LA3AMON'S BRUT AND ITS ROOTS IN OLD ENGLISH NARRATIVE POETRY

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OLD ENGLISH NARRATIVE

POETRY

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PREFACE

Critics of Laȝamon's *Brut* have noticed the repetitiveness of the work, and some have noted that Laȝamon often establishes pairs of themes in opposition The poem is framed by a pair of scenes in binary opposition. The pervasiveness of this feature throughout the work has not, in my opinion, been fully explored. In this thesis, I will examine narrative balance and opposition in representative passages from the *Brut*. Furthermore, unlike previous studies, this one will discuss the relationship of Laȝamon's narrative structure to that of Old English poetry. Poems such as *Beowulf*, *The Wanderer*, and Aelfric's *Lives of Saints* place themes in binary opposition to show contrast and to provide a "frame" for their narrative. The *Brut* represents a continuation of this aspect of the Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PROBLEMS IN LAȜAMON STUDIES

Laȝamon's[1] Brut is one of the few long poems written in the time between Beowulf and The Canterbury Tales; it contains the first English versions of the Arthur and Lear legends.[2] However, the Brut is not widely read. Readers may be put off by the poem's length (it is over 16,000 lines) or perhaps by the difficulty of the language, which appears to be something between Old and Middle English.[3] Nevertheless, the Brut is an important work. It evidences, through its poetic and narrative devices, a continuation of Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition into the Middle English era.

Laȝamon's use of repetition, both at the syntactic and thematic levels, is one of the most noticeable features of his Brut. Depending on the reader's interest in Old and Middle English literature, this trait can either be a distraction or evidence of the poet's indebtedness to an earlier formulaic tradition. J. S. P. Tatlock's 1923 study, "Epic Formulas, Especially in Layamon," discusses Laȝamon's use of one and two line formulas and concludes that the Brut has more in common

with classical (Graeco-Roman) than with Old English epic poetry. Later scholars, such as Håkan Ringbom, Dennis Patrick Donahue, and Carolynn VanDyke Friedlander, see repetitive themes in Brut as contributing to the poem's[4] narrative structure. Recently, there has been more concern for the narrative structure of Brut; however, even with this emphasis on thematic balance, there still exists a tendency to read Laȝamon's work as a collection of loosely connected episodes--like an anthology of short stories. Although the Brut is by no means a tightly structured narrative, I hope to demonstrate through this study that the poem has structure. Through balance and antithesis, Laȝamon's additions to Wace's Roman de Brut enhance this structure. Furthermore, Laȝamon maintains a feature important to Old English narrative poetry.

There is not a great body of Laȝamon scholarship, and what does exist is often concerned with non-literary matters. Roland Blenner-Hassett, for instance, devotes a great deal of scholarly attention to place names in the Brut.[5] Some scholars have employed a variety of evidence to refute the commonly accepted completion date of 1205. H. B. Hinckley suggests a completion date sometime between 1160-1170. E. G. Stanley, on the other hand, argues that the poem is a product of the early- to mid- thirteenth century.[6] Other scholars seek to identify sources for the Brut other than those mentioned by Laȝamon in his introduction. P. J. Frankis notes parallels between the

Brut and Aelfric's homilies, and Francoise LeSaux considers possible Welsh sources.[7]

Although scholars' attempts to find specific sources for the Brut other than Wace or Geoffrey of Monmouth are likely to prove fruitless, setting the poem in the context of a literary tradition is possible and useful to our understanding of the work. Laȝamon's word choice, his repetitiousness, and his use of alliteration[8] have led scholars to connect his work to Old English poetic tradition. However, most such comparisons either treat the connection only generally, or limit themselves to syntax or prosody. Henry Cecil Wyld states that "Laȝamon is essentially an English poet. He is strongly moved by the old romantic stories of his native land" (29). Tatlock, disagreeing with Wyld, contends "Not a great many of his [Laȝamon's] formulas are found in the extant Anglo-Saxon or twelfth century Middle English poetry" (515). He finds more parallels between Brut and later Middle English poetry than between it and its predecessors and considers Laȝamon's formulaic usage to be "one which appears in the beginnings of a literature. . . and survives in much that is later" (528). Thus, according to Tatlock, Brut marks the heroic age of Middle English poetry, just as The Odyssey marks the heroic age of Greek poetry and Beowulf marks that of Old English literature. Wyld and Tatlock, furthermore, deal only with Laȝamon's word choice and syntactical matters; they ignore his narrative structure

and the relationship of this aspect to Old English poetic tradition. It is through his treatment of themes that Laȝamon's indebtedness to Old English poetry becomes evident. Thus, a study of themes in the Brut can help place the poem in the context of Old English narrative poetry.

Scholars have debated Laȝamon's indebtedness to Old English poetry on the basis of verse form and word usage. Tatlock, discussing prosody, compares the two forms: "The pauses for apposition, repetition, and transition [in classical OE poetry] produce a staccato rhythm. Owing to the absence of these traits, Laȝamon's is more legato" (8). Tatlock compares his versification to that of the later (eleventh century) Chronicle poems. Roger Sherman Loomis connects Laȝamon's verse form to that of "the humbler minstrels who succeeded the courtly scops and learned clerics" (105) and his "ferocious streak" to Anglo-Saxon poetry: ". . . the scop in his battle pieces exulted in slaughter; and the clerics who composed Exodus and Judith display a similar taste for blood" (108). Shirley Kossick notes that "Layamon's poetic vocabulary . . . is almost entirely native, harking back to the heroic period. . . and as far as possible avoiding French words" (26). H. S. Davies, on the other hand, finds Laȝamon's use of long similes unprecedented either in Wace or in Old English literature.

The _Brut_ has been linked to Old English poetry on the basis of prosody. In the past, Scholars have considered Laȝamon's verse form to be more closely related to the popular verse of the late Anglo-Saxon period than to classical Old English works, such as _Beowulf_. N. F. Blake invents the term "rhythmical alliteration" to describe Laȝamon's verse form, and connects it to early Middle English oral poetry. According to Blake, Laȝamon's use of alliteration "not so much as metrical device, but more for rhetorical effect" and his lack of enjambment are features of the "fusion of poetry and prose in the early Middle English period"(122). Carolynn VanDyke Friedlander supports much of Blake's argument, though she feels he overlooks the influence of written poetry on Early Middle English writers. She uses the term "accentual verse" to describe the four-stress end-stopped verse form of Laȝamon and claims that the simpler alliterative patterns the _Brut_ displays occur because "Not only were the EME accentual poets cut off from Old English tradition, but they were nostalgic about it" (230).

The view that Laȝamon owes his poetic style to the influence of popular Old English poetry, to the exclusion of classical poetry, has not gone unchallenged. Arthur Wayne Glowka, who connects the free verse of _Brut_ to the Old English half-line, states, "This conception of a popular tradition de-emphasizes Layamon's role in the selection of prosodic techniques and places Early Middle

English poetry in greater isolation than necessary" (14). James Erwin Noble discusses La3amon's use of lexical variation and sees a continuation of the classical alliterative tradition:

> . . . as unsophisticated by earlier standards as they may be, short passages [of variation] are sufficiently commonplace in the Brut to be considered a feature of La3amon's style. What is more, they afford us evidence of the relationship between that style and the style of the so-called 'classical' poets of the OE period which has hitherto gone unnoticed (93).

These two more recent scholars are concerned mainly with prosody, but their work demonstrates that a continuation of the poetic tradition of the classical Old English works can be found in La3amon.

Hakan Ringbom provides one of the first studies of the narrative structure of the Brut. This feature has been widely neglected, although a great deal of work has been done concerning La3amon's versification and word order. Ringbom identifies his use of three themes (feasts, voyages, and arrivals with greeting) and a number of subthemes La3amon uses to depict each theme. Unfortunately, in spite of what Ringbom's title suggests, he does not compare Beowulf to the Brut very closely. He does, however, connect themes to Old English tradition: "originally part of oral tradition, set themes are

preserved as clearly discernible narrative units within a literary tradition. In the Meters of Boethius . . . the Anglo-Saxon poet. . . suddenly departs from his original by bringing a stock theme, such as a storm at sea" (77). Dennis Patrick Donahue gives a clearer distinction between themes and formulas:

> Understanding the difference between word groups that make up formulas and word groups that make up compositional devices is made possible by a close study of the nature of the longer unit of repetition in the Brut, the theme. Themes will be shown to have conceptual stability and verbal flexibility (128).

Like Ringbom, Donahue focuses his study on Laȝamon's repetitive use of themes, and like Ringbom, he is concerned mainly with syntactic parallels; he does not address the function of thematic parallels in Brut. Friedlander ("The Structure and Themes") examines the function of parallel scenes in Brut: She states that they "strengthen the impression that history is cyclic" (129). In "The First English Story of King Lear," she discusses additions from Wace that heighten parallel structure:

> Layamon's additions neaten and articulate the passage's structure; events which Geoffrey and Wace intend us to regard as parallel are here related in parallel language. . . Structure is

> further clarified by Layamon's use of repeated phrases (47).

Christopher Brian Kennedy, like Friedlander, views repeated themes as serving a purpose in the narrative. He considers mutability and the guiding force of providence to be the major themes of Brut: ". . .the rise-fall-rise pattern suggests that, although nothing in this world can be relied upon to last, the pervasive reversals that Layamon depicts can nonetheless be combated" (134). As useful as these studies are in explaining the function of themes in the narrative structure of Brut, many of these themes (such as the deterioration of place names and the fall of rulers) also occur in Wace, and thus do not reveal much about Laȝamon's own concerns; more explanation of how Laȝamon's amplification affect the presentation of themes is needed if Laȝamon's indebtedness to Old English tradition is to be verified. Furthermore, Friedlander and Donahue tend to break the Brut up into a series of loosely connected episodes. Like Beowulf scholars who claim the work lacks continuity, they tend to overlook the balance between scenes that establishes narrative structure in the Brut.

Works such as those of Ringbom, Friedlander, Donahue, and Kennedy are valuable, though, because they focus on the long-neglected aspect of narrative structure; they help characterize the Brut as a literary work, rather than a linguistic mine from which philologists and

prosodists can extract antiquities and archaisms. The interrelationship of themes in the Brut has not, however, been fully explored. Furthermore, Laȝamon's narrative structure (his ordering of themes) has never been examined in the context of Old English narrative poetry.

In this study, I will examine Laȝamon's balanced treatment of themes, which he accomplishes through binary opposition and parallelism. I will accept Alfred Lord's definition of a theme as "a recurring concatenation of details and ideas, not restricted to a specific narrative event, or certain formulas, which forms an underlying structure for an action or description" (77). Laȝamon's additions to Wace's material place many of his scenes into balanced pairs, with one reflecting the other. Unlike previous studies, this one will demonstrate that the narrative balance Laȝamon establishes is derived from Old English poetry (from Beowulf as well as from later works). In my next chapter, I will demonstrate the importance of balance and opposition to Old English narrative poetry.

NOTES

[1]I use the spelling of the name used by Brook and Leslie in their edition of the Brut. The variants used by other scholars are "Layamon," "Lawman," and even "Lazamon." In referring to La3amon's characters, I use whatever spelling is most frequently used by the author.

[2]Friedlander's "The First English story of King Lear" and Tatlock's Arthurian Literature (both of which are cited here) offer detailed discussions of La3amon's treatment of the Lear and Arthur stories respectively.

[3]E. G. Stanley ("Layamon's Antiquarian Sentiments") calls La3amon a conscious archaist: "The language of La3amon's Brut preserved in M. S. Cotton Caligula.ix . . . has a more archaic flavour than that of other West Midlands texts of the second half ot the thirteenth century" (23). Of course, this characterization of La3amon is dependent upon Stanley's assumption that the Brut was completed in the mid-thirteenth century; an assumption which cannot be verified (see note 6).

[4]I use "poem" loosely; some would argue that the Brut is not a poem. N. F. Blake refers to it as "rhythmical alliteration," and Carolyn VanDyke Friendlander calls it "accentual verse."

[5]For example, Roland Blenner-Hassett ("Gernemuȝe: A Nature Name Puzzle in Lawman's Brut") discusses the location of one of the islands in the Brut. Roland Smith ("Lawman's 'Gernemuȝe'") refutes Blenner-Hassett's conclusions.

[6]The traditional date is based on Laȝamon's use of the preterit "wes" in reference to Queen Eleanor as proof that it was written after her death. Hinckley cites instances in Old English writings where the preterit was used to indicate present tense as proof that an earlier completion date is possible. Stanley states that there is no evidence to preclude a completion date sometime not very early in the thirteenth century. He does not, however, respond to Hinckley's arguments. Curiously, neither Hinckley nor any other scholar discussing dates for the Brut has used reference to himself in the preterit (1-2); since he could not have written posthumously, it would seem that Laȝamon's verb tense usage is not conclusive evidence for dating the text.

[7]Like speculations concerning the date of the text, these studies are largely inconclusive. Frankis ("Laȝamon's English Sources") notes some parallels between the Brut and Aelfric's homilies; however, these parallels are not close enough to prove that Laȝamon actually uses the homilies in the Brut. LeSaux argues for Welsh sources, which she credits for Laȝamon's scenes of

the victors of battles gloating over their fallen enemies. Her assertion that this motif "does not seem to occur in the Old English literary tradition" (388) is questionable in light of poems such as "The Battle of Brunanburh." The English author of this poem spends a good deal of time gloating about the defeated Scottish and Norse soldiers.

[8]Ringbom notes that Laȝamon uses alliteration in seventy-one percent of his lines, and rhyme in forty percent of them (71).

[9]Ringbom connects the theme to oral poetry, and distinguishes between themes and formulas: "unlike the formula, the theme does require exact repetition of patterns of words, nor is it restricted by metrical considerations. The theme and the formula are different entities, operating within different units of narrative" (78).

CHAPTER II

THEMATIC BALANCE IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

In order to understand Laȝamon's indebtedness to the Anglo-Saxon poets, it is first necessary that we examine the narrative structure of Old English poetry. Parallelism and antithesis are prevalent in Old English narrative poetry. Poets use these devices to emphasize ideas that they considered important: the contrast between past success and present misfortune and the ultimate death of all earthly things and the dichotomy between good and evil. They often compare what *is* with what *was* (as in *The Wanderer*), or what one *should* do with what one should *not* do (as in the Heremod and Scyld episodes in *Beowulf*). Parallel themes can mark the beginning and conclusion of a block of narrative (*Beowulf* begins and ends with a funeral, for instance). Although variation between scenes does occur, poets tend to balance important incidents with their parallels or their opposites. In his seminal lecture on *Beowulf*, J. R. R. Tolkien connected the poem's heroic theme, which centers on the struggle between good and evil (and the inevitable

defeat of the former), to its basis in Northern pagan mythology:

> . . . he [the Beowulf poet] and his hearers were thinking of the shoreless sea, beneath the sky's inaccessible roof; whereon, as in a little circle of light about their halls, men with courage went forward to that battle with the hostile world and the offspring of the dark which ends for all, even the kings and champions, in defeat (18).

Christianity offers hope for an eternal world beyond time, but within the confines of this world, the human situation is hopeless. According to Tolkien, this view of the human condition establishes the narrative structure of Beowulf. He defends the poem against charges by Klaeber and others that it lacks steady advance:[1]

> It [Beowulf] is essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms, it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death (29).

Although certain points of Tolkien's, such as his division of the poem into two halves "of roughly equivalent phonetic weight" (31) and his view that the division between these two halves occurs between lines 1887 and

1888 (31), have been questioned, his basic assertion that Beowulf's narrative structure is founded on balance and opposition is undisputed by critics.

Later scholars have expanded on Tolkien's thesis and have noted more examples of parallel and opposition in Beowulf. Herbert G. Wright discusses the clash between light and darkness, which corresponds to the clash between good and evil; Wright also notes that the conclusion of the poem (Beowulf's funeral) reflects its introduction: "It is evident that the author of Beowulf constructed his poem in such a way that the end should recall the beginning, which tells how the other great hero, Scyld, passed away" (10). Helen Damico examines how scenes concerning Wealtheow, "the ideal queen" in Heorot, are set in opposition to those involving Grendel's mother, "an exemplar of savage, corrupt womanhood". According to Damico, "This inverse pattern of motif establishes a harmony" (11).[2]

An examination of the poem reveals that Tolkien and others were right in emphasizing the importance of balance and opposition in Beowulf. The hero's arrival at Heorot and his defeat of Grendel are each followed by a feast during which Queen Wealtheow appears. Her appearance in each scene is associated with mead (which she serves to the warriors) and gold (which she either wears or distributes to the court). During the first

feast, she is described as "goldhroden" (614)[3] and she passes the cup:

> sincfato seald oþþaet sǣl ālamp,
> þaet hīo Bēowulfe, bēaghroden cwēn
> mōde geþungen medoful aetbaer;" (622-624).[2]

In her second appearance, the motifs of the mead (or wine) cup and gold recur: "þā cwōm Wealhþēow forð/ gān under gyldnum bēage" (1162b-1163a). She greets Hrothgar with wine: "Onfōh þissum fulle, freodrihten min, / sinces brytta!" (1169-1170a). These scenes are indicative of the traditional function of Germanic court women. Beowulf retells the mead serving by Wealtheow and later by Freawaru in his retelling of his story to Hygelac. Hygelac's queen Hygd, "wīs wēlþungen" (1927a), performs another mead-serving ceremony.

Grendel's murder of one man (Hondscio) is paralleled by his mother's murder of Aeschere. Both men are taken in their sleep. Neither understands fate (wyrd). Aeshcere has no idea of what is to befall him: "Wyrd ne cūðon, / geosceaft grimme" (1233b-1234a). Hondscio, like his comrades, feels his death is imminent, but the Geats believe that they all are going to die:

> Nǣnig heora þōhte þaet hē þanon scolde
> eft eardlufan ǣfre gesēcean
> folc oþðe frēoburh, þǣr hē āfēded waes
> (691-693).

The only difference is that, in the first attack, one of the Geats is killed, and in the second, it is a Dane.

Often the Beowulf poet uses digression to establish parallels. After he has defeated Grendel, Hrothgar's scop sings of the dragon slayer Sigurd, to whom he compares Beowulf. This reference foreshadows Beowulf's last battle, also a dragon-fight. When Beowulf reminds Unferth that he has "þīnum brōðrum tō banan wurde" (587) and of the punishment that he will receive for his sin, the reader's attention is drawn to the poet's earlier reference to Cain (Grendel's forefather) (108-110). Later, the poet again mentions Cain and refers to him as "ecgbannon āngun brēþer" (1262). This line bears close syntactic semblance to Beowulf's condemnation of Unferth. Unferth, therefore, is connected to Cain, and his character is thus further denigrated.

However, important scenes and characterizations have their antitheses as well as their parallels. These antitheses, as Wright notes, are demonstrated by scenes set in opposition to them. Immediately after Beowulf has been favorably compared with Sigurd, the scop tells the story of Heremod, the covetous bloodthirsty ruler. Although this story may be a warning to Beowulf of how not to conduct himself as king, the reader cannot help comparing him with Hrothgar and Scyld (both rulers):

Ne wearð Heremōd swā
eaforum Ecgwelan, Ār-Scyldingum;

ne gewēox hē him tō willan, ac tō waelfealle
ond tō dēaðcwalum Deniga lēodum; (1709b-1710)

Heremod's rule of the Danes contrasts sharply with that of Scyld, who acted to enhance their honor. The poet praises Scyld's raids against, and subjugation of, rival tribes, "þaet waes gōd cyning!" (11), an epithet also attached to Hrothgar. The poet's favorable comment that Hygd is "wis welþungen þēah ðe wintra lȳt" (1927) gives precedent for the digression concerning Modþryð, who is Hygd's opposite.

Damico has noted the contrast between Wealtheow's entrances into the hall and those of Grendel and his mother.[3] We can further contrast the mead and praise Wealtheow offers Beowulf with the dagger blows Grendel's mother serves him. The connection between these scenes is enhanced by the poet's reference to Beowulf as Grendel's mother's "selegast" (1545).

This pattern of reversal can be seen in the scop's description of creation and the poet's depiction of Grendel's first ravages. The scop sings of creation as a joyous event:

cwaeð þaet se Aelmihtiga eorðan worhte
wlitebeorhtne wang, swā waeter bebūgeð,
gesette sige-hrēþig, sunnan ond monan
lēoman tō lēohte landbūendum,
ond gefraetwade foldan scēatas,

leomum ond lēafum, lif ēac gesceōp

cynna gehwylcum ara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ (92-98).

The result of this song is joy for the inhabitants of Heorot: "swā ða drihtguman drēamum lifdon" (99). Grendel's appearance represents what J.D. Foley terms an "anti-feast": it reverses their joy, "Rhetorically, the feasting passage marks the transition from the dream ("joy") and daylight order of Hrothgar to the dark, nighttime order of Grendel" (238). Each of the positive images of the creation has its negation in the poet's depiction of Grendel's heritage. Instead of the light and water that beautify the earth, we have the darkness of the moors--the home of Cain's monstrous offspring (103-104). God's creation of basically beneficial life (some of which decorates the earth) is negated by the "untydras" (111) that Cain engenders. Finally, God's creative energy is opposed by Grendel's and Cain's destructiveness. The result of this is the reversal of the joy that the scop's song helped to create:

Ðā waes on ūhtan mid āerdaege

Grendles guðcraeft gumum undyrne;

þā waes aefter wiste wōp up āhafen,

micel morgenswēg (126-129a).

The pattern of reversal from good to bad fortune, as many scholars (Tolkien et al.) have noted, is of major significance to Beowulf. The poet uses thematic balance to portray these reversals. The most important of these

balanced scenes, perhaps, is the contrast between Beowulf's first and last fights. In his battle with Grendel, he is aided (albeit ineffectually) by his band of retainers (thirteen in all). Nearly the same number (twelve, if we count the guide) desert him when he faces the dragon. His first battle brings glory and treasure to the Geats. His last, in which he is killed, leads to their dissolution. The life story of the hero begins and ends with the motif of retainers and their relative loyalty in the face of danger. Furthermore, the poem itself is "framed" by funeral scenes. It opens with the life story of the Danish king Scyld which includes a detailed description of his funeral. It concludes with Beowulf's funeral. Parallel themes, at the opening and closing of the poem, reinforce its main idea, which is (as Tolkien notes) the temporality of worldly beings. Even great heroes age and die.

Narrative balance, identified by Tolkien in Beowulf, can be found in Old English narrative poetry outside of this work. It occurs in such works as The Wanderer, certain Chronicle poems, and Aelfric's Lives of Saints. It constitutes a tradition that continues into the Early Middle English period through Laȝamon's Brut. Examining a passage in The Wanderer, we can note the contrast between the protagonist's current situation and his past:

þince him on mōde aet hē his mondryhten
clyppe ond cysse ond on cnēo lecge
honda ond hēafod, swā hē hwīlum āer
in geardagum giefstolas breac.
Đonne onweacneð eft winelēas guma,
gesihð him biforan fealwe wēgas,
baþian brimfuglas, brēadan feþra,
hrēosan hrīm ond snāw, hagle gemenged.[4]
(41-48)

In this passage, the poet-protagonist's dream (the first four lines) is reversed by the following four. The companionship of his lord has its antithesis in the waterfowls, which the poet later states are not good company). Thus, his present life of sorrow is placed in opposition to his previous life of joy.

The tenth-century Chronicle poem "The Battle of Brunanburh" also deals with sorrow, though not in an elegaic manner. The poem contrasts the exaltation of the brothers Aethelstan and Eadmund and the sorrow of their defeated foes, Anlaf and Constantinus. In about sixteen lines, the poet describes the flight of the foreign kings and the losses each suffers. He devotes almost the same amount of space to each; Anlaf's flight and the the description of the dead warriors he leaves behind are depicted in eight lines (28b-36). Constantinus' retreat is narrated from lines 37 to 46a (nine lines). The English king's joyous return is placed in opposition to the

mournful and shameful homecoming of Anlaf and Constantinus. Whereas the Norse king is "nēde gebēded / tō lides stefne" (34)[5] and the Scottish king "waes his maega sceard, / frēonda gefylled" (40b-41a) the two brothers are "wīges hrēmige" (57b). Furthermore, the poet juxtaposes the attitude of the English toward the fallen Norse and Scottish soldiers with that of the defeated kings; the English leave them behind for the scavengers (raven, eagle, and wolf) to feed on.

Aelfric, writing in the early eleventh century, not only follows the Old English tradition of using balance and opposition to establish contrast, but like the Beowulf poet, he frames his narratives between parallel scenes. His life of Saint Oswald, like Beowulf, is set between two scenes with the same theme--in this instance, healing. When Oswald defeats Cadwallan at Heavenfield, a series of miraculous healings, related to the cross he erected there, follows. Both men and livestock (cattle) are healed in this scene. Aelfric also adds an extended narrative of a man who has fallen and broken his arm and is healed by some moss from Oswald's cross. After the king is killed by Penda, more healings take place at the place of his death. Again, men and livestock benefit, and as in the first scene, the healing of wounds sustained in a fall (in this instance it is a horse that falls) occurs. Of course, these incidents are taken straight from Bede's Ecclesiastical History, but in Aelfric's

version, they are placed in a parallel relationship. He omits the section dealing with Earconbert, and shortens those concerning Aidan and Birinus. He also establishes closer syntactic balance between the two healing scenes. The one that occurs at Heavenfield reads:

> Seo ylce rod siððan þe oswald araerde
> on wurðmynte þaer stod and wurdon fela gehaelde
> untymra manna and eac swilce nytena
> (30-32 emphasis added).

One-hundred and sixty lines later, after his death, the miraculous healing is described in similar (though not identical) words: "and þaer wurdon gehaelede þurh his halgan geearnunge / fela infirm men fram mislicum oþrum" (192-193 emphasis added). Aelfric's version, unlike that of Alfred the Great,[7] establishes a syntactic parallel between the two scenes. In Alfred's version, part of the relic (the moss from the cross in the first scene, and the mould from the ground where Oswald fell in the second), is taken and put into water for sick men and beasts to drink. Alfred says of the first miracle, "þaet waeter on adlige men oþðe on neat stregdað oþðe drincan syllað" and ". . . in waeter dydon sealdon heora untymrum monnu neatum drincan; him sona wel waes.(156)"[8]

Aelfric's Lives resemble Beowulf and other Old English poems in their juxtaposition of good and evil. A more conspicuously religious writer than either Laȝamon

or the Beowulf poet, Aelfric writes of his characters in terms of their standing as Christians. A good ruler, rather than winning glory (and loot) for his people, as Scyld does, believes in Christ strongly. Likewise, his evil kings are described either as Satanists or as practitioners of pagan rites. The sharp contrast between good and evil is present; Aelfric rarely, if ever, depicts a mediocre ruler. Thus, in his story of "Abdon and Sennes, Kings," the emperor Decius is "deoflican Caseres" (1b),[6] while Abdon and Sennes are "twegen kyningas on crist gelyfde / . . . mid soðum geleafan" (2-4). Maximian, in "Saint Maurice and his Companions," is described as a heathen king who "waes cene and reðe and deofol-gild be-eode dwollice libbende" (5-6). He is set in contrast to Maurice and his Theban legion (6636 men), who are "swiþe cristene menn" (9) and "sweþe gelyfede on þone lyfigendan god" (15). After he has related the story of the legion's martyrdom, Aelfric condemns the behavior of his contemporaries by contrasting the patience of Maurice and his men with the slothfulness of his generation. Whereas the martyrs endured torture and death, the people of his age "ne we nellað forberan an bysmorlic word / for ures drihtnes naman swa swa we don sceoldon" (135-136).

In the Lives, the conflict between good and evil is often conveyed to the reader by contrasted images of light and darkness, Aelfric enhances this contrast by associating the loss of physical vision with the lack of

spiritual sight. The theme of blindness/darkness opposed to vision/light unifies his "Passion of Saint Julian and his Wife Basilissa." This motif occurs three times. Julian tells Martianus ("se manfulla cwellere") that his mind is blind. Later, Martianus' servant is <u>literally</u> blinded when, as he is striking the saint, one of his eyes falls out. Aelfric clarifies the connection between physical and spiritual vision after Julian restores the lost eye. The servant accepts Christianity, and the poet declares: "he gelyfde on þone lyfigean god / þe his eage onlihte and eac his heorton" (179-180). This motif recurs later in the same chapter. The Christians are thrown into a dungeon, and God causes a bright light to appear. The soldiers guarding them exclaim,

> Unrihtlic us bið þaet we aeft gescyrron
> fram þysum <u>beorhtan</u> <u>leohte</u> to <u>blindan</u> <u>þystrum</u>
> fram life to deaðe fram soðe to leasunga.
> (218-220 emphasis added)

Recurring themes throughout his Aelfric's <u>Lives</u> provide continuity among the individual stories. The preservation of a saint's body (or part of it), for instance, connects the Life of Oswald with "The Life of Saint Edmund": Oswald's right arm, like Edmund's body, is preserved because of his piety. A recurring theme in Aelfric's <u>Lives</u> is the contrast between the joyous death of a Christian martyr and the wretched demise of one of

his heathen detractors. Saint Julian and his companions go to Heaven where Christ and their fellow Christians await them (411-421). Martianus, on the other hand, suffers a gruesome death:

> and he wearð fornumen aefter feawum dagum
> swa þaet wurmas crupon cuce of his lice
> and se arleasa ge-wat mid wite to helle
> (429-431).

This scene is parallel to the death of King Leofstan ("Saint Edmund, King and Martyr") whose only sin is arrogantly demanding proof that the saint's body is still whole:

> ac swa hraðe swa he geseah þaes sanctes lichaman
> þa awedde he sona and wael-hreowlice grymetede
> and earmlice geendote yfelum deaðe (236-238).

Aelfric's Lives, therefore, have a certain degree of narrative structure.

The narrative structure of Old English poetry follows a pattern of thematic balance. In this chapter, I have discussed how Anglo-Saxon authors used this technique to depict ideal behavior (such as the ideal of kingship), to express the contrast between good and evil, and to juxtapose past fortune with present misfortune. These latter two concepts, as Tolkien points out, reflect concerns central to Germanic thought. Laȝamon's Brut, though longer than most Old English narratives, retains this pattern. In the next chapter, I will

demonstrate how Laȝamon preserves Old English thematic balance. I will also discuss Laȝamon's concern for the Old English ideas of good and evil, and the mutability of this world.

NOTES

[1]Like Tolkien, Klaeber identifies two halves of the story, but does not see them as interdependent: "The first of these does not in the least require or presuppose a continuation. Nor is the second dependent for its interpretation on the events of the first plot, the two references to the 'Grendel part' being quite cursory and irrelevant" (li-lii).

[2]I quote from Klaeber's edition of the poem. Hereafter quotations are taken from this work.

[3]Damico further notes the significance of Wealtheow's entrances into the hall: "Wealhtheow governs the movement of incident and theme. Characterized by structural and thematic repetition, her episodes are two concluding portions of two elaborately constructed scenes . . . that comprise one-fifth of the first of the poem, some 421 lines" (7-8).

[4]Quotations from The Wanderer are taken from R. F. Leslie"s edition of the work.

[5]I quote from J. Ingram's edition of The Saxon Chronicle.

[6]References to Aelfric are taken from the Early English Text Society's edition (Walter W. Skeat, ed).

[7]Alfred is, of course, translating Bede's Latin text. Bede, however, is also an Anglo-Saxon; thus, parallelism is an expected feature in his work. Aelfric tightens the parallel probably because his Lives is a poetic (or at least semi-poetic) text. As Tolkien notes, the overall structure of Old English narrative poems tends to reflect the binary structure of the alliterative half-line. The effects of versification on the narrative structure of Anglo-Saxon works would be a subject for future studies.

[8]I quote from the Early English Text Society's edition of Alfred's translation of Bede (Thomas A. Miller, ed).

CHAPTER III

THEMATIC BALANCE AND THE NARRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE *BRUT*

Comparing Laȝamon's work to Old English poems such as *Beowulf* and *The Wanderer*, we find that the *Brut* is longer and its metre is not as consistent. However, Laȝamon retains the narrative structure of these poems. It has been generally recognized that Laȝamon's additions make his scenes resemble one another.[1] However, why he makes these additions (what tradition he writes from) and what effect this has on the reading of his work has not been discussed in detail. Like his predecessors, Laȝamon uses thematic parallels and binary opposition to establish a "typology" for his characters, enhance the contrast between good and evil, and mark the beginnings and conclusions of blocks of narrative in the *Brut*. The *Brut*, like *Beowulf* (and unlike Wace's *Roman*), is a cycle; it begins and ends with the same theme.

The juxtaposition of good and evil is an important concern in the *Brut* as it is in works such as Aelfric's *Lives*. Laȝamon's kings almost always represent either one side or the other and he usually introduces them with

a moral explication of some sort. Ebrauc is "aðelrest alre kingen" (1306)[2], as is Arthur; and Argal (before his conversion) is ". . .þE for-cuðest mon þe aefre hede kinedom" (3265). Like Aelfric and the Beowulf poet, Laȝamon sends his evil characters to Hell; after Peredur's vicious reign, Laȝamon states, "swa vuele he luuede his lif: þat þe Schucke hine i-feng" (3408). I do not assert that the Brut is unambiguous regarding good and evil; such a claim is demonstrably false. However, Laȝamon's characters are more polarized in terms of good and evil than those of Wace. The French poet, as Friendlander notes, depicts the British hero Brenne, after conquering Rome, as lapsing into tyranny, but Laȝamon omits this passage.[3] His portrayal of Brenne as a pure champion of good heightnes the contrast between the Britons and their deceitful Roman adversaries. Furthermore, Wace does not present Arthur without reservation: "Les thecches Artur vus dirrai. / Neient ne vus en mentirai" (9015).[4] Laȝamon makes no such promise; his Arthur is introduced immediately as the near-flawless hero of Britain:

> þa þe Arður wes king: Haerne ne seollic þing.
> he wes mete-custi: aelche quike monne.
> cniht mid þan beszte: W[u]nder ane kene
> (9945-9947 brackets theirs).

Laȝamon's unreserved praise of Arthur is reminiscent of

the depiction of Hrothgar and Scyld in Beowulf and of the Christian rulers in Aelfric's Lives.

Binary opposition reinforces this polarization. It can be seen at both the syntactic and thematic levels in the Brut. Twenty-six of the 128 formulas Tatlock identifies are pairs of half-lines in opposition. Often, this pairing is mere repetition, probably done for rhythmical reasons or to establish rhyme: "cnihtes eoden up-ward: cnihtes eoden dun-ward" (8765). However, a pair of opposed half-lines frequently reflects or predicts an event in the narrative, such as a change in fortune. After Brutus has accidentally slain his father, Laȝamon states, "Wa wes him on liue: þaet þe fader wes on deaðe" (161). In this line "on deaðe" in the second half-line contradicts "on liue" in the first. The line itself is significant; it not only shows the change in Brutus' fortune (he is exiled from Italy for the deed) but it is also the first action in a series that ultimately leads to the founding of Britain. Arthur's taunting of the dead Saxon brothers Colgrim and Baldulf, reveals a similar reversal: "Swulc þu to hauene: nu þu scalt to haelle" (10069). This line contrasts the hopes of the Saxons with the death they actually suffer. Octa's rejection of his paganism (8382): & alle ure laue: nu us sunde laðe" reflects his changed attitude towards his gods. Sometimes, as in the section dealing with the penitent tyrant Argal, half-lines such as these reveal a change

from evil to good. This change in character, unlike Brenne's degeneration, is an esential part of the narrative; therefore, Laȝamon does not change it. Laȝamon depicts his reformation with a pair of syntactically antithetical half-lines: "þat vuel he al for-lete: þat gode he imette" (3375). Although a couplet composed of two lines in close syntactic relation to each other is a fairly common (and not unexpected) feature of Wace's Roman de Brut, the opposition of one line to the other is not usually a feature of the French poem.[5]

Laȝamon also uses this half-line structure to contrast present expectations with future realities, thus foreshadowing events in his narrative. He predicts a future act of treachery in this manner. For instance, when Pasent and Gillomar pledge to support each other, Laȝamon says, "þe aðes weoren isworen: ah it aeft heo weoren for-lorene" (8768). Often, a pair such as this one contrasts present expectations with future failure. Of the same attack, Laȝamon tells the reader of Gillomar's impending defeat: "þe king wordede þus: þa while him a-lomp wurs" (9008). Such foreshadowing is a common trait of Old English poetry, a trait that usually indicates that everything is pre-ordained (it might also lead a modern reader to conclude that Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry lacks suspense). As Grendel breaks open the doors of Heorot, where Beowulf is waiting for him, the poet predicts the monster's defeat:

Ne waes þaet wyrd þā gēn,
þaet hē mā mōste manna cynnes
ðicgean ofer þā niht (734b-736a).

Tatlock is right when he says that "Not a great many of his [Laȝamon's] formulas are found in the extant Anglo-Saxon or twelfth century Middle English poetry" (515). However, by indicating reversals in fate and by foreshadowing, Laȝamon's balanced half-line formulas preserve a feature of Old English narrative structure, which has precedence in such works as Beowulf, The Wanderer, and "The Battle of Brunanburh." Laȝamon also preserves the balance of the Old English line, on which which Tolkien places such emphasis. The Brut therefore, should not be read as a rambling narrative, or as a collection of loosely connected episodes; it is the story of the rise and fall of the British people. Within this large cycle are several smaller ones which depict changes in their fortune, and illustrate Laȝamon's ideas about kingship and loyalty.

Laȝamon gives a similar balanced treatment to long passages and in these passages the Brut closely resembles Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry. For instance, Aurelius, desiring to build a monument (Stonehenge), sends for Merlin for help. Wace simply has Merlin come immediately at the king's request, but Laȝamon adds the motif of reward. In his Brut, the king offers him treasure in exchange for advice:

þe king sende his sonde: ȝeond al his kine-
londe.
and bad aeuraelcne mon: axien after Merlin.
& ȝif me hine mihten ifinden: bringen hine to
þan kinge.
he him wolde ȝifen lond: boðe seoluer & gold.
& a weorl-richen: driȝen his iwille (8488-8493).

The wizard refuses, and in his refusal, Laȝamon repeats the main images of Aurelius' offer:

Maerlin andswerede þa: þaet cnihten was ful wa.
Ne recche ich noht his londes: his seoluer no
his goldes.
no his claðes no his hors: miseolf ich habbe
inowe.
(8509-8511 emphasis added).

Laȝamon's version heightens the reader's respect for the character: Merlin is a man who cannot be bought. It also establishes a contrast between the material (signified by Aurelius, a worldly ruler) and the spiritual. The king assumes that his possessions can get him anything he desires. Merlin indeed answers his summons, but only after reminding his knights that he (a prophet) is not interested in wealth. This scene is reminiscent of Aelfric's contrasting the piety of the saints and the worldly wealth of the secular kings.

This thesis-antithesis pattern recurs in lines 10374-10428, where Arthur, having defeated Childric and

the Saxons for the first time, accepts their surrender. Like the Merlin episode, this passage involves an offer of treasure (this time it is accepted); it also involves the theme of reversal of fortune that occurs in many of Laȝamon's half-lines. This time it is treated more elaborately. The emissary from the Saxons offers terms for surrender: "& heo wulleð ȝiuen þe ȝisles inowe. / & halden þe for lauer[d]: swa þe beoð alre leofest" (10379-80). Arthur accepts, repeating the terms: "ȝisles ich wulle habben: of haexten his monnen. / hors & heore wepnen: aer heo heonne wenden" (10420-21). The extended "fox" simile (10398-10413), occurring in the same passage,[6] follows this pattern of opposition. In the first seven lines, Laȝamon describes a fox and concludes that, as long as he is the hunter, "he weneð to beon of duȝeðe: baldest alre deoren" (10404). However, when the fox is hunted,"þenne beoð þer for-cuðest: <u>deoren alre pruttest</u>" (10412 emphasis added). These passages are connected by the repetition of the words "deoren" and "alre" and it reflects the fate of the Saxon king. The reversal of fortune that Childric himself suffers is depicted in a pair of similarly related passages. When Arthur is told of the Saxons' desire to surrender, he gloatingly recalls Childric's intentions in Britain:

> I þonked wurðe Drihtene: þe alle domes walde.
> þat Childric þe stronge: is sad of mine londe.

Mi lond he hafe to-daeled: al his duȝeðe cnihtes.

me seoluen he þohte: to driuen of mine leoden.

halden me for haene: & habben mine riche.

& mi cun ai for-uaren: mi uolc al fordemed.

(10392-97).

How Childric's fortune is reversed becomes evident when Arthur gives the terms of the surrender:

ah nu ich habbe hine idriuen: to þan bare daeðe.

whaeðer-swa ich wule don: oðer slaen oðer a-hon:

Nu ich wulle ȝifen hine grið: & leten hine me specken wið.

nulle ich hine slae no ahon: ah his bode wulle fon.

(10415-19 emphasis added)

The word "idriuen" connects this passage to the previous one and establishes opposition. Childric, Colgrim and Baldulf later break their truce and again invade Britain. Arthur again defeats them, killing Colgrim and Baldulf. He then ironically gives them his kingdom[7] and tells them to greet their kin in Hell:

and bide heom þer wunie: wintres & sumeres.

& we sculle on londe: libben in blisse.

(10703-04).

The life Arthur and his Britons will enjoy is contrasted to the Saxons' existence in Hell. Neither of the speeches occurs in the French text, though Wace's Arthur delivers a

long religious speech extolling his men to uphold Christianity against the heathen (9317-36), which Laȝamon shortens and secularizes. The opposition, though, is not present in Wace's version. These short passages, two of which depict a reversal of fortune, are reminiscent of passages of Old English poetry, such as The Wanderer or "The Battle of Brunanburh."

In adition to the reversal of fortune, Laȝamon uses thematically parallel scenes to establish a typology for his characters. Thus, the career of one evil king will resemble that of another. The rise and fall of a tyrant,for instance, is a recurring motif in the Brut; two such scenes, the reigns of Membriz and Gracien, feature both syntactic and thematic opposition. The former's ascension to the throne (he gains it by slaying his brother Malin) is marked by a set of opposed half-lines: "Membriz hefde inomen at grið: ah sone he makede unfrið" (1279). In both this section and the one concerning Gracien, the tyrant robs the wealthy of their possessions. Membriz turns against his own family:

> Membriz hatede al his cun: for non nes him iqueme.
> þa riche he makede wrecchas: þa haene hine awarieden"
> ȝif þar was swa hah mon: þat he ne durste fordon.

> mid attere he hine adrengte: þat he sone daed wes (1282-85).

Membriz' hatred for his family and his poisoning of his enemies, as well as his homosexuality, is taken from Wace (1471-81), but the king's of robbery and the "grið-unfrið" line are additions. After a long, hateful career, Membriz is killed in a bizarre hunting incident (he is eaten by wolves) and his son Ebrauc, who receives the epithet "aðelest alre kingen," takes the throne. Laȝamon then reverses the motifs of peace breaking and family hating:

> Al his cun he wurðede: richen & wrecchen.
> þa richen he lette beon stille: a wrecchen hefden heore wille.
> þat lond heo lete tillien: him tuwen hired-men to.
> blisse wes on londe: a feole kunne þinge.
> Heo heold swiðe god grið: ne breac na man his frið (1308-12).

This episode is paralleled by the career of King Gracien, and the opposition between the suffering of the people under a ferocious tyrant and their joy after his death recurs. As in the "Membriz" episode, the motifs of loss of wealth and of oppressed cowardly underlings occurs, though Gracien victimizes the poor as well:

> iwrað þe king Gracien: gumene for-cuðest.
> al he for-uerde þis lond: þa leoden him weoren laðe.
> þa riche he for-uerde: þa wrecche he drof of aerde.

> ne durste.þa riche þeines: nowhaer him cumen
>
> to-ȝeines (6110-13 emphasis added).

Wace mentions his thievery: "Les nobles homes enorout / E les paisanz exillout" (133-34), but the reference to fearful subjects is original in Laȝamon. He further mentions the happiness the Britons enjoy after Gracien's death (not in Wace): "Sone hit wes ouer-al iseid: þat þe luðere king wes dead. / þa weoren inne Brutene: blissen inowe" (6151-52). This addition draws the scene into a close parallel relationship with the one dealing with Membriz. However, Laȝamon's main amplification is the depiction of Gracien's death. Wace, following Geoffrey of Monmouth, has the king killed by a popular uprising. Laȝamon expands Wace's version by over thirty lines and adds two characters, the English brothers Eðelbald and Aelfwald, and he has these two brothers kill the tyrant on a hunting expedition. This latter addition may have been, as has been suggested, influenced by the mysterious death of Wiliam Rufus[8], but it also reflects the death of Membriz, who is also killed while hunting.

Laȝamon's amplifications to this scene create a parallel relationship with the preceding one. Both are, furthermore, brought about by past misdeeds. Membriz is the grandson of Guendoline (the first ruling queen to appear in the Brut), who gains the throne by killing her husband, (King Locrine), his concubine, and their illegitimate daughter. Membriz' reign is the result of

the sins of previous generations being visited on later ones. Gracien assumes the throne after King Maximian, along with most of the warriors of Britain, has been killed contending for the throne of Rome. In both sections, the populace of Britain is innocent, except perhaps of cowardice. The motifs presented in these scenes recur in the other sections dealing with tyrants. Like Membriz and Gracien, Vortiger is guilty of degrading his British knights:"bett weoren iscrudde: & bed weoren iuaedde. / Haengest swaine: þene Vortigernes þeines" (6978-79). Leir is, to some extent, guilty of the same crime when he deprives the faithful Cordoille of her inheritance. Membriz, therefore, is, a type for Laȝamon's other tyrants.

The capture of a leader by a ruse occurs twice in the narrative, and Laȝamon's additions establish parallel structure between these two scenes. The first such scene, Brutus' capture of the Greek king Pandrassus, occurs in lines 389-416; the second, Hengest's taking of Vortiger, in lines 7589-7593. Laȝamon does not add new incidents to these two scenes. Both Wace's and his versions involve a planned surprise attack, a signal that only one side will recognize, and a slaughter of the other side. Wace gives Hengest a speech immediately after he captures Vortiger. Laȝamon includes this speech, and gives Brutus a similar one after the capture of Pandrassus. Brutus' speech to his men is nearly as long in Wace's

account (twelve lines) as it is in La3amon's (fourteen lines). In both speeches, Brutus warns his men to follow his plan; and in both, the Trojans attack the Greeks mercilessly. However, La3amon gives Brutus a speech as soon as he captures the Greek king:

> Ich habbe þisses folkes king: faelleð his leoden.
> Ne lete 3e nenne quick: quecchen to holte.
> & iche wlle þesne king: laeden mid me seolfan.
> (414-416)

La3amon's addition heightens the relationship between this scene and the one involving Hengest and Vortiger. Brutus' exultation over his prisoner bears more semblance to Hengest's order for the attack on the Britons than to his speech concerning Vortiger (in which, ironically, Hengest commands his men to spare the British king out of gratitude for the favor shown him): "Nimeð eoure sexes: sele mine bernes. / & ohtliche eou sturieð: & *naenne* ne sparieð." (7610-11 emphasis added). La3amon's addition to Hengest's speech scene causes it to reflect the earlier one involving Brutus and Pandrassus.

In this instance, though, the parallel reinforces a contrast between the two passages: Brutus' actions advance the British cause (the heroes of *Brut*) and Hengest's works against it. Worse still, Hengest is a heathen.[9] The methods the two leaders use to achieve their ends (the surprise attack) may seem similar on the surface, but the differences are significant. La3amon does not seem to

consider attacking enemies in their sleep objectionable: Uther wins a battle through the same ploy (9172-9210), and neither he nor Brutus is spoken of in a pejorative manner. Hengest, on the other hand, is given the epithet "cnihtene swikelaest" (7609). The other two leaders make no pledge of truce, as Hengest does; he is, therefore, guilty of treachery, a crime which, as Friedlander has noted, is important to Laȝamon: "One manifestation of Layamon's moral polarization is his preoccupation with deception and betrayal" ("Structure and Themes" 109). His description of the two capture scenes emphasizes the polarization Friedlander mentions. By making the second one reminiscent of the first, Laȝamon demonstrates the difference (albeit slight) between good and evil conduct in war.

In fact, Laȝamon seems most creative when he is describing traitors and acts of treachery; it is here that we find the most amplifications from Wace. In Laȝamon's scene depicting the murder of Constant, for instance, he adds a character (a Pict named Gille Callaet) and a drunken riot.[10] A Pict also orchestrates the murder of King Constantine, Constant's father. The murder of Constantine, however, is set parallel to that of Aurelius. Both involve a treacherous servant who is given private access to the king's person. The assassin is given a speech in both (Wace does not include either speech but he does mention that Aurelius' murderer speaks with the

king [8260-61]). Laȝamon, furthermore, has his traitors kneel before their victims; his additions throughout both scenes emphasize the absolute trust the two kings have in the men who kill them. Aurelius treats the Pictish knight, Cadal, well:

> He hafde in his huse: aenne Poht: hende cniht and swi[ðe] aht.
> he uerde mid þan king: & mid alle his dringen.
> nanes weie oðer: bute al-swa his broðer (6453-55).

Laȝamon further adds a motive for his crime, missing in Wace: "þa iwarð he swa riche: al his iferen vnliche. / þa þohten he to swiken" (6456-57a). Cadal lures the king by offering to tell him "uncuðspellen" (6461). Like Cadal, Appas, the Saxon who poisons Aurelius, is a foreigner. He offers to heal the king a sickness (8836-38) and "his spaeche wes ful milde" (834). The kneeling and feigned good intentions of both Cadal and Appas, and the trust Constantine and Aurelius show them, establish more sympathy for the kings and greater condemnation of their assassins; thus the contrast between good and evil is enhanced. These scenes, connected by the themes of treachery, also show the weakness shared by Constantine and his son: they are too trusting.

Laȝamon's additions to the scene of Aurelius' murder also juxtapose it to the scene between him and Merlin. Like the wizard, Appas denounces working for material gain:

> Hider me sende Vther: þe is þin aȝen broðer.
> & ich al for Godes luue: aem to þe her icume.
> for ich þe wulle helen: & al hal makien.
> for Cristes leofe Godes sune: ne raecche ich nane garsume.
> ne mede of <u>londe</u>: ne of <u>seoluer</u> <u>no</u> <u>of</u> <u>golde</u>.
> ah aelche seocken ich hit do: for luue of mine Drihten (8836-41 emphasis added).

Laȝamon here repeats the same rewards--land, silver, and gold--that were offered by Aurelius and refused by Merlin. Unfortunately for the king, the wizard has taught him his lesson too well; Appas is able to earn his trust by presenting himself as one who, like Merlin, cannot be tempted by material gain. By setting a hypocritical refusal of money in opposition to an honest one, Laȝamon reveals that good arguments can be turned to evil.

A similar opposition between a sincere and a hypocritical speech involves Hengest's daughter (and afterwards Vortiger's wife) Rouwenne. In a scene first written by Geoffrey of Monmouth, the girl brings the custom of sharing a drink and exclaiming "Waes hail!" to Britain. In both Wace's and Laȝamon's versions of this episode, her sharing of this custom with King Vortiger is a cover for a plot she and her father have devised to trick the king into marrying her, thereby increasing Hengest's influence at court. The plan works, but when Vortiger accepts his new bride's paganism, his subjects

rebel. They depose him and install his son Vortimer. In all three versions Rouwenne then murders Vortimer, feigning friendship with her stepson, and helps her father and her husband regain their stations. As most commentators who have dealt with themology in the Brut (beginning with Ringbom)[11] have noted, Laȝamon greatly expands the murder scene from Wace's version; Wace devotes only five lines to the scene:

> Par grant haenge e par envie
> Ronwen, cume male marastre
> Fist envenimer sun fillastre
> Vortimer, que ele haeit,
> Pur Henguist, que chacie aveit (7156-60).

Laȝamon, however, repeats the wine ceremony in his version, and Rouwenne displays cunning worthy of an Ian Fleming novel. She drinks half of the wine herself, slips poison from a concealed vial into it, and returns it to Vortimer. Laȝamon's amplification of this scene makes his narrative more logical. The reader of Wace might wonder how Rouwenne gets close enough to Vortimer to poison him. Laȝamon has her write to the new king, send him gifts (silver and gold, as Aurelius offers Merlin), and offer to accept Christianity. It is only after these steps that she is able to gain admission to his court. More importantly, this addition of Laȝamon's sets the second feast scene in opposition to the first. Both feature subthemes identified by Ringbom: trumpets are

sounded, the table is set, and drink is served. More significantly, Rouwenne repeats her toast almost verbatim. In the first scene, she says "Lauerd king waes haeil: for þine kime ich aem uaein" (7141). Although she wants to seduce Vortiger, Rouwenne can be assumed to be sincere when she wishes him health (he has to at least be alive to be politically useful). In the second, when she presents the venom-laden wine, she says, "Lauerd king waes hail: uor þe ich am swiðe uaein" (7469). This scene is verbally parallel to the scene in Vortiger's court; opposition is established by context. Like Appas, Rouwenne is a hypocrite; she wished Vortimer health, but desires his death. These two parallel scenes mark Rouwenne's entrance into, and exit from, the narrative.[12] The scenes establish the feast-anti-feast pattern as Foley discusses it. In her appearances at their respective courts, Laȝamon is able to contrast the evil king (who looks at Rouwenne lustfully) with the good Christian king (who desires to convert her from her paganism).

Laȝamon's other treacherous queen is Iudon, mother of Ferreus and Porreus, and murderer of the latter. Although the scene involving her is one of the most frightening and intriguing passages of the Brut, it has received little scholarly attention. After Porreus defeats and kills his brother Ferreus, with whom he is contending for the throne, Iudon, who favored Ferreus, sneaks into Porreus' tent with six knife-wielding women

and dismembers him. This scene is significant to Laȝamon's narrative because it is set in opposition to a later scene, in which a queen (Tonuenne) intercedes to <u>stop</u> a quarrel between her two warring sons. Belin and Brenne, the two princes, are also contending for the throne of Britain; Brenne, who has been defeated once by his brother, has gathered a new army and has returned for a second fight. Tonuenne rushes to his camp, and successfully implores him to abandon his campaign. Wyld says of this scene that it "transcends the French [Wace's version] in picturesqueness and human interest" and that it possesses "a true and natural touch" ("Laȝamon as an English Poet" 10). Wyld is correct, but it should also be remarked that Laȝamon's additions establish a more antithetical relationship between this story and Iudon's than is found in Wace's <u>Roman</u>. Each of the main images and motifs used to describe Iudon has its opposite in those connected with Tonuewnne. Iudon is given the epithet "þe riche was and on-maere" (1992); her material power is contrasted to Tonuenne's wisdom: "þa ȝet leouede þa aelde quene: a wifmon wis and kene" (2488). Furthermore, Tonuenne makes a deliberate show of poverty: "Heo nom hire on anne curtel: þe wes swiðe to-toren hire hem heo up i-taeh: hire cneon he wes swiðe neh" (2490-91). This poverty contrasts sharply with Iudon's wealth. Iudon approaches her son's tent <u>after</u> the battle, secretly; she is attended by six armed women. Tonuenne not only

approaches alone and openly, she is not even wearing shoes (2493-94). Laȝamon incorporates the image of a dagger ("sexe") in each scene. Iudon and her attendants use this weapon to dismember Poreus (2003). Tonuenne figuratively turns the knife on herself: "Ne do þu me neure þane scome: / þat ich for þine þinge: mid _saexe_ me of-stinge" (2509b-10 emphasis added). Although Wace gives the queen a long speech in which she reminds her son of the pain she went through bearing him (2729-2816), the theme of the symbolic knife-murder is original with Laȝamon. Furthermore, in each scene, Laȝamon includes a line in which the word "moder," as a stressed word in one half-line, alliterates with a word in the second half-line that describes the character of each woman. In 2001, "þeo uniseli moder: þus hire sune murðde" the words "mother" and "murder" are connected. This line has its antithesis in a line describing Tonuenne:"þa spec þe moder: milde mid muðe" (2539). Here, "mother" is linked to "mild"; the two scenes are thus syntactically and verbally parallel as well as thematically contrasted.

The opposition of these two passages not only reveals the contrast between a good and an evil mother, but also marks the beginning and end of a unit of narrative. After the murder of Poreus, the irate populace throws Iudon into the sea (2012). Neither Poreus nor Fereus has any children; so Britain is plunged into a long period of civil war. It lasts until Dunwallo, Tonuenne's husband,

overpowers the rival claimants. However, soon after his death, his sons (Belin and Brenne) start another civil war, which lasts until Tonuenne reconciles them. Thus, Tonuenne, acting as a peacemaker, reverses the turmoil that Iudon initiates. Following Damico's theory, the contrast between Iudon and Tonuenne could be compared to that between Wealhtheow and Grendel's mother, one a killer and one a peacemaker. Damico notes that the Danish queen is referred to as "friðusibb foca" (10).

Laȝamon's additions to Wace's version of Brutus' dream (of finding Britain) and his account of Cadwalader's dream (of losing it) are the most significant examples of his use of parallel and opposition. The dreams, of course, occur in all three works (Geoffrey's, Wace's and Laȝamon's), but Laȝamon enhances the contrast between the two. In Wace, Brutus makes a sacrifice to the Goddess Diana; in return, she gives him a vision of the beautiful island (Britain) he is to conquer. Laȝamon, however, alters Wace's account of Cadwallader's dream, setting the scene parallel to Brutus' dream. According to Wace, the British king, who has fled his land because of famine and plague, asks God when he can regain his land. God tells him that he will never recover it and advises him to go to Rome to do penance for his sins. The same basic events occur in the Brut, but Laȝamon makes several additions to the latter. Cadwalader receives his vision when he is in church hearing mass; in Geoffrey's account, the voice

speaks to him as he is preparing to invade Britain and Wace has him ask for divine guidance (14781-84). La3amon's addition reflects Brutus' prayer, which is also made within a temple (571-590). All three versions have Brutus prostrate himself before the altar of Diana; La3amon adds that Brutus kneels before the altar (611). La3amon's Cadwalader also kneels: þe king laei on cneouwen: and cleopede to Crist[e]" (15998 brackets theirs). In each account (Geoffrey's Wace's and La3amon's), Brutus' vision comes to him in a dream; however, only La3amon uses the motif of the dream to present Cadwalader's vision:

> þe while þe he spac touward Goden: þa gon he to slepen
> þa gon he to slumme selehðe him wes 3iueðe.
> of seoluen ure Drihten: þe scop is dae3es lihte.
> (16003-05).

The entering of a temple (or church), the kneeling, and the sleep and dream vision that La3amon adds to his Cadwalader scene establish a parallel between it and the scene of Brutus' dream. The messages of the deities, however, are antipodal. Diana, the pagan goddess, convinces Brutus to seek Britain by promising him glory if he does so:

> Þer-to þu scalt teman: & ane neowe Troye þar makian:
> þer scal of þine cunne: kine-bearn arisen.

& scal þin maere kun: waeldan þ[a]s londes
(625-27 brackets theirs).

The rewards here are worldly--the pagan virtues of glory and fame. Christ's advice to Cadwalader, on the other hand, is almost the exact opposite; he advises the king to take a journey, but not to any earthly reward:

A-wake Cadwalader: Crist þe haueð doere.
and ȝarke þine uore: and farswiðe to Rome.
þu uindest aenne pape: preost mid þan beszte.
he þe (scal) scriuen: of þine weorld-lifen.
þat þine sunen alle: scullen þe from falle.
and þu scalt wurðe clene: al þurh Godes dome.
of alle þine misdede: þurh mihte of ure Drihte.
And seo[ð]ðen þu scalt i-witen: and faren to
heofne-richen (16009-016).

This passage, which does not appear in Wace, reverses Brutus' vision. Instead of pagan fame, Cadwalader is told to seek Christian redemption. The first line of the passage is significant. Brutus is allowed to sleep through his vision, but Cadwalader is told to wake up, as if the entire reign of the British has been a dream from which they must awake and accept their defeat. Furthermore, Cadwalader's journey to Rome completes the cycle Brutus begins in Italy.

In all three versions of the story Cadwalader is given a vague hint that the Britons will regain Britain when Arthur returns. However, as far as Cadwalader

(and the reader) is concerned, British rule has ended and that of the "Alemainisce men"--the Anglo-Saxons--has begun. Through the two dream scenes, Laȝamon provides a frame for his entire narrative--the tale of the Britons begins and ends with two thematically parallel scenes.[13] In this trait the *Brut* resembles Old English heroic poetry, especially a work such as *Beowulf*, which is framed between two funeral scenes. The framing in both poems draws attention to the popular English theme (which Donahue identifies)[14] of the reversal of fortune--the contrast between past joys and present afflictions. Cadwalader's dream, like Beowulf's funeral, signifies that earthly joy has ended; the swallow from the Old English story has completed his flight through the meadhall.

The *Brut*, of course, differs in some ways from Old English poetry. Laȝamon is dealing with more material than most Anglo-Saxon poets; therefore, his narrative structure, like his metre, is not so tight as that of *Beowulf*. Although the concept of dissolution and the ultimate end of worldly kingdoms are important to Laȝamon, we see in the *Brut* a greater concern for Heaven and eternal reward than is evident in a work such as *Beowulf*. In this respect, the *Brut* more closely resembles *The Wanderer* or *The Seafarer*: all three works advise the protagonist that earthly joy is fleeting and that the only permanent happimess can be found in the

Afterlife. Nevertheless, Laȝamon follows the tradition of Old English narrative poetry closely enough to be considered a continuation of that tradition.

NOTES

[1]Friedlander, for instance, notes, of Laȝamon that "continually he tries to link one speech or action with another, as if he were dissatisfied with Wace's relaxed, episodic manner" ("Structure and Themes" 36).

[2]I quote from G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie's edition of the Brut (Caligula manuscript, unless otherwise noted). Hereafter citations are taken from this text.

[3]Friedlander notes the moral dichotomy Laȝamon establishes in this scene: "Wace depicts the Romans as noble warriors, but in Laȝamon's Brut they form treaties deceitfully, also fight deceitfully, and are eventually deceived themselves," while "the victorious Britons conduct themselves worthily" ("Structure and Themes" 36).

[4]The word "tecche" can be translated as either a list of virtues or as a list of one's vices. Eugene Mason, translator of the Arthurian section of Wace's Roman, translates the line: "His faults and virtues I will show you alike. . ." (43). Later in the poem, Wace uses "teche" to mean a fault (13371). Wace's appraisal of Arthur is, in any case, not one of unconditional approval, as is Laȝamon's. Quotations from Wace are taken from Ivor Arnold's 1938 edition of Le Roman de Brut.

[5]Such opposition between two lines does occur at times, however. One instance I feel worth mentioning occurs between line 3569, which describes the death of the tyrant Peredur: "E mal vesqui e mal fina" and 3610, which depicts the death of his virtuous brother, Eledur: "Il vesqui bien e fina bien." Laȝamon's lines relating the same instance are not as closely related: "þae com þe faer-liche daed: & faelde hine to grunde / swa vuele he luuede his lif: þe Scucke hine i-fenge" (3407-08) and "& þa he sculde of liue wende: he haefde feire ende" (3415). I find this instance to be an exception, however (Laȝamon apparently found sending the tyrant to Hell to be a necessary addition).

[6]Similes of this length are not characteristic of Old English poetry. Tatlock believes that Laȝamon may be influenced (indirectly) by classic authors, such as Virgil. Davies and LeSaux, on the other hand, trace these similes to Welsh (British) sources.

[7]This scene has a parallel in the late Anglo-Saxon (eleventh and twelfth century) Peterborough Chronicle. The author offers a sneering "eulogy" for William I: "se þe þaes aerur rice cyng & maniges landes hlaford, he naefde a ealles landes buton seofon fotmael" (10).

[8]Like King Gracien, William was shot while hunting, by a supposed friend; The Peterborough Chronicle, however, does not suggest any conspiracy. The death of

the historical king could as easily be connected to Brutus' accidental slaying of his father.

[9]Brutus is also a pagan, of course, but because he lived before Christ, he may be excused.

[10]The Picts ask King Constant for beer, which he grants. Under the pretext of drunken revelry, they murder him, using the noise as a cover. Ringbom and Donahue ("Thematic and Formulaic Composition") consider this scene an example of the "feast" theme, which Laȝamon uses extensively. Like Rouwenne's poisoning of the wine she gives to Vortimer, this act represents a perversion of a traditional Germanic theme--thanes drinking with their lord in his hall.

[11]Ringbom notes that it is an occurrence of the feast theme; he accounts for its presence by Laȝamon's interest in thematic composition.

[12]Wace reintroduces her in order to have her burned with Vortiger. Laȝamon's version is more logical; since her main loyalty has always been to her father (Vortiger was a political tool), she would have no further business with the king after Hengest turns on him.

[13]Laȝamon intensifies the sense of loss in this passage: "for no most þu naeuer-maere: Aengle-lond aȝe. / ah Alemainisce men: Englen scullen aȝe. / and naeuermaere Bruttisce men: bruken hit ne moten" (16017-19). Laȝamon gives a more elegiac treatment of this episode than does

Wace: "Engleis Bretaine aver deveient; / Ja Bretun n'i recuvereient" (14792-92).

[14]Kennedy identifies mutability as the controlling theme in the Brut: "Layamon depicts mutability in a number of ways, the most consistent and significant of which seems to be the description of reversal of personal fortune" (83). Friedlander refers to the Brut as "Layamon's entire chronicle of defeat" ("The First English Story of King Lear" 48).

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The final scene of the Brut underscores the idea of mutability--an idea Laȝamon shares with Old English poets. The overall narrative structure of the poem is a cycle which depicts the rise and ultimate fall of the Britons. Although its pessimism is tempered by Christianity, the Brut is essentially pessimistic; all things of this earth ultimately fail. In this respect, the Brut, framed by two dream scenes, is like Beowulf, which is is framed by two funeral scenes. The main difference between the two is that the latter deals with one cycle (the rise and fall of a single hero) while the latter contains, within the framework of the rise and fall of a people, many cycles of victory and defeat. It is important to note, furthermore, that episodes in the Brut are interrelated by Laȝamon's use of parallelism and opposition.

In spite of these differences, Laȝmon is essentially a poet in the Old English tradition. I have tried to demonstrate, through this study, that the narrative and thematic structure of the Brut is one common to Old English narrative poetry. I have

concentrated on such works as Beowulf, The Wanderer, and some of Aelfric's Lives of Saints. The balancing of themes, through antithesis and parallel, is a pervasive feature of each of these works. In using these devices in his Brut, Laȝamon continues the tradition of Old English narrative poetry.

This study also demonstrates that Laȝamon's additions to Wace establish pairs of scenes placed in parallel or opposed relationships to each other. These pairs of scenes do more than simply remind the reader of previous ones, nor are they constructed in a random or haphazard manner; they help Laȝamon convey his themes to the reader, especially the contrast between good and evil or between past good fortune and present ill fortune; they mark blocks of narrative, thus providing a frame for certain parts of the Brut as well as for the poem as a whole. These traits make the work bleaker and more didactic than the French version. Laȝamon's Brut, therefore, has more in common with Beowulf and The Wanderer than with its courtly precursor.

I have by no means provided an exhaustive study of Laȝamon's use of thematic balance. Because of the scope of this study and the length of the Brut, I have necessarily chosen representative passages. Other examples of this trait may be found, both in Laȝamon's poem and Old English works. Laȝamon's use of alliteration to establish syntactic parallels could be

examined in greater detail than is done in this study. If we can accept Tatlock's theory that the *Brut* has influenced later Middle English poetry, an examination of the narrative structure of other such works, especially alliterative poems such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the context of Old English themology might be interesting. The parallel beheading scenes in this poem show the same concern for thematic balance that I have discussed in this study. A discussion of other Middle English poems in the context of thematic balance could help enhance our understanding of the indebtedness of Middle English poets to their Old English predecessors.

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VITA[2]

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