Introduction

This book is concerned with a place and a time of extreme political and cultural upheaval. Between 1066 and the end of the twelfth century, England suffered a dramatic regime change, and a change in the language of the elite; it saw nearly twenty years of civil war, and unceasing rivalries within its royal house; its rulers possessed vast and unstable territories across the seas; it experienced the rapid, and not unresisted, strengthening of royal governance and administration; and it was subject to Church – and thus lay – reform at the behest of the papacy, and as part of a mainswell of western European cultural change. But all of these things, to one degree or another, had happened before. The period immediately preceding the Conquest had seen successful Danish invasion and nearly thirty years of Danish rule, the rise and rivalry of competing aristocratic families, and the ineffectual reign of an English king raised in the Norman ducal court: eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon England was, on the face of it, no less dramatic or internationally complex.[1]

We must allow, then, for the fact that periodization is always an obfuscation of history's continual flux; the evenemential master narrative, embedded in teleology as it is, can be seen as an almost arbitrary means of delineating significance and locating origins.[2] But nevertheless, it is uncontroversial to observe that the post-Conquest period produced some astonishingly sweeping developments in literary culture. This book examines 'fiction and history' in the period because these categories were reinvented at this time; the twelfth century saw an unprecedented flowering in Latin historical writing, followed hard upon by the development

---

[1] See Stephen Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007) for a new account of the political and power structures of eleventh-century England, traced through the changing fortunes of one aristocratic family.

[2] Recent critiques include David Bates, '1066: does the date still matter?', *Historical Research* 78 (2005), 443–64. cf. Robert M. Stein, *Reality Fictions: Romance, History, and Governmental Authority, 1025–1180* (Notre Dame, 2006), pp. 89–90 and notes 57–8.

1

of *vernacular* historiography, the contemporary chronicle, and the romance – the first genuinely fictional extended narrative.

In examining some key moments and texts which make up this narrative of cultural and literary change – in seeking to explain why this place, this time – I am deeply implicated in the production of historical illusion. Each of the book's chapters may be seen as analogous to a Derridan *point de capiton*, a quilting point, insisting upon capturing particular texts and events and fastening them to a fixed significance. But of course in studying cultural and literary history, I am in the fortunate position of investigating and attempting to describe not only history, but historiography, and historical epistemology; that is to say, of investigating the patterns and forms produced in and by the minds of historical individuals and groups. As such, the objects of study are themselves *points de capiton*; they are the structures by which eleventh- and twelfth-century individuals and groups interpreted and generated their own culture. The fascination of texts lies in their dual nature, as consciously and unconsciously shaped entities, both distinct from historical reality and yet a part of it. In the anthropologist's words, 'it is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know'.[3] It is in considering texts as locations of conscious and unconscious meaning, and meanings presumed to be valuable to those who commissioned, produced, read and listened to them, that I have sought to illuminate the identities and ideologies of these people.

One portion of my title requires further explanation. In examining literary change I will attend to the blurred categories of fiction and history, and my observations will largely be contained within the period 1066–1200; but what of England?

It has long been a commonplace of literary history to observe that in the twelfth century, first in the French-speaking territories controlled by the Anglo-Norman and Capetian ruling families, and especially within the milieu of the English royal court, antique and chivalric romances appear simultaneously with a new kind of historical chronicle driven by contemporary affairs. In short order historiography and romance, whether written in Latin or in the vernaculars, became culturally dominant genres of narrative expression throughout the rest of Europe.[4]

There is nothing inaccurate about these statements, but I will seek to offer a different emphasis, and a particular nuance, to the circumstances of

---

[3] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977), p.79.
[4] Stein, *Reality Fictions*, p.1 and note 1. See also D. H. Green, *The Beginnings of Medieval Romance: Fact and Fiction, 1150–1220* (Cambridge, 2002), and Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth-Century France* (Berkeley, 1993).

literary production. It will be a part of my argument that the role of the royal court has been overestimated, at the expense of the importance of aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage and audiences. But more significantly, I believe that there is a particularity to the literary and cultural productions of England during this period, which can be delineated in contrast with the wider milieu of Francophone Europe. England's *insular* French and Latin literature – a term unfortunate for its negative connotations, but indispensable for its lack of ambiguity, in contrast with *continental* French and Latin – is the main subject of this book.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt of the permeability of French-speaking culture, and the cross-Channel nature of political power.[5] Thus, to assert the uniqueness of the culture of these islands is in effect to discuss the inheritance, formation, and development of English identity, and the ideologies which surround and serve it. This being so, I must begin by observing that it is not immediately obvious what identity might, consciously or unconsciously, be chosen by the powerful in twelfth-century England. In 1066 an established nation was invaded by an assertive people of formidable reputation, and against all likelihood, virtually the entire male ruling class was replaced by immigrants over the following years.[6] The strength and character of these two identities have been much debated in recent scholarship, and it is worth briefly recounting the current position.

The robustness of pre-Conquest English identity, and of the power of English kings and government, is no longer in doubt.[7] The late Patrick Wormald recently asserted its incontrovertibility:

It must now be accepted, however reluctantly, that the sheer power of the first English kings brooks no debate. Their coin circulated, without rival or alloy, to York, Exeter and beyond; their writ ran to broadly similar effect everywhere to the east of the Tamar and to the south of the Humber, or even the Tees. Since they were in no position to dragoon obedience – or not consistently – what alternative do we have but to presuppose a level of mass solidarity that it makes sense to call 'national'? Dr Foot and I have now argued *ad nauseam* that a sense of 'Englishness' was remarkably widespread remarkably early …[8]

---

[5] The maximum view of cross-Channel cohesion is that of John le Patourel; see *Normandy and England, 1066–1144* (Reading, 1971), and *The Norman Empire* (Oxford, 1976).

[6] See Ann Williams, *The English and the Norman Conquest* (Woodbridge, 1995), esp. pp. 7–44.

[7] For a recent summary of scholarship see Hugh M. Thomas, *The English and the Normans: Ethnic Hostility, Assimilation, and Identity 1066-c. 1220* (Oxford, 2003), chapter 2, 'English Identity Before the Norman Conquest', pp. 20–31.

[8] Patrick Wormald, 'Germanic power structures: the early English experience', in *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. by Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 105–24 (p. 118).

   This summation is the endpoint of a growing body of work on the early development of English identity.[9] The debate has been marked by the question of terminology, and the difficulties thrown up by modern theories of nationalism, which have notoriously excluded the Middle Ages;[10] but as Kathy Lavezzo has recently observed, 'scholars in medieval studies have gone far in querying the traditional notion that the medieval West was incapable of national discourse'.[11] Anglo-Saxon scholars largely agree that there was an English 'nation' before the Conquest, although there is some caution about the word itself: 'If the word "national" still sticks in the throat', suggests Wormald, 'let it be "ethnic" if you really think that helps; let it even be "tribal", so long as you have no illusion that bonding overall was perceived as in any way biological'.[12] Susan Reynolds has elucidated this confusion in her seminal work on medieval communities, in which she suggests that the contemporary terms *gens*, *natio* and *populus* should all be translated neutrally as 'a people', meaning 'a community of custom, descent, and government'.[13] For Reynolds, the key bonding factor is 'the habit of obedience to a lawfully crowned king', which forges a 'regnal community'. The English had long held such a habit, and 'felt themselves to be a single people'.[14] Much discussion has focused upon the role of institutions and legislation in the formation of this people, the *Angelcynn*, and has turned to question whether, beyond a strong sense of regnal solidarity, there was an overarching entity which might be termed a 'nation-state', to which early English nationalism might be attached. James Campbell is the foremost exponent of the positive view, while Sarah Foot takes a more cautious line.[15] Nicholas Brooks has

[9] See especially Patrick Wormald, '*Engla Lond*: The Making of an Allegiance', *Journal of Historical Sociology* 7 (1994), 1–24; Sarah Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 6 (1996), 25–49; Alfred P. Smyth, 'The emergence of English identity, 700–1000', in *Medieval Europeans: Studies in Ethnic Identity and National Perspectives in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Smyth (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 24–52.

[10] Benedict Anderson's influential book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), invokes modernity as the essential condition of nationalism. Patricia Clare Ingham has called this book 'an account of nation that medievalists love to hate': *Sovereign Fantasies: Arthurian Romance and the Making of Britain* (Philadelphia, 2001), p. 8.

[11] Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World: Geography, Literature, and English Community, 1000–1534* (Ithaca, 2006), p. 8.

[12] Wormald, 'Germanic power structures', p. 118.

[13] Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900–1300*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1997), pp. 254–6. See also Robert Bartlett, 'Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001), 39–56 (p. 47).

[14] ibid., pp. 262–7. See also Rees Davies, 'The Peoples of Britain and Ireland, 1100–1400: I. Identities', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser., 4 (1994), 1–20 (pp. 19–20).

[15] See James Campbell, 'The late Anglo-Saxon state: a maximum view', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 87 (1994), 39–65; Campbell, 'Some agents and agencies of the late Anglo-Saxon state', in

described the political influence of Canterbury, whose 'campaign of *imitatio Romae* was an essential element in the process of English ethnogenesis, that is in a programme of constructing a single *gens Anglorum*'.[16] Patrick Wormald is the greatest proponent of the importance of Anglo-Saxon legal culture in the formulation of national identity, of which more below. Among literary critics, recent work has sought to elaborate the means by which pre-Conquest Englishness was expressed in texts and translations, and has emphasized the importance of Old English writing to the foundation of this identity.[17] This work has also provided a thoroughgoing critique of the modern bias to theoretical studies of nationalism.[18]

Nevertheless, the Conquest was a deep trauma which developed, over the early years of unsuccessful revolt and ruthless suppression, into a thoroughgoing threat to English identity. Traces of English distress are thin in the textual record, for reasons which heighten the force of those which can be found. Parts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle have become justly famous for their laconic grief, as when MS. D recounts the belated submission of the magnates: 'bugon þa for neode þa mæst wæs to hearme gedon, 7 þæt wæs micel unræd þæt man æror swa na dyde, þa hit God betan nolde for urum synnum' ['they submitted from necessity when the most harm was done, and it was great folly that they did not do so earlier, when God would not remedy matters because of our sin']; and the impact of Norman rule: 'worhton castelas wide geond þas þeode, 7 earm folc swencte, 7 a syððan hit yflade swiðe. Wurðe god se ende þonne God wylle' ['they built castles all across the land, and oppressed the wretched people, and afterwards it continually grew very much worse. When God wills, may the end be good'].[19]

Anglo-Saxon History: Basic Readings, ed. by David A. E. Pelteret (New York, 2000), pp.225–49; and his *The Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000); Sarah Foot, 'The historiography of the Anglo-Saxon "nation-state"', in *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. by Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (Cambridge, 2005), pp.125–42.

[16] Brooks, 'Canterbury, Rome, and the Construction of English Identity', in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, ed. by Julia M. H. Smith (Leiden, 2000), pp.221–46 (p.222).

[17] Janet Thormann, 'The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* Poems and the Making of the English Nation', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. by Allen J. Frantzen and John D. Niles (Gainesville, 1997), pp.60–85; Stephen J. Harris, 'The Alfredian *World History* and Anglo-Saxon Identity', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 100 (2001), 482–510; Alice Sheppard, *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto, 2004); Lavezzo, *Angels on the Edge of the World*, ch. 1, 'Another Country: Ælfric and the Production of English Identity', pp.27–45.

[18] See particularly Kathleen Davis, 'National Writing in the Ninth Century: A Reminder for Postcolonial Thinking about the Nation', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 28 (1998), 611–37.

[19] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS. D*, ed. by G. P. Cubbin (Cambridge, 1996), *s.a.* 1066 (pp.80–1).

This manuscript of the Chronicle peters out in 1079, but the perception of Norman ruthlessness and English wretchedness was a long-lived memory. Writing in the 1120s, Henry of Huntingdon closed his account of the Conqueror's reign with unequivocal words:

Anno uigesimo primo regni Willelmi regis, cum iam Domini iustam uoluntatem super Anglorum gentem Normanni complesent, nec iam uix aliquis princeps de progenie Anglorum esset in Anglia, sed omnes ad seruitutem et ad merorem redacti essent, ita etiam ut Anglicum uocari esset obprobrior, huius auctor uindicte Willelmus uitam terminauit. Elegerat enim Deus Normannos ad Anglorum gentem exterminandam, quia prerogatiua seuicie singularis omnibus populis uiderat eos preminere.[20]

[In King William's twenty-first year [1087], when the Normans had fulfilled the just will of the Lord upon the English people, and there was scarcely a noble of English descent in England, but all had been reduced to servitude and lamentation, and it was even disgraceful to be called English, William, the agent of this vengeance, ended his life. For God had chosen the Normans to wipe out the English nation, because He had seen that the Normans surpassed all other people in their unparalleled savagery.]

This explanation of Norman severity – to turn to the second of our competing identities – drew upon a long history of Norman self-definition, which balanced a triumphalist sense of invincibility and austere piety with a wild, potentially uncontrollable, violence. The Norman dukes were notable for their commissioning and encouragement of historical writing,[21] and Marjorie Chibnall has observed that these chronicles are 'dominated by two themes: their success in war, and their benefactions to the Church'.[22] In an analysis traced through several texts, Emily Albu argues that the darker side of *Normanitas* is a constant and ambiguous presence,[23] and indeed Eleanor Searle has suggested that the dukes exploited their neighbours' fear of Scandinavian savagery.[24] In the most recent account of the development of Norman identity, Nick Webber speaks of its 'ideal synthesis of both Scandinavian and Frankish culture', making use of historical writing as 'a distinct cultural symbol – the achievements of the Norman lords were

---

[20] *Historia*, p.402.
[21] See the excellent treatment of Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington DC, 1997).
[22] *The Normans* (Oxford, 2000), p.24.
[23] *The Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion* (Woodbridge, 2001).
[24] *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power, 840–1066* (Berkeley, 1988), p.124: 'it was to the interest of the Rouen leaders well into the eleventh century to emphasize their Scandinavian character'.

being recorded so that a tradition of greatness could be handed down to subsequent generations'.[25]

However, alongside this discussion of the nature and content of *Normanitas* there has developed a debate about its longevity, and its eventual fate. The classic work on Norman identity, R. H. C. Davis' *The Normans and their Myth*, asserted that the 'myth' reached its apogee in the writings of the twelfth century.[26] This view now has few adherents. Since Graham Loud's refutation, in which he dated the flowering of *Normanitas* to the eleventh century,[27] historians and critics have in increasing numbers, and despite the apparent paradox, documented a post-Conquest crisis in Norman identity, and its eventual near-demise during the twelfth century.[28] Certainly Normandy retained a strong regional identity throughout this period, but *Normanitas* proved to be surprisingly weak as an export to England.

These competing identities are the focal points of my discussion in chapters one and two, considered through the lenses of particular texts and artefacts. For the present purposes, it suffices to say that at the opening of the twelfth century, England was a trilingual society, territorially bound to the continent, which had inherited a variety of conflicting ideologies. None of these ideologies – or terminologies – would obviously succeed in asserting itself above the others. But if this was indeed a 'multi-racial society',[29] then that consciousness equally applied a pressure, as Thomas Hahn has noted: 'The incoherent, diverse, antagonistic populations that jostled each other on English soil provided a powerful incentive – for political leaders, lawyers, intellectuals – to imagine a larger community … the writing of race and difference becomes a strategy calculated not merely to describe but to control the centrifugal forces represented by these diverse blocs'.[30]

At the other end of the period under consideration, as with the moment just before the Conquest, the question of identity is similarly regarded as settled. The traditional view of the re-emergence of Englishness suggests a dating in the thirteenth century. Historians have typically looked to the loss of Normandy in 1204, and the growing xenophobia, not to say

---

[25] *The Evolution of Norman Identity, 911–1154* (Woodbridge, 2005), pp. 33, 35–6.

[26] Davis, *The Normans and their Myth* (London, 1976), esp. pp. 62–4.

[27] G. A. Loud, 'The *Gens Normannorum* – myth or reality?', *Anglo-Norman Studies* 4 (1981), 104–16, 204–9.

[28] Webber, *Norman Identity*, pp. 173–4, 179; Thomas, *English and Normans*, pp. 40–5.

[29] Marjorie Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England, 1066–1166* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 208, 211.

[30] Hahn, 'The Difference the Middle Ages Makes: Color and Race before the Modern World', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001), 1–37 (pp. 7–8).

Francophobia, of the English aristocracy during the reigns of John and Henry III, as the markers of renewed English identity.[31] Literary critics have, reasonably enough, concentrated upon the resurgence of the written English vernacular which took place at the beginning of the century, and rapidly gathered pace.[32] Thorlac Turville-Petre notes at the outset of his book on the subject that 'writers of the mid-thirteenth century expressed their sense of England as a nation, but did so in Latin or French. In consequence,' he argues, 'they found it difficult to convey the concept of the nation constituted by the whole population'.[33] He associates the rise of English nationalism with the rise of English as a 'national language'.[34] However, as Andrew Galloway notes in his response to Turville-Petre's work, its connection of 'English literary communities and anthologies with the emerging national status of the English language, calls out for a succession of appendices – or rather … many further chapters'.[35] Indeed, Derek Pearsall has argued, in discussing a much later period when one might expect the connection to be stronger, that the use of the English vernacular cannot itself reliably be connected with national feeling.[36] My suggestion that a strong sense of Englishness exists rather earlier, expressed in French, is complementary to this observation, although certainly not to the main body of his argument: which is to assert a general absence of national feeling in England throughout the Middle Ages, until the Reformation. He concludes by stating that 'a people must have a common language before they can be fully conscious of themselves as a nation … It was the English language, and the new use of English in

[31] See for example David Carpenter, *The Struggle for Mastery: Britain 1066–1284* (London, 2004), pp.8–10, 353–4; also Carpenter, 'King Henry III's "Statute" against aliens: July 1263', *English Historical Review* 107:425 (1992), 925–44; M. T. Clanchy, *England and its Rulers 1066–1272: Foreign Lordship and National Identity*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1998), pp.241–4.

[32] See e.g. Diane Speed, 'The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance', in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. by Carol M. Meale (Cambridge, 1994), pp.135–57; Carole Weinberg, 'Victor and victim: a view of the Anglo-Saxon past in Laȝamon's *Brut*', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the thirteenth to the twentieth century*, ed. by Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge, 2000), pp.22–38; Jill C. Havens, '"As Englishe is comoun langage to oure puple": The Lollards and Their Imagined "English" Community', in *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, ed. by Kathy Lavezzo (Minneapolis, 2004), pp.96–128; Jill Frederick, 'The *South English Legendary*: Anglo-Saxon saints and national identity', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons*, pp.57–73 (esp. pp.72–3). The key study of this phenomenon's flowering is Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford, 1996).

[33] *England the Nation*, Preface, pp.v–vi.

[34] Turville-Petre, *England the Nation*, p.20.

[35] 'Latin England', in *Imagining a Medieval English Nation*, pp.41–95 (p.41).

[36] 'The Idea of Englishness in the Fifteenth Century', in *Nation, Court and Culture: New Essays on Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. by Helen Cooney (Dublin, 2001), pp.15–27 (p.15).

Bible-translation, that was the enabling condition of a developed sense of nationhood when Henry VIII finally pulled the trigger'.[37] For Pearsall – and it is in the dating, not the theory, that he disagrees with Turville-Petre – English identity is unavailable as a genuinely inclusive, national feeling until the definitive triumph of the English language, which he dates to the early modern period.

Such an approach to the importance of language, which necessarily regards the twelfth century as anomalous for its use of French as the literary vernacular, has a tendency to separate Norman and Angevin England from the notion of English identity. This has been supported not only by critics of the later period, but by those working in the twelfth century from very different (and sometimes antagonistic) angles. Ian Short, who argues strongly for the precocity and vigour of insular literature, nevertheless regards it as part of a larger Francophone culture spanning England and the continent, and hence in no way nationally specific.[38] Diametrically opposed to this view, but with the same result of depriving insular French literature of a national character, is the work of Elaine Treharne, who asserts the unrecognized literary and political importance of the Old English still being written during the twelfth century. For Treharne, the 'study of influences on twelfth-century production of Old English is, fundamentally, an examination of cultural identity and transmission'.[39] Nevertheless, there is a growing body of scholarship insisting upon the particularity of insular French literature, and it is from this basis that my analysis begins. As will become clear, I would sidestep the whole question of the dating of the emergence of English as a 'national', or collective, language, because I do not believe it to be a pre-requisite for the expression of national identity. It is vital, in this context, to accept that the Englishness expressed in post-Conquest texts spoke to itself in French, and did so apparently unself-consciously. This uncoupling of language from national identity is one of the modern reader's greatest surprises; but it is undoubtedly there.[40]

[37] ibid., p.27.

[38] See e.g. Ian Short, 'Language and Literature', in *A Companion to the Anglo-Norman World*, ed. by Christopher Harper-Bill and Elisabeth van Houts (Woodbridge, 2003), pp.191–213 (esp. pp.206, 211–12).

[39] Treharne and Swan, 'Introduction', in *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century*, ed. by Elaine M. Treharne and Mary Swan (Cambridge, 2000), pp.1–10 (p.7).

[40] See Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton NJ, 2002), pp.37–40, on the apparent irrelevance of language to medieval ethnic and national groupings; and Thomas, *English and Normans*, pp.377–87, who outlines previous scholarship's presumption of the link between language and identity, and argues that the connection was 'fairly weak' (p.379) during the period in question.

Nevertheless, it is certainly true that there was a permeability of circulation throughout the Francophone world, and that texts in all genres moved freely across the Channel, albeit, it seems, in much greater volume from the continent to England than the reverse.[41] However, the very fact of this free movement of texts, and the wide reach of their reception, seems to me to render the distinctiveness of insular production all the more significant. Indeed as Beate Schmolke-Hasselman has shown, in the thirteenth century and later, much continental literature shows the influence of insular narrative, and a desire to conform to insular tastes: the model is, perhaps ironically, vigorous enough to impose itself outside its own territory:

A considerable number of Arthurian verse romances were definitely written for a French-speaking public in England … The works also enjoyed considerable success within the sphere of influence of the French Crown; however, this success did not rest on the ideological and political content of the romances, but can be registered as proportional to the literary quality of the works … The knowledge that Arthurian material was English, and that Arthurian literature was English national literature, irrespective of the language in which it was composed, survived until the beginning of the modern age.[42]

Given that the formative, archetypal works of Arthurian romance were produced by Chrétien de Troyes on the continent (albeit within Angevin lands); and that the twelfth century seems not to have produced any insular Arthurian counterparts; and indeed that these legends were not English but British, the fact of their later Englishness can only be evidence of the vitality and force of this ideology.[43] Ultimately for these romances, as immediately for the insular texts, to ground a narrative in English territory is to ground it in English national identity. This is a point to which I will repeatedly return.

Among historians, the question of English identity during the twelfth century – its date of resurgence, its nature and expression, its class penetration – has been much debated in recent years.[44] As Rees Davies

---

[41] See Leah Shopkow, *History and Community: Norman Historical Writing in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Washington DC, 1997), p.18, on the few English historical texts known on the continent.

[42] *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: the Verse Tradition from Chrétien to Froissart*, trans. by Margaret and Roger Middleton (Cambridge, 1998), pp.277–8, 291.

[43] An excellent recent study of the English Arthurian legend in the later Middle Ages is Ingham, *Sovereign Fantasies*.

[44] The terms 'Englishness' and 'English identity' have become ubiquitous in recent scholarship of most historical periods, and doubts about their usefulness have recently been expressed: Bruce O'Brien, 'Early Medieval Englishness Reconsidered', paper delivered at the Institute of Historical Research, London, 15 November 2006. In this book, I use the terms in a circumscribed fashion to refer to currents visible in cultural phenomena of the time; their semantic content is not to be identified with that applicable to other places and periods.