

# First Works of Arthurian Literature in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century: At the Boundary between History and Fiction<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** The Latin rhetorical triad (“historia,” “argumentum,” “fabula”) was actively used and reinterpreted in the Middle Ages. Macrobius, Isidore of Seville, Geoffrey Map — these are just a few of the authors who have used these categories both for the analysis of literature prior to them and for the analysis of their own works and the works of contemporary authors. This reflection on the form and function of the text also important for the literature written in the vernacular (Wace, Chrétien de Troyes, Guillaume de Lorris, etc.). The authors of the first works of the so-called Arthurian cycle, trying to raise the status of their narrative, insisted on historical accuracy of their texts (this intention was one of the reasons for criticism from the so-called “professional historians,” one of them was William of Newburgh, the British historian of 12. c.). First works of Arthurian literature (e.g. *The History of the Kings of England* by Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Le Roman de Brut* by Wace) were characterized by historiographic claims and by downplaying the proportion of invented elements. The latter was varying because of the language in which the works were written (Latin and Old French) as well as depending on the audience for which the texts were intended.

**Key words** Historia; fabula; argumentum; Galfrid of Monmouth; Wace; historiography; fiction

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## Introduction

Cicero in his treatises *De Oratore* and *De Inventione*, Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratorio* and the anonymous author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* distinguished between three types of narrative depending on the degree of its verity, and they proposed,

as do many minor writers on the topic as well, the categories of *fabula*, *argumentum*, and *historia*. A *fabula* is a tale not only invented, but containing impossible or highly improbable elements; talking animals, for instance, or humans metamorphosed into flora and fauna. *Argumentum* is also invented but neither impossible nor improbable; and *historia* is the relation of actual events. The literary genres deriving from these types of *narratio* are: tragedy or *carmina* from *fabula*, comedy from *argumentum*, and from *historia* history, the setting forth of the fact, of *res gesta*, the thing done. (Sargent-Baur 27)

This Classical triad was the object of interpretation and commentary for a whole constellation of Middle Age Latin authors, whose ideas, in turn, resonated with writers, who were creating the first romance writings in their respective vernaculars.

Isidore of Seville, who exerted a great influence on writers in the Middle Ages, devoted a lot of space in his *Etymologiae* to the contraposition and comparison of the three mentioned types of narration. In the first book of *Etymologiae* (Grammar, Chapter XLIV, *The Kinds of History* /*De generibus historiae*/) he wrote, in particular: “Both history, ‘plausible narration’ (*argumentum*), and fable differ from one other. Histories are true deeds that have happened, plausible narrations are things that, even if they have not happened, nevertheless could happen, and fables are things that have not happened and cannot happen, because they are contrary to nature” (65). Isidore dedicated a separate chapter to the fable (XL, *The Fable* /*De fabula*/): “Poets named ‘fables’ (*fabula*) from ‘speaking’ (*fando*), because they are not actual events that took place, but were only invented in words” (63).

Developing his idea further, Isidore wrote about the functions of the fables: “Poets have made up some fables for the sake of entertainment, and expounded others as having to do with the nature of things, and still others as telling about human morals” (63). Fables created for entertainment were meant for simple folks (Isidore mentioned, as his example, comedies by Plautus and Terence, in which plots were invented; in this sense they were getting closer to his definition of “fable,” that is of fiction). Fables created for the purpose of explaining the nature of things

tell of animals and natural events, both real and not, such that never existed (as, for example, Hippocentaur, who was depicted as half-human and half-horse). Finally, fables on human behavior treat it “so that we arrive at the matter that is intended with the true meaning, though, to be sure, by means of a made-up narrative” (64).

Thus Isidore followed the Classical rhetoric thinking, summarizing its basic ideas and repeating its triple division, while he mentioned both “*historia*,” “*argumentum*” and “*fabula*” (invented narration). Let us remark here, however, that one fable type, written “in order to present human morals,” invented narration containing some “true meaning” in part comes closer to the histories containing a narration on “true deeds that have happened” (*res verae quae factae sunt*). Let us also point out that the function of fables created for entertainment coincides with that, which Jehan Bodel, the 12<sup>th</sup>-century *trouvere* from Arras, regarded as inherent to “Breton sagas” (cf. his famous prologue to his *Chanson de Saisnes*): “Breton tales are empty and entertaining...”, as opposed to Roman tales that “teach us understanding” and tales on France that are “always truthful” (3).

Macrobius, a well-known Latin author of 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. who was often quoted throughout the Middle Ages, made his contribution to the development of the Classical rhetorical thought in the introduction to his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. This work by Macrobius was known to Isidore of Seville, whose *Etymologiae* “contain many references to *Commentary*” (Isidore LXVII), in particular his third book dedicated to astronomy. We shall try now to explore the difference between the literary thought of Macrobius and the conception of Isidore as well as the Classical rhetorical tradition.

Right at the beginning of his *Commentary* Macrobius justified the use of fiction or, to be more specific, use of dreams in philosophers’ works, in particular those by Plato. Macrobius defined fiction as follows (using the expected word — *fabula*): “Fables, which name alone announces openly that they are fictitious, were invented in one case only with the aim of simply providing entertainment to listeners while in the other case for the purpose of prompting them to lead a more moral life” (6). Macrobius indicated here, therefore, two functions of fable and fiction; the first one, *delectare*, coinciding with the function of fables which Isidore considered as intended “for entertainment”; the second one, *docere*, with the function of those fables that depicted human morals. Macrobius developed this statement further, simultaneously illustrating it with examples: any fiction aiming at only providing entertainment to readers (*totum fabularum genus, quod solas aurium delicias profitetur*) — as, for example, Menander’s comedies, practically all of Petronius’ works and some of Apuleius’ writings — was not worth the

philosopher's quill and was not to be included in philosophical writings.

Works that include fiction, which aims to prompt its readers to lead a more moral life, are divided, in turn, into two groups: "the narrative (*argumentum*) of some fables is completely invented and all of their storyline is woven out of sheer deception — as, for example, in Aesop's fables that are known for their sophisticated inventions; in other fables, however, the narration (*argumentum*) is based on hard facts, which facts are presented only in conjunction with something invented and constructed; they talk in such cases about some 'inauthentic narration' (*narratio fabulosa*) and not fable (*fabula*)" (6-7).

Thus Macrobius mentioned the same word, *argumentum*, in his text, which a century later was to be used by Isidore, but it did not appear here as a separate narrative category. He introduced, however, a new type of narration — *narratio fabulosa*. His examples here are ritual Orphic and Hesiodic mysteries as well as mystical cults of the Pythagoreans that were dedicated to the origins of the gods and to their deeds.

The narration of this last type is divided, in turn, into two subgroups.

Even if some narration (*argumentum*) is based on real facts, it may contain something vile, abominable and obscene — for example, tales of gods' infidelities or a story of Saturn who cut off his father's phallus: philosophers prefer to omit narration of such type in their books. It also happens, on the contrary, that there is nothing indecent in the narration, that only worthy events and persons are mentioned; narration of this type, such "inauthentic narration," is acceptable in the philosophers' works (7).

Macrobius was thus suggesting a polynomial classification for fiction types which would be differing both by the degree of their distance from the "truth," from what really happened, and by their function and the degree of decorum. The boundaries between fiction and "truth" appear in his classification as less clearly defined, as more indistinct than in Isidore's work. This classification was undoubtedly a guideline for the authors in the Middle Ages, when they were using legendary or folklore material, since it allowed them to find in it both partial "truth" and moral value.

During the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which mediaevalists call "the cultural Renaissance," the success of *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* reached its apogee, the testimony of which is given by the number of rolls and manuscripts that contained this work. It is not a coincidence that Chrétien de Troyes mentioned the author

of the *Commentary* in his first romance poems *Erec et Enide* (*Erec and Enide*), which was probably written during his stay at the court of Henry II of England (Plantagenet):

[Et] sor l'autre Erec seoir fist,  
 Qui fu vestuz d'un drap de moire.  
 Lisant trovomes en l'estoire  
 La descriçtion de la robe,  
 Si en trai a garant Macrobe  
 Qui ou descrire mist s'entente,  
 Que l'en ne die que je mente.  
 Macrobe m'enseigne a descrivre ,  
 Si con je l'ai trové el livre  
 L'ovre dou drap et le portrait.<sup>2</sup>

Chrétien de Troyes named Macrobius next to the word “history” so that his name served as a guarantee of the veracity of the narration; Chrétien says unequivocally in his text that it was the author of the *Commentary* who taught him the art of description (*Macrobe m'enseigne a descrire*).

Some decades later Guillaume de Lorris will also recall Macrobius in the prologue to his *Romance of the Rose* (*Le Roman de la Rose*) making him, just like Chrétien did, a guarantor of the truthfulness of his narration:

Maintes genz cuident qu'en songe  
 N'ait se fable non et mençonge.  
 Mais on puet tel songe songier  
 Qui ne sont mie mençongier,  
 Ainz sont après bien aparant.  
 Si em puis traire a garant  
 Un auctor qui ot non Macrobes,  
 Qui ne tint pas songes a lobes,  
 Ançois escrit l'avision  
 Qui avint au roi Scipion.  
 Quiconques cuit ne qui que die  
 Qu'il est folece et musardie  
 De croire que songes aveigne,  
 Qui ce voudra, por fol m'en teigne,

Car androit moi ai ge creance  
 Que songe sont senefiance...<sup>3</sup>

This all tells, undoubtedly, of the importance of the Latin literary theory to the first French romance writers for it legitimized their use of fiction which they did while trying to raise the status of their writings in the vulgar tongues (vernacular).

But let us go back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and to our topic: the interrelationship of history and other types of narration. Walter Map (1140 – around 1210) who was a courtier of Henry II of England (Henry Plantagenet) blurred over the difference between “history” and fiction even more. In the first book of his main and only writing, *De nugis curialium* (*Courtiers’ Trifles*), Map named two narrative categories which we already encountered in Isidore’s work and in the Classical rhetoric, that is, history and fable, or *historia* and *fabula*: “we have histories which continue from the beginning of time and to our days, and we also read fables” (126). In Walter Map’s opinion, we value history because we find in it some mystical sense, *intellectus mysticus*, through which we learn of and become familiar with the sense of proportion and humbleness. Walter named Biblical stories as his examples — those of Cain, of Sodom and Gomorrah, of Joseph and others. As for fables — such as the tale of the House of Atreus (Atreidai) and Thyestes, Pelops and Lycaon, as well as others, quite like these — they have the same, edifying, function as histories: “fables also serve us as edification” (126). Therefore, as Walter Map assured, one should not avoid reading fables, since they have the same function as history: “both narration types obey the same laws and have the same goal” (126).

So, Walter Map does not insist anymore on the insurmountable difference between history and fable. Even if such a difference exists, since history is based on veritable truth (*ueritate nititur*), while the fable is woven of fiction (*facta contextit*), Walter was inclined not to set apart these two narrative categories, but to unify them, for their goal and function is the same — admonishing, counseling: “Both history based on the truth and fable that is woven of fiction bring happiness by their happy ending, because virtue triumphs condemning the unrighteous to their death — and both show how abominable is vice” (126).

Let us sum up preliminary results. The blurry boundary between “truth” and fiction, the partial or complete conjunction of their functions as well as the possibility of uniting them in the same work became significant to very different authors whom we mentioned in this chapter: for Walter Map and, as we shall ascertain below, for two “historiographers”— Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace.

The proportion of invented and “truthful” elements, however, as well as the mode of their combination was different for each author.

### **Geoffrey of Monmouth and His History**

In the beginnings of Arthurian literature, which was based on the “Breton material,” there was Geoffrey of Monmouth (Galfridus Monemutensis), a Gallo-Norman cleric, who created in England, around 1138, during the rule of Henry I, the history of British kings, *The Historia Regum Britanniae*. Geoffrey started his *History of the Kings of Britain* from Brutus, an eponymous king, who came to Albion after the fall of Troy, and he ended it with the death of Cadwallader in 689 A.D.

*The History of the Kings of Britain* reached us in over 200 manuscripts from the 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries, it gave English kings some celebrated Trojan ancestors and it also inserted the history of the Britton nation into the history of the Antiquity. Attempts at “extending” local history into the pre-Augustan time were generally made in England before Geoffrey, from early 12<sup>th</sup> century, which had the effect of raising interest in the history of “Celtic” churches and Celtic saints. *The History of the Kings of Britain* by Geoffrey of Monmouth was accepted within the context of this development, for he tried to create a totally new version of the ecclesiastical history of the island, in the center of which a “Brittonic” church was placed. His conceptual approach in general — as opposed to its certain elements — was not accepted, however, by the English historiography. Geoffrey’s best known critic, William of Newburgh, his younger contemporary and English historian, dedicated at the close of the 12<sup>th</sup> century some very caustic lines to *The History of the Kings of Britain* and to its author — in the prologue for his *Historia regum Anglicarum*. William’s approach to the creation of the Northumbrian “model” of English history can be called “scientific” and “critical.” At the beginning of his work he speaks of Bede and St. Gildas, great historians, whose honesty and truthfulness was “fairly well proven” (112), and he also laments that “a writer in our times has started up and invented the most ridiculous fictions concerning them, and with unblushing effrontery, extols them far above the Macedonians and Romans” (113). The next fragment which tells us what was William of Newburgh’s appreciation of history, also contains his comment that Geoffrey was nicknamed (“surnamed”) “Arthur,” “from having given, in a Latin version, the fabulous exploits of Arthur, drawn from the traditional fictions of the Britons, with additions of his own, and endeavored to dignify them with the name of authentic history” (113). Thus William saw history as a truthful narration in Latin and he juxtaposed empty inventions (*fabularum vanitatem*) to true history, following in this in the paths of the Classical rhetorical

tradition which we mentioned above:

Moreover, no one but a person ignorant of ancient history, when he meets with that book which he [Geoffrey] calls the History of the Britons, can for a moment doubt how impertinently and impudently he falsifies in every respect. For he only who has not learnt the truth of history indiscreetly believes the absurdity of fable. (112)

Having asked the question why would Geoffrey make up and invent this, William offered two answers: "...either through an unchecked propensity to falsehood, or a desire to please the Britons, of whom vast numbers are said to be so stupid as to assert that Arthur is yet to come, and who cannot bear to hear of his death" (115). We shall have an opportunity later to comment on these beliefs by the Britons; at this point we must note that after this remark William of Newburgh epitomized the content of Geoffrey's book, demolishing and ridiculing all the deceitful stories told by this historian of the Britons. He dedicates his special attention to the history of King Arthur: "On the decease of Utherpendragon, he [Geoffrey] makes his son Arthur succeed to the kingdom of Britain the fourth in succession from Vortigern, in like manner as our Bede places Ethelberht, the patron of Augustine, fourth from Hengist in the government of the Angles. Therefore, the reign of Arthur, and the arrival of Augustine in England, ought to coincide. But how much plain historical truth outweighs concerted fiction may, in this particular, be perceived even by a purblind man through his mind's eye" (114).

Mentioning the description of a celebration at the king's court, which we shall come back to later on, in a different context, William catches Geoffrey of Monmouth in one more historical mistake: "After this, with numberless triumphs, he [Geoffrey] brings him back to England, where he celebrates his conquests with a splendid banquet with his subject-kings and princes, in the presence of the three archbishops of the Britons, that is London, Carleon, and York whereas, the Britons at that time never had an archbishop" (114). William's next argument is his appealing to the many historians who never ever, not one single time, mentioned King Arthur in their writings: "For how would the elder historians, who were ever anxious to omit nothing remarkable, and even recorded trivial circumstances, pass by unnoticed so incomparable a man, and such surpassing deeds? How could they, I repeat, by their silence, suppress Arthur, the British monarch (superior to Alexander the Great), and his deeds [...]?" (115). Let us note that one more of Geoffrey's readers, historian Giraud de Barri (around 1145-1223), his contemporary, explained



why, for example, Gildas never mentioned King Arthur: “after Arthur killed Gildas’ brother, this saint got so furious that he threw into the sea all the wonderful books which spoke of our king’s great deeds” (115). Giraud, however, mentioned in his text “our famous (*famosus*), not to say fictitious (*fabulosus*) Arthur,” (Aurell 122) thus making this king into a hero of fables and fairy-tales and also, in the same breath, relegating to inventions or fables Geoffrey’s *History* and equating it to “*historia fabulosa*,” that is to “apocryphal history,” which is a new, hybrid, narration category which is so obviously related to Macrobius’ *narratio fabulosa* (“inauthentic narration”); the latter, let us remind ourselves, contained a core of truth which was hidden under the fictitious narrative.

In the opinion of Willam of Newburgh, one more reason for Geoffrey’s descriptions of Arthur’s great exploits and deeds was his fear of the Britons: “it is to be noted that he [Geoffrey] subsequently relates that the same Arthur was mortally wounded in battle, and that, after having disposed of his kingdom he retired into the island of Avallon, according to the British fables, to be cured of his wounds; not daring, through fear of the Britons, to assert that he was dead — he whom these truly silly Britons declare is still to come” (115).

At the very beginning of Geoffrey’s book we can read as follows: “Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, a man of great eloquence, and learned in foreign histories, offered me a very ancient book in the British tongue, which, in a continued regular story and elegant style, related the actions of them all, from Brutus the first king of the Britons, down to Cadwallader the son of Cadwallo”(5). That is to say, a man learned in foreign histories (tales) offered Geoffrey some ancient book, which existence we may not be convinced of, but which, if we believe Geoffrey, told of a sequence of kings who ruled Britain. As told before, by referring to Gildas and Bede, neither of whom have seemingly never written anything about ancient kings of this land, Geoffrey decided to fill the gap and thus he dedicated a good portion of his *History* to the story of the birth and heroic deeds of the great king Arthur who vanquished the Saxons and was a threat to Romans, all of which came from this supposedly found book.

Thus Geoffrey was writing his own *History* using ancient tales that he heard from Walter of Oxford (which he will mention again when closing his last, twelfth book), and this *History* laid claim to being the truth beyond question: “[...] I advise them to be silent concerning the kings of the Britons [this refers to historians who were Geoffrey’s contemporaries: Caradoc of Lancarvan, William of Malmsbury, and Henry of Huntingdon, since they have not that book written in the British tongue, which Walter, archdeacon of Oxford, brought out of Brittany, and which

being a true history, published in honor of those princes, I have thus taken care to translate”(137).

In this way the author of the first text that gave rise to Arthurian literature introduced it as his translation into Latin of a truthful history written in the language of the Britons. His “historiographical claim” is strengthened by both stylistic peculiarities of the text (in which narration is preferred over weather notes and annals), and following the rules of Latin rhetoric, and a long prologue, or dedication, and the announcement (as part of the prologue) of his intention to write “the history of the kings of Britain,” and, finally, the title of a book, which we can find out about in the last lines of *Vita Merlini* (*Life of Merlin*), one more work written by Geoffrey of Monmouth: “Therefore, ye Britons, give a wreath to Geoffrey of Monmouth. He is indeed yours for once he sang of your battles and those of your chiefs, and he wrote a book called ‘The Deeds of the Britons’ which are celebrated throughout the world” (170).

Despite historiographical claims inherent both in the prologue and the introductory chapters of Geoffrey’s book, its text is defined by an intertwinement of the severity and restraint in its historical sources with purely literary qualities. Nevertheless, some episodes of this work were obviously created in a rather dry and severe style, which, perhaps, was meant to attest to the veracity of all that the writer was describing. One of such episodes is his tale of how king Arthur was conceived. It has, obviously, a folklore basis: it resembled the conception of Alexander the Great by the last ruler of Egypt, pharaoh Nectanebo II (comparison of Arthur with Alexander, even if implicitly, is present throughout Geoffrey’s book) as well as the wondrous conception of Hercules, not a lesser hero indeed, which Zeus could achieve when he appeared as Amphytrion, Alkmene’s husband; tales of the same kind are also known in the Celtic folklore tradition.

This story which is based in folklore was, however, told in a very dry and laconic manner, with no vivid details. It is also telling that it was, in particular, very brief. In today’s edition of *The History of the Kings of Britain* (from the moment when Utherpendragon, Arthur’s future father, sees Igera for the first time to the moment when she becomes his wife and two children are born to them, Arthur and Anna) this story takes up some eighty lines (Paragraphs 137-138). Geoffrey of Monmouth characterizes Igera’s physical beauty with only one phrase, even if in the superlative: “Among the rest was present Gorlois, duke of Cornwall, with his wife Igera, the greatest beauty in all Britain” (92). The description of the burst of feeling that the king experienced is also quite laconic and matter-of-fact, it is still devoid of courtly wording: “No sooner had the king cast his eyes upon her

among the rest of the ladies, than he fell passionately in love with her, and little regarding the rest, made her the subject of all his thoughts” (92). Merlin, who was king Utherpendragon’s counsel and helper, provides him, through the use of some magical herbs, with the likeness of Igera’s husband, so that he could successfully spend the night with the woman he loved, during which Arthur was conceived. This tale in Geoffrey’s text does not have any dialog between his heroes, and his style is that of a chronicler providing a dry and impartial narrative of the actions that were taken in order for Arthur to arrive in this world: “The same night therefore she conceived of the most renowned Arthur, whose heroic and wonderful actions have justly rendered his name famous to posterity” (134).

Geoffrey used the same severe and laconic style in order to end the history of King Arthur: “And even the renowned king Arthur himself was mortally wounded; and being carried thence to the isle of Avallon to be cured of his wounds, he gave up the crown of Britain to his kinsman Constantine, the son of Cador, duke of Cornwall, in the five hundred and forty-second year of our Lord's incarnation” (124).

We shall try to make an analysis now of the transformation which underwent the episodes that we just looked into above, this time under the pen of Geoffrey’s Middle Age translator — Wace.

### ***Le Roman de Brut* as Wace’s Translation Project**

Less than twenty years passed, and in 1155 our text was freely translated. The author of the translation was Wace, who was the historiographer of Henry II of England. Lacking the sense of historicism, one of the first romance writings, just as *History* by Geoffrey of Monmouth, it was not without a claim to historical credibility and to the veracity of the narration. Wace, following Geoffrey’s *History*, insisted on the inseparable connection between the Classical world of Antiquity and the world of ancient Britons, between ancient Troy and new Troy, *Troie Nove* — future London. In this connection, Wace’s work — together with Geoffrey’s *History of the Britons* and two contemporary romances, the [anonymous] *Le Roman d’Enéas* (*The Romance of Aeneas*) and *Le Roman de Troie* (*The Romance of Troy*) by Benoît de Sainte-Maure, who was, just as Wace, creating his works at the court of Henry II of England (Plantagenet) and who succeeded Wace in his capacity as royal historiographer — became “inscribed into the new and modern perspective, according to which the French-speaking world of the 12<sup>th</sup> century had inherited the culture and the political authority of the Graeco-Roman world that moved from the east to the west” (*La geste du roi Arthur* 8); this is what Chrétien de Troyes would

be writing about in the famous fragment from the prologue to his poem *Cligès*:

Ce nos ont nostre livre apris  
 Que Grece ot de chevalerie  
 Le premier los et de clergie,  
 Puis vint chevalerie a Rome  
 Et de la clergie la somme,  
 Qui or est en France venue<sup>4</sup>.

Such a perspective of *translatio imperii et studii* was meant to confirm that the ancestors of the Angevine kings were Trojans.

Wace developed the episode regarding Arthur's conception into a larger narration provided with new details. Let us mention at first that he dedicated 264 verses to this episode. He kept the superlative to characterize Igerne: "There was no lady so fair in all the land" (n'en ot plus bele en tut le regne /verse 24/), but he also added two more verses which would subsequently become the most frequent description of women in the courtly literature of the 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries: "Right courteous was the dame, noble of peerage" (curteise esteit e bele e sage, e si esteit de grant parage /verses 25-26/). One more detail or, rather, motif, which we owe to Wace (for it was not present in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth) and which would also start its wanderings through the literary works of the Middle Ages, was the depiction of love that the hero feels for a woman whom he had never seen before and whose beauty became known to him by word of mouth:

Li reis en ot oï parler,  
 e mult l'aveit oï lœr;  
 ainz que nul semblant en feïst,  
 veire asez ainz qu'il la veïst,  
 l'ot il cuveitie e amee,  
 kar merveilles esteit loee<sup>5</sup>. (vv. 27-32)

This quote, as far as we are concerned, evidenced that the notion of love instilled by word of mouth, something that does not exist in Geoffrey's text, would not give us the right to say that the feeling of love hit Arthur's father like a sunstroke as A. D. Mikhailov wrote about it.

Let us also note — before we can return to the comparison of Geoffrey's and Wace's treatment of the topic — that Marie de France would borrow from Wace

when describing king Equitan's sudden love to the wife of his seneschal, a feeling that burst into flame, even though he knew about her only from hearsay:

El reialme n'aveit sa per.  
 Li reisl'oï sovent loër.  
 Soventes feiz la salua ;  
 de ses aveirs li enveia.  
 Senz veüe la conveita...<sup>6</sup> (vv. 41-45)

Anyone who read *Le Roman de Brut* were of the same opinion — that Wace was “rather a romance writer than a historian” (LXXXVII). The text of *Le Roman de Brut* was more rhetorical than the Latin original, and the octosyllabic verse that Wace was using was in organic conjunction with his use of many rhetorical devices and of a certain picturesqueness; for example, Wace who wanted to achieve rhythmic effects would again and again use repetitions, citations and anaphors: “whether he ate or drank, spoke or was silent” (“se il manjot, se il beveit, se il parlot, se il taiseit” /verses 35-36/) or this when Brut:

Vit les valees, vit les plainnes,	Sees plains and valleys,
[...],	[...],
Vit les eues, vit les rivages,	Sees lakes and rivers,
Vit les champs, vit les praeries,	Sees fields, sees meadows,
Vit les porz, vit les pescheries,	Sees harbors, sees water filled with fish,
Vit sun pople multepleier,	Sees how his people multiply,
Vit les terres bien guaaainier...	Sees well-tended lands...
(vv. 1210-1216)	(verses 1210-1216)

All these devices make Wace's verses easier for both appreciation and performance (let us remind that these writings were meant to be spoken loudly and not to be read silently). We shall find analogous rhetorical passages everywhere in the text, like, for example, this one:

Ne puis aler, ne puis venir,	I cannot walk, nor come about my
ne puis lever, ne puis culchier,	business,
ne puis beivre, ne puis mangier...	I cannot wake for sleep, [...]
(vv. 109-112)	Neither can I eat or drink ...
	(verses 109-112)

Comparing other episodes in Geoffrey's *History* and Wace's romance provides similar results: Wace's narration is in many cases more rich, it is more colorful, and it is possible to say that it moves even further away from the strict historical narration than its Latin original. For example, where Geoffrey was content with one phrase describing the fortress city Tintagel ("he [Igerne's husband] put her into the town of Tintagel, upon the seashore, which he looked upon as a place of great safety."), Wace offered a whole wide picture to his readers:

<p>Tintajiel ert bien defensable: n'esteit par nul engin pernabile; de faleise est clos e de mer; ki sul la porte puet garder, mar i avra dute ne reguart que hum i entre d'autre part. (vv.73-80)</p>	<p>It was a strong keep, easily holden of a few sergeants, since none could climb or throw down the walls. The castle stood on a tall cliff, near by the sea. Men might not win to enter by the gate, and saving the gate, there was no door to enter in the tower. (verses 73-80)</p>
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Wace, unlike Geoffrey, included in his narrative dialogs between Utherpendragon and Ulfin (verses 105-128) as well as long monologs of the king (verses 202-225), his councilor Ulfin and also Merlin whom Wace made wear the semblance of Bertel and who was described in much more detail than in the Latin original (verses 149-174).

Let us also point out two important details which are not present in Geoffrey's text and which first appear in Wace's rendition. Firstly, Wace introduced for the first time the motif of the round table, which king Arthur established and of which Britons told so many fables:

<p>Pur les nobles baruns qu'il ot, dunt chascuns mielldre estre quidot chascuns se teneit a meillur, ne nul n'en saveit le peiur — fist Artur la Röunde Table dunt Bretun dient mainte fable. (vv.1019-1024)</p>	<p>Because of these noble lords about his hall, of whom each knight pained himself to be the hardiest champion, and none would count him the least praiseworthy, Arthur made the Round Table, so reputed of the Britons. (verses 1019-1024)</p>
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Secondly, just like Geoffrey, Wace — when ending his tale of king Arthur's

rule and telling the year of his departure to the island of Avallon — conveyed several important details: he mentioned the Britons and their faith in the eventual return of the king, reminded of himself and of his own unwillingness to believe in the king's disappearance because he seemingly did not know anything beyond what had been already told, and finally he added an emotionally tinted regret that Arthur was childless:

Arthur, si la geste ne ment,  
 fud el cors nafrez mortelment ;  
 en Avalon se fist porter  
 pur ses plaies medicinier.  
 Encore i est, Bretun l'atendent  
 sicum il dient e entendent ;  
 de la vendra, encore puet vivre.  
 Maistre Wace, ki fist cest livre,  
 ne volt plus dire de sa fin  
 qu'en dist li prophetes Merlin ;  
 Merlin dist d'Arthur – si ot dreit –  
 que sa mort dutuse serreit.  
 Li prophetes dist verité :  
 tut tens en ad l'um puis duté,  
 e dutera, ço crei, tut dis,  
 se il est morz u il est vis.  
 Porter se fist en Avalun  
 pur veir puis l'Incarnatiun  
 cinc cenz e quarante douz anz  
 Damage fud qu'il n'ot enfanz :  
 al fiz Cador, a Costentin,  
 de Cornüaille, sun cusin,  
 livra sun regne si li dist  
 qu'il fust reis tant qu'il revenist.  
 (vv. 4435-4458)

So the chronicle speaks sooth, Arthur himself was wounded in his body to the death. He caused him to be borne to Avalon for the searching of his hurts. He is yet in Avalon, awaited of the Britons; for as they say and deem he will return from whence he went and live again. Master Wace, the writer of this book, cannot add more to this matter of his end than was spoken by Merlin the prophet. Merlin said of Arthur — if I read aright — that his end should be hidden in doubtfulness. The prophet spoke truly. Men have ever doubted, and — as I am persuaded — will always doubt whether he liveth or is dead. Arthur bade that he should be carried to Avalon in this hope in the year 642 of the Incarnation. The sorer sorrow that he was a childless man. To Constantine, Cador's son, Earl of Cornwall, and his near kin, Arthur committed the realm, commanding him to hold it as king until he returned to his own. (verses 4435-4458)

There were, however, omissions. We cannot agree with Ivor Arnold, the publisher of *Le Roman de Brut*, that these omissions are “rare and insignificant: some names of minor characters, Roman generals, Saxon leaders; names of Britons' bishops

from the times of king Arthur, and genealogy of the kings of Brittany” (qtd. In Wace 5). One omission can be regarded as both serious and major: Wace excluded from his translation Merlin’s prophecy regarding the suture of Britain and its kings which Geoffrey introduced in the sixth book of his History. Possibly Wace was absolutely sincere when he confessed why he was not willing to pass on Merlin’s prophecy:

Dunc dist Merlin les prophecies	Thus Merlin spoke his prophecies,
Que vus avez, ço crei, oïes,	Which, I think, you may have heard,
Des reis ki a venir esteient,	About the kings who will come to rule
Ki la terre tenir deveient.	And will own lands.
Ne vuil sun livre translater	I am not willing to translate his
Quant jo nel sai interpreter...	[Geoffrey’s — N.D.]
(vv. 7535-7540)	book,
	Because I do not know how to interpret
	it.
	(verses 7535-7540)

These prophecies were indeed very obscure, but we should not forget that Wace was writing for the less educated people and, as any writer of that period who was using the vernacular, he aimed at making simpler the content of his work.

### Conclusion

Diffusive nature of such categories as “truth” and “fiction,” which was important for the literary theory of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was significant both for Geoffrey and for Wace, his successor. The latter erased the boundary between them even further making his romance be closer to the “inauthentic narration” (“*narratio fabulosa*”), truthful in its base, but containing many fictitious elements. Such a shift was in Wace’s case, of course, correlating with his using the poetical form of the romance in the vernacular and thus to a new audience. Just as did other translators who created non-literal versions of Latin texts, Wace was explaining and simplifying the original, while at the same time amplifying it. Just as did other authors who rendered prose with verses, Wace introduced additional elements into his text, including epithets, descriptions, direct speech, and all of that is organically incorporated into the versified narration, because this type of narrative is conducive to it. In the meantime, it would not be possible to say that Wace restricted himself to the task that was usual for the authors of such translations: unlike them, Wace



significantly increased the fairy-tale element in his version while introducing such additions there which were not sought after only in conjunction with the task of the translators in the Middle Ages.

## Notes

1. The article was prepared within the framework of the Academic Fund Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2015- 2016 (grant №15–01-0035) and supported within the framework of a subsidy granted to the HSE by the Government of the Russian Federation for the implementation of the Global Competitiveness Program.

2. King Arthur sat upon the one, and upon the other he made Erec sit, who was robed in watered silk. As we read in the story, we find the description of the robe, and in order that no one may say that I lie, I quote as my authority Macrobius, who devoted himself to the description of it. Macrobius instructs me how to describe, according as I have found it in the book, the workmanship and the figures of the cloth (transl. by W.W. Comfort, Everyman's Library, London, 1914).

3. "Many men say that there is nothing in dreams but fables and lies, but one may have dreams which are not deceitful, whose import becomes quite clear afterward. We may take as witness an author named Macrobius, who did not take dreams as trifles, for he wrote of the vision which came to King Scipio. Whoever thinks or says that to believe in a dream's coming true is folly and stupidity may, as he wishes, think me a fool; but, for my part, I am convinced that a dream signifies the good and evil that come to men, for most men at night dream many things in a hidden way which may afterward be seen openly"(31) See *The Romance of the Rose*. Trans. Charles Dahlberg. (New Jersey:Princeton University Press, 1971).

4. Our books have informed us that the pre-eminence in chivalry and learning once belonged to Greece. Then chivalry passed to Rome, together with that highest learning which now has come to France. (See: [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/831/831-h/831-h.htm#link2H\\_4\\_0004](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/831/831-h/831-h.htm#link2H_4_0004) [accessed 23 January 2015]).

5. The king had heard much talk of this lady, and never aught but praise. His eyes were ravished with her beauty. He loved her dearly, and coveted her hotly in his heart, for certainly she was marvelously praised.

6. "Certainly she had no peer in all the realm. The King had heard much in praise of this lady and many a time saluted her upon the way. He had also sent her divers gifts. Often he considered in his mind how best he might get speech with the dame." (105). *Medieval Lays and Legends of Marie de France*. Trans. Eugene Mason. (New York: Dover, 2003)

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