *HRB*, Geoffrey ends with the defeat of the Britons being attributed to the wickedness of the people, the Saxon victory because of their goodness, and an angelic voice promising a return of Britons to power. All through the text, Geoffrey has been telling his audience to avoid vice and showing the consequences for those who don't. With the end of the prophecy depicting the Normans no longer in power, Geoffrey is specifically telling his rulers, who are currently involved in a civil war, to live better or lose power. Geoffrey can safely do this through the mystical prophecy of Merlin. So in Part Five, Geoffrey effectively uses the subplot to reinforce his moral meaning for his contemporaries.

With the return to Part Six, Geoffrey continues the rising action and takes very little time to resolve Vortigern's story. Aurelius Ambrosius, one of Constans's younger brothers, comes to seek revenge against Vortigern and to restore the kingdom to the Britons. To motivate his men to fight well against Vortigern, Aurelius describes Vortigern's sinful actions in this way: "This evil man, through the heathen whom he invited over, has exiled the nobility, laid waste a fertile country, destroyed the holy church and virtually obliterated Christianity from one sea to the other" (188). Aurelius traps Vortigern in his tower and burns it down, a fitting end for a man who burned with lust, pride and avarice and who destroyed the land, the people, and the church that he was supposed to protect.

The rising action of the stories of sinning kings continues with Uther who inherits the crown when his brother Aurelius is murdered. He continues the fight against the Saxons, defeating them in a great battle, and as king restores peace and administers justice. All goes well until Uther sees Ygerna, the wife of his trusted adviser Gorlois and “the most beautiful woman in Britain” (205). Uther is “immediately filled with desire for her” and “devoted all his attention to her” (205). Gorlois discerns Uther’s lust, takes Ygerna away and refuses to come back to Uther’s court. Furious, Uther gathers troops and goes to battle against Gorlois; his uncontrolled lust and wrath lead him to battle against a trusted friend. After only one week of being away from Ygerna, Uther’s “passion for Ygerna became more than he could bear.” Uther tells a friend, “I am desperately in love with Ygerna, . . . and if I can’t have her I am convinced that I shall suffer a physical breakdown” (206). Because of his lust, he is willing to do just about anything, and he enlists the help of Merlin. Through magic and trickery, Uther takes on the appearance of Gorlois and “satisfied his desire by making love with her,” and “that night she conceived Arthur” (207). Meanwhile, Gorlois is killed in battle, and Uther gets to marry Ygerna. Later on, Uther becomes “ill with a malady which affected him for a long time” (208), this illness being a manifestation of giving in to his lust. While Uther is still weak from this malady, the Saxons return and renew their efforts to take over Britain. After much death and destruction caused by the Saxons, Uther finally defeats them, but “his illness had taken an even more serious turn,” and the Saxons use this to their advantage by poisoning the spring which is Uther’s only source of water. Because of this poison, Uther and one hundred of his men die. Since poison kills from the inside, it is a fitting death for one whose briefly uncontrolled lusts are eating at him and causing disease. Once a strong and just king, Uther gives in to his lust and wrath, which results in the death of an innocent man, his own disease and death, and the death and destruction of more Britons.

In Part Six, Geoffrey continues to build his plot as he starts and ends this section with the death of a king. Both Vortigern and Uther suffered deaths appropriate for their vices. However, Geoffrey uses their stories of sin to draw a contrast as part of his rising action. Vortigern's sins are obvious and many as he frequently succumbed to the temptations of his vices. It is easy to describe him as evil. It is also not surprising that his sins result in death for himself and the Britons. In contrast, Uther is generally a good king who gave in to his lust only once, and this lust leads to some unforeseen consequences. For one result, Uther ends up weak from disease, and the Saxons are harder to defeat. For another, Uther's lust results in Ygerna conceiving Arthur who, through his own uncontrolled vices, eventually brings on even more death and destruction and whose sins begin the downfall of the Britons. By telling of Vortigern's and Uther's sins and deaths, Geoffrey continues and completes his rising action, still emphasizing his moral message to motivate his audience to steer clear of vice.

The climax in *HRB* comes in Part Seven with the story of Arthur, a mix of both virtue and vice, but with his overall influence, his vice actually leads to the decline of Britons. With the death of Uther, the Saxons renew their efforts to conquer Britain. Arthur is only fifteen years old at the time, but he is crowned since he is well-known for "his outstanding courage and generosity, and his inborn goodness" (212). Arthur continues the fight against the Saxons and in numerous battles against them and their various allies, like the Scots and the Picts, eventually defeats them all. He then "restored the whole country to its earlier dignity" and marries Guinevere (221). The following summer, the first signs of greed appear as Arthur wants more to control and leaves to conquer more nations. He defeats Ireland and a few other nearby islands for no good reason other than he wants to subject them to his authority.

Twelve years of peace ensue during which Arthur develops the now famous “code of courtliness,” and his fame for courage and generosity spreads. However, kings in far off countries are afraid that Arthur will decide to invade their countries and take over. Arthur learns of their fears, and “the fact that he was dreaded by all encouraged him to conceive the idea of conquering the whole of Europe” (222). Instead of being content with peace and fame for his court, he allows his pride and greed control his choice to take over Europe. In first defeating Norway and Denmark, Geoffrey writes that Arthur and his men “invested the cities of Norway and set fire to them everywhere. They scattered the rural population and continued to give full license to their savagery” (223). In Gaul, they “began to lay waste the countryside in all directions” (223). With the greed and savagery shown in destroying the country and scattering and killing the peasants, Arthur manifests similarities to Maximianus, who killed without mercy in his greed to defeat all that stood between him and Rome, and to Wanius and Malga, who came to Britain and slaughtered the unprotected peasants. Where is the greatness and generosity when his vices take over? Arthur’s greed and pride lead to savagery in himself and his soldiers and death and destruction of innocents.

After nine years of fighting, Arthur returns to Britain, his vices retreat, and he shows again his promise of being a good king. Britain also again experiences a time of greatness; in fact “Britain had reached such a standard of sophistication that it excelled all other kingdoms in its general affluence, the richness of its decorations, and the courteous behavior of its inhabitants” (229). Arthur is still most famous for his generosity. During one extended celebration, twelve men arrive from Rome with a message from Lucius the emperor demanding that Arthur again start paying the tribute. He informs Arthur that if he doesn’t pay, Lucius will come with his troops and invade Britain. Arthur’s pride is challenged. Arthur and his councilors decide that not

only will they not obey, but they will go to Rome and exact tribute from the Romans for the times that Britons previously ruled Rome. Arthur and his allies gather troops to immediately head for Rome, planning to conquer countries on their way. Arthur's pride and greed rear their ugly heads again. He is not satisfied to stay home and protect the realm should Lucius actually attempt to invade. Instead, he determines to prove that he really is the best. He moves from peace to war in one quick move. Since he is blinded by his need to protect his pride instead of his kingdom, he makes the well-known and fatal error of leaving his kingdom in the hands of his nephew Mordred and wife Guinevere.

With all the stories of kings, Geoffrey leads to his climax, the story of Arthur. In his other stories, as the action builds, he gives more details and the consequences become more serious, getting so that they result in even death and suffering for the Britons, through no fault of their own. In the previous sections, even with really evil kings like Maximianus and Vortigern, the people and the kingdom are eventually restored to peace and at least enjoy the leadership of a good king at least for a small window of time. But Arthur is the turning point. Geoffrey clearly shows the contrast between the good, generous Arthur when his kingdom is blossoming and becoming the model of civilization for all others and the Arthur who can't control his pride and leaves Britain vulnerable. Following Arthur, the kings are mostly evil, and the Britons are poisoned by these kings and become sinful themselves. Geoffrey creates this poignant contrast between the bright and glorious Britons of the climax and the degenerate ones of the conclusion. The story of Arthur serves to convince Geoffrey's audience to guard against vice and to demonstrate that even the great can fall and cause devastating consequences.

After the climax comes the falling action and resolution where Geoffrey gives us closure and emphasizes his moral meaning, and this all comes in Part Eight. From Arthur's reign to the

end of Geoffrey's chronicle is 147 years. In a whole history of 1900 years, 147 years is not a long time. During this time frame, the Britons experience only 60 years of peace, the majority of those under Cadwallo. For most of the time, the people suffer under sinful kings. Geoffrey briefly tells about the reigns of four bad kings: Constantine who killed the sons of Mordred, one in a church without mercy, and was then "struck down by the vengeance of God" (262); Aurelius Conanus who had taken "delight in civil war" (263); Malgo who was "given to the vice of homosexuality" (263); and Keredic who was a "fomenter of civil discords" (263). During the reigns of these bad kings, the Saxons and other invaders were constantly trying to invade and take over Britain.

With such evil at the head of the kingdom, the Britons themselves become poisoned. Geoffrey interrupts his telling of the events to preach to the Britons:

"You foolish people, weighed down by the sheer burden of your own monstrous crimes, never happy but when you are fighting one another Because the lunacy of civil war and the smoke-cloud of jealousy obscured your mind, because your pride did not permit you to obey a single king, that is why you see your fatherland ravaged by the impious heathens. (264)

Geoffrey identifies the pride of the people and their fighting and jealousy as the causes for their defeats at the hand of the Saxons. Following a great destruction of the island, the Britons continue to fight among themselves and are divided and ruled by three tyrants. Following another Saxon invasion, the Britons band together again under the leadership of Cadvan. In planning to fight against the Saxons, Cadvan asks another king for help and explains to him why the Britons are so easily defeated; he says that they "were made proud by the very vastness of their wealth," "began to indulge in sexual excesses," "had a dislike of truth," preferred "evil to

good” and felt a “reverence of viciousness in the place of virtue” (273). By naming their sins, Geoffrey is illustrating how evil the people are becoming and parallels the falling action of the plot to their falling and becoming more degenerate.

Cadvan eventually signs a peace treaty with the Saxons. His son Cadwallo later fights against the Saxons, completely defeats them and then rules in peace for 48 years. His son Cadwallader succeeds him on the throne and rules well for 12 years until he becomes ill, perhaps a sign of vice though Geoffrey doesn’t specify. With his illness, the Britons start to fight amongst themselves and again come God’s punishments, but this time in more Biblical fashion: “a grievous and long-remembered famine afflicted the besotted population” followed by “a pestilent and deadly plague [that] killed off such a vast number of the population that the living could not bury them” (281). The Britons had a brief respite from sin and suffering because of Cadwallader. But with the first sign of weakness in the king, the Britons are back to sinning, and God Himself punishes them. The Britons who survive, including King Cadwallader, desert Britain and immigrate to Brittany, with only a few remaining in Wales. Upon sailing away, Cadwallader laments: “Woe unto us sinners . . . for our monstrous crimes. . . . The vengeance of His might lies heavily upon us. . . . When He, the true Judge, saw that we had no intention of putting an end to our crimes, . . . He made up his mind to punish us for our folly. He has visited his wrath upon us” (281). Cadwallader, as the last Briton king to rule, gets Geoffrey’s last speech in *HRB*.

Even so, it is not the last time that we will hear of God Himself determining the fate of the Britons. After eleven years of being in Brittany and with evidence that the plague is no longer killing people, Cadwallader decides to go back to Britain and rule again. However, God intervenes in this plan as an “Angelic Voice spoke to [Cadwallader] in a peal of thunder and told

him to stop. God did not wish the Britons to rule in Britain anymore” (282). The Angelic voice, however, promises that “as a reward for its faithfulness, the British people would occupy the island again at some time in the future” (283). Cadwallader gives up on his personal but sends his son Yvor and his nephew Yni to Britain to reclaim the throne. They try for seventy-nine years to win it back, but Geoffrey still emphasizes that it is due to the wickedness of the Britons that they are unsuccessful: Geoffrey states, “The plague about which I have told you, the famine and their own inveterate habit of civil discord had caused this proud people to degenerate so much that they were no longer able to keep their foes at bay” (284). In his very last paragraph, Geoffrey describes why the Saxons, by contrast, are rewarded with the island: The Saxons “behaved more wisely. They kept peace and concord among themselves, they cultivated fields, and they re-built cities and castles” (284). God rewards people for living rightly and getting along. With the Saxons being rewarded with Britain, Geoffrey has completed his story arc, and with the Britons no longer in Britain, Geoffrey gives the audience closure. His moral message is clear: it is imperative to avoid vice and embrace good.

Conclusion

Throughout his text, Geoffrey illustrates “how God avenges himself for past sins” (147). In his purposeful construction of the narrative, Geoffrey constantly reinforces his moral message. Through the rising action of the stories of evil kings and the growing seriousness in sin and broadness in punishment, Geoffrey elevates the need for the audience to avoid vice. The climax is the story of Arthur who embodies both the good and the evil and who, because of his sins, sets in motion the decline of the Britons. The falling action and conclusion complete Geoffrey’s narrative arc as he attributes the ultimate loss of Britain to the Britons’ civil war and evil deeds. Always his moral is at the forefront of his narrative. And all this pushing of his message is not only to motivate the individual to avoid sin but also to avoid a crisis in society at large.

In addition to his plot construction to reinforce his moral message, Geoffrey endeavors to connect to his audience through his use of shared beliefs and Christian teachings. With this audience connection, he helps ensure that his audience will see and understand his message and hopefully be motivated to live a moral life. Geoffrey’s particular use of the Bible underscores his teachings that people should avoid vice. He builds his narrative to communicate this message through his stories of the evil Briton kings. Most often these wicked kings suffer punishment by death, and their people also suffer—through being massacred by enemies, being involved in battle, civil war among themselves, unstable succession, or Biblical-like famines and plagues. He clearly shows that vice brings suffering to many, not just the sinful, and that God punishes the wicked. Geoffrey is very deliberate in his narrative construction so that his moral message is constantly present. By reminding his English audience of their Christian beliefs, Geoffrey is ultimately hoping to help them preserve their society.

Despite the often negative reaction of historians to *HRB*, what remains clear is that the text was—and continues to be—widely read. Indeed, the fact that there are 200 extant manuscripts attests to its popularity and the desire of curators to preserve Geoffrey's work, regardless of its historical accuracy. During the Middle Ages, readers were drawn to Geoffrey's skill in writing: the text contains an exciting plot, individualized characters, and a pace that keeps the action moving forward. It tells of great kings and queens and their actions to preserve society—their commitment to justice, maintaining the law, building cities, being generous. It also tells of evil kings and their wicked deeds, thus functioning as a collection of moral exempla intended to teach even as it delights.

Because of his narrative structure and efforts to preserve his society's foundational beliefs, it is important to see Geoffrey as an historiographer rather than as teller of fact. Calling something a "history" implies some sort of telling of the events and/or human behaviors in relation to fact and how they actually happened. By titling his work as "history," Geoffrey implies that it is about real events and real people told in an accurate way. But from a modern perspective and understanding of history as narrative, as White defines it, we can see that Geoffrey's book is an historical narrative that Geoffrey is choosing and interpreting events to fit with his purpose. In order to impart his moral message, he added other layers within the text—his shared beliefs with his contemporary audience and an overtly Christian subtext. With his society in chaos due to questions of succession and civil war, he could see the need to remind his contemporaries of their foundational beliefs. The Britons who feature in *HRB* won't stop fighting with each other and won't live by God's law; therefore, they are evicted from Britain. It seems logical to assume that Geoffrey was hoping this message would get to the warring peoples

of his own era. Sadly, it was more than 10 years after *HRB* appeared that a peace treaty was signed.

Though it didn't have an immediate effect on his Norman rulers, we can still see *HRB* as Geoffrey's attempt to preserve his society and the Christian beliefs that had been an underpinning guide for good living for centuries. By constructing his narrative with a pattern of evil kings appearing every so often throughout his history, he shows the consistent damage that is done to self, people, and land when a king or a group of people succumbs to vice. He consistently raises the stakes throughout his narrative to show the ever-increasing seriousness of the punishments and consequences that come because of sin. Since God is at the helm of the nation, he can't look on sin with a cavalier attitude—wickedness must be punished, and Geoffrey illustrates this throughout *HRB*.

Though we are well past the Norman rule of Geoffrey's day, this book still has value to readers. We might not share or even know of the medieval beliefs that Geoffrey depended on to connect with his contemporary audience, but we can still see the dangers of vice. We might not believe in the vices as seen by the Christians of his day but rarely do people applaud others giving in to lust or greed or wrath or pride; most can agree that these are dangerous behaviors and see around us the sad results of such vices in society today. If we look to Geoffrey's narrative and heed his warnings against vice, we, too, might be motivated to live with greater moral awareness. And that can only be a good thing.

Appendix

Here I have copied M. Victoria Guerin's list that shows specific parallels between King David and King Arthur (15-17). In regards to this list, she explains:

The following is a list of significant events in David's life, and whenever relevant, their parallels in Geoffrey's *Historia*. Both in the biblical text and in Geoffrey's, these events are listed in the order in which they occur. Blank spaces in the right column designate episodes in David's life which have no correspondence in the *Historia* but which will be picked up by the French prose cycle. (15)

King David	King Arthur
1. "David's reign is preceded by that of a sinful king, Saul. (1 Sam. 9-15)"	"Arthur's reign is preceded by that of a sinful king, Vortigern. (<i>Historia</i> vi.6-viii.2)"
2. "Israel is threatened by invasion from the Philistines. (1 Sam. 13ff.)"	"Britain is threatened by invasion from the Saxons. (<i>Historia</i> vi.10 to end of work)"
3. "Saul sins against God by sparing the conquered king of the non-Jewish Amalekites, Agag, and failing to sacrifice to God the animals taken during the war. (1 Sam. 15)"	"Vortigern sins against God by inviting the non-Christian Saxons into Britain, marrying a Saxon princess and making alliances with his enemies. (<i>Historia</i> vi.10-16)"
4. "David, a child of non-noble parentage, is chosen king by the prophet Samuel. (1 Sam. 16:1-13)."	
5. "David slays the giant Goliath. (1 Sam. 17)"	"Arthur slays the giant of Mont Saint Michel. (<i>Historia</i> x.3)"
6. "David possesses a wonderful sword, that of Goliath, taken from	

<p>behind the Ephod by the priest Ahimelech. (1 Sam. 21:8-9)”</p>	<p>“Arthur possesses a wonderful sword, Caliburn (later, Excaliber). (<i>Historia</i>, ix.4, ix.12, x.11)”</p>
<p>7. “David leads the Israelites in battle against the Philistines and defeats them. (2 Sam. 5:17-25, 8:1-14)”</p>	<p>“Arthur leads the Britons in battle against the Saxons and defeats them (<i>Historia</i>, ix.1-5).”</p>
<p>8. “David unites the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and builds a city which is a great center of wealth, culture and magnificence (Jerusalem). (2 Sam. 8:15-18)”</p>	<p>“Arthur unifies Britain and establishes a court which is a great center of wealth, culture and magnificence (situated, later, variously at Carduel, Caerleon, and Camelot). (<i>Historia</i>, ix.11)”</p>
<p>9. “David catches sight of Bathsheba, wife of his captain, Uriah the Hittite. He sends Uriah to certain death in battle and marries his widow, who is already pregnant by David. (2 Sam. 11)”</p>	
<p>10. “The prophet Nathan rebukes David in God’s name, telling him, ‘The sword shall never depart from your house.’ Evil will come from his house, and his wives will be publicly given to others. David repents, and Nathan says that God will spare him but that the child which Bathsheba carries will die. (2 Sam. 12:1-14)”</p>	
<p>11. “Another of David’s sons, Amnon, commits incest by raping his half-sister, Tamar. (2 Sam. 13:1-19)”</p>	
<p>12. “David’s son, Absalom, rebels against his father. He wins the hearts of the Israelites, sleeps with a number of David’s concubines, gathers an army, and marches against him. (2 Sam. 15-16)”</p>	<p>“Arthur’s ‘nephew,’ Mordred, rebels against his ‘uncle.’ He wins the hearts of the Britons, marries Arthur’s wife, Guenevere (or, in later versions, seeks to</p>

<p>13. “David’s army and Absalom’s fight, and Absalom is killed. David survives. (2 Sam. 17-18)”</p> <p>14. “After David’s death, his son Solomon falls into the sin of idolatry and is denounced by God. In punishment, the kingdom is taken from his descendants. A series of evil kings follows. (1 Kings 11-2 Kings 25)”</p>	<p>do so), gathers an army, and marches against him. (<i>Historia</i>, x.13)”</p> <p>“Arthur’s army and Mordred’s fight, and Mordred is killed, as is Arthur. (<i>Historia</i>, xi.1-2)”</p> <p>“A series of evil kings follows Arthur’s death, and the kingdom is lost to the Saxons. Geoffrey, on God’s behalf, denounces the British for the sins of jealousy and pride (<i>Historia</i>, xi.3-9)”</p>
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