A VIDA DE MERLIN: EXPRESSÕES DE TRADUÇÃO CULTURAL NO PAÍS DE GALES MEDIEVAL

THE LIFE OF MERLIN: EXPRESSIONS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION IN MEDIEVAL WALES

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Resumo: Este trabalho se propõe a aproximar o livro *A vida de Merlin*, por Geoffrey de Monmouth, a um dos poemas presentes no manuscrito medieval galês *Livro vermelho de Hergest* ("Um diálogo entre Myrddin e sua irmã Gwendydd"), buscando identificar aspectos de tradução cultural de acordo com o conceito de Bhabha (1994) e sua expansão posterior por Neumann (2013). Durante as primeiras décadas do século XII, a invasão normanda sobre a Grã Bretanha estabeleceu um domínio cultural que repercutiu por séculos, durante os quais a cultura do País de Gales foi reprimida e sofreu tentativas de apagamento. Assim, este estudo busca debater os entre-lugares da obra Monmouth como um texto escrito por um autor conectado ao País de Gales e também inserido na cultura da aristocracia normanda. Esta análise discute os traços de tradução cultural que se fazem presentes na narrativa de Monmouth, verificando a possível existência de pontes entre a cultura galesa e normanda e debatendo a expressão da identidade galesa em textos de escritos em outras línguas, dentre elas o inglês.
Palavras-chave: Tradução cultural; Literatura galesa; Geoffrey de Monmouth; *Livro vermelho de Hergest*; Identidade nacional.

Abstract: This article seeks a comparative reading of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *The Life of Merlin* and one of the poems contained within the medieval Welsh manuscript *The Red Book of Hergest* ("A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd"), in an attempt to identify aspects of cultural translation as defined by Bhabha (1994) and expanded by Neumann (2013). During the first decades of the 12th century, the Norman invasion over Great Britain established a cultural domination, the consequences of which would be felt for centuries, and during which Wesh culture suffered repression and attempts at erasure. In being so, this study seeks to debate the in-between location of Monmouth's work, as a text written by an author who was connected to Wales and also inserted into the culture of Norman aristocracy. This analysis discusses traits of cultural translation within Monmouth's narrative, verifying the possible existence of bridges between Welsh and Norman cultures, while also debating the expression of Welsh identity through texts written in other languages, English among them.
Keywords: Cultural Translation; Welsh Literature; Geoffrey of Monmouth; *The Red Book of Hergest;* National Identity

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Introduction

A look upon the literary history of Wales reveals that matters of national and cultural identity have been long discussed within fictional works by Welsh authors; the concern with identity has, in fact, been a recurrent theme in Welsh literature since the High Middle Ages – with Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gerard of Wales – up to recent years, as can be observed in Sharon Kay Penman's trilogy *Here Be Dragons*, the works of Dylan Thomas, and several other 20th century writers as described by Audrey Becker and Kristin Noone (2011) in the book *Welsh Mythology and Folklore in Popular Culture*. This search for identity has become an intrinsic aspect of Welsh culture, as the country has undergone a process of colonization which changed the development of that region's language and literature, among other cultural aspects. When discussing the contemporary Anglophone Welsh literature and its possibilities, Aleksander Bednarski (2016) speaks of "a hybridised and interstitial space mediating between the minority Welsh-language culture and mainstream English-language culture, undoubtedly renewing and refreshing the latter (p.251).

Several authors have already explored Wales' relation to England under the light of postcolonial theories, pointing to the Middle Ages as the time frame during which cultural, economic, and political domination was established. Thus, it can be argued that the first expressions of Anglo-Welsh literature date from that same early period; the efforts of Welsh authors in translating texts of their own speech and culture into Latin – and later English –, consist of interesting and fruitful material to discussions on the different identities and contexts being expressed through English language.

The Life of Merlin (*Vita Merlini*) was one of Geoffrey of Monmouth's last works, written around 1150. Monmouth was a Norman-Welsh author who lived in 12th century Britain, born in 1100 and who lived approximately to the year of 1155; he is considered one of the first writers to characterize folkloric figures such as King Arthur and Merlin as they are currently known in English tradition. His first and perhaps most famous work, which greatly helped consolidate Merlin's image and fame, was the *The History of the Kings of Britain* (*Historia Regum Britanniae*), completed *c.* 1136. It is understood that Geoffrey of Monmouth's work played a crucial role in inserting those characters within the tradition of literature written in English, and such, aided in the development of chivalry romance and further European literature.

According to Alan Lupack (2007), Geoffrey of Monmouth was a cleric and teacher (signing as *maester* in official documents), but his legacy is mainly that of a writer. It is relevant to note that he introduces *The History of the Kings of Britain* as a translation of one ancient book written in a British language (LUPACK, 2007). Lewis Thorpe (1966) notes that the existence of such book has been largely questioned: Monmouth's references were most likely collected over many different manuscripts, and it is even possible that this ancient tome might symbolically refer to the Welsh oral tradition itself. Through this statement, as demonstrated below, Geoffrey of Monmouth proves to be conscious of his role as a translator from his very first literary work,

> I frequently thought the matter over in this way until Walter archdeacon of Oxford, a man skilled in the rhetorical arts and in foreign histories, brought me a very old book in the British tongue, which set out in excellent style a continuous narrative of all their deeds from the first king of the Britons, Brutus, down to Cadualadrus, son of Caduallo. Though I have never gathered showy words from the gardens of others, I was persuaded by his request to translate the book into Latin in a rustic style, reliant on my own reed pipe. (MONMOUTH, 2007, p. 4)[2]

Geoffrey of Monmouth's writings are always dedicated to some authority figure, either from the clergy of from the nobility; therefore, the author's narratives were explicitly directed to a Norman aristocratic audience. Those works were produced during a time in which the Norman dynasty began to expand and establish their rule over Great Britain; the invasion of Wales, Scotland and Ireland consisted of a colonization process that, although it was not the same as the domination imposed by the 19th century English imperialism, erased and suppressed local cultures and language. According to Sioned Davies (2007), the Norman invasion "ultimately transformed the society, economy, and church of Wales" (p. XVII).

Even though Geoffrey of Monmouth clearly expressed his intend to write to Norman readers, the content of his stories is mainly composed of folktales and characters originated in Welsh oral literature, later transcribed into manuscripts. There are many aspects of *The Life of Merlin* which recall Welsh literary tradition; in light of that, one could trace back not only the narrative's plot, but also its characters, to the

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[2] To quote the Latin text presented by Neil Wright in the 2007 English-Latin bilingual edition of *The History of the Kings of Britain*: "*Rogatu itaque illius ductus, tametsi infra alienos ortulos falerata uerba non collegerim, agresti tamen stilo propriisque calamis contentus codicem illum in Latinum sermonem transferre curaui*" (MONMOUTH, 2007, p.5). This segment can also be observed within the Add MS 15732 manuscript provided by the online catalogue of the British Library (full reference within the Works Cited section).

poems contained within the manuscript *The Red Book of Hergest* – or, *Y Llyfr Coch Hergest* in the Welsh original.

In light of that, the present article aims at identifying elements of cultural translation within the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth through the comparative study of *The Life of Merlin* and the poem "A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd" (*Cyfoesi Myrddin a Gwenddydd a'i Chwaer*), contained within the medieval Welsh manuscript *The Red Book of Hergest* (*c*. 1382). William F. Skene's (1868) translation of *Y Llyfr Coch Hergest*, published in *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, will be referenced throughout this study. Through the discussion of Monmouth's cultural "in-between" position, this article intends to analyze how this author's work helps to establish a dialogue between Welsh and Norman cultures – and in doing so, aided in translating aspects of Welsh literature into some of the most recognizable elements of the English identity. In looking to sections of both texts, while presenting the historical context in which these works were produced, this study seeks to further contribute to the debate about how literature can express social dynamics such as those occurring in Great Britain during the twelfth century, and how they impact on the current cultural and social organization of Wales.

1. Geoffrey of Monmouth in-between locations

In order to better understand how Geoffrey of Monmouth's works contain aspects of cultural translation, it is relevant to revisit the historical environment in which they were first written. Throughout the centuries, Great Britain "has always historically been subjected to waves of invaders and immigrants over the centuries, because of varying economic and social reasons" (FEAR, 2012, p. 15); the Celts arrived at the island in 700 b.C., followed by 400 years of Roman rule, and later the Germanic peoples – Angles, Saxons, and Jutes – invasion, which took place around the 5th century.

As those latter invaders came, the local inhabitants posed resistance and a rupture was created between the British and the Angle-Saxons by putting up physical and linguistic barriers. During the 8th century, Saxon king Offa built a dyke, which was a dirt well right along the frontier between England and Wales – the outline of which is very similar to the limit still held today between both countries. The names Wales and

Welsh were also coined by Germanic rulers; the terms originated from the word *Waelas*, which meant "foreigner" (FEAR, 2016).

As a possible answer to such designation, the British started calling themselves *Cymry*, a word that "derived from a more ancient Brythonic word, *combrogi*, meaning 'fellow countrymen'" (FEAR, 2016, p. 46-47). In light of that, one could argue that Great Britain's political context during the Middle Ages caused the emergence of an early notion of national and cultural identity. In being deemed "foreigners in their own land" (FEAR, 2012, p. 16), the Welsh people developed a sense of belonging and identity through their language and culture as a means of opposing the attempted Norman cultural dominance. In *Postcolonialism Revisited*, Kristi Bohata (2004) analyses the particular reactions and developments to English advances over Wales, expressing that "Welsh nationalism has focused on resisting the cultural imperialism of England, with political autonomy regarded as a means to securing and protecting Welsh cultural difference" (p. 9).

In 1066, the Normans – the people originated from the north region of France known as Normandy – arrived at Great Britain; this event not only marks the founding of feudalism within the isle, but it also resulted in several alterations in local social and political organization. The Norman expansion to the west, pushing into Welsh territory, started a colonization process which to this day affects Welsh culture and national identity. In regards to such events, Alan Fear (2016) writes,

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

During the first half of the twelfth century, Norman kings designed several impositions over Wales, many of which prohibited the building of castles by local rulers, and therefore greatly weakening Welsh military defenses. The control over the land was handed over to Norman barons, who would hold the right to impose English law over the boundaries and execute punishment upon the people who inhabited the region.

The attempted erasure of Welsh culture by Norman – later English – kings continued throughout the following centuries; by the 1600's, King Henry the VIII officially absorbed Wales into England, denying its existence as an independent

political and cultural unit. During the Industrial Revolution which took place during the 18th and 19th centuries, about 44% of people living in Wales were English, and much of Welsh language had disappeared or been irrevocably changed (FEAR, 2012). Thus, it seems appropriate to place at Wales

> […] among countries whose early histories include conquest and colonization prior to the period traditionally addressed by postcolonialism, and whose subjugation or marginalization may indeed continue right through and beyond the eras of overseas mercantilism, colonization and imperialism. (BOHATA, 2004, p. 3).

Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote during the early stages of such process, while the Norman dynasty had still not fully settled their rule. As a monk, Monmouth's works were written in Latin – and so, his texts were targeted towards the nobility and the clergy. That is made evident by the author mainly through the consistent textual acknowledgements to authority figures, such as arch-bishops and princes, showing that Monmouth had the intention of being read by and pleasing those people. – for instance, in the introduction to *The Life of Merlin*, Monmouth makes a complimentary nod to Robert, bishop of Lincoln. The readers and patrons of his works were, then, active part of the Norman colonization and cultural domination over Wales.

According to Thorpe's (1966) analysis, Geoffrey's inspiration in writing his works was a patriotic one (p.9). Such affirmation is worthy of further attention, particularly because the author does not elaborate on what "patriotic" would mean in this context. There seem to be two possible readings to that notion: it could either refer to Monmouth's possible role in translating Welsh culture, or to his intent of allowing Norman aristocracy some level of identification with British through deliberate narrative resources. It can be argued that Monmouth's works do accomplish, to some extent, both of the above mentioned effects: his writing registered and brought to light Welsh pieces of literature which might have otherwise been lost and forgotten over time, but these texts were altered to conform to Norman tastes and expectations.

Thorpe (1966) states that Monmouth had the clear political intent to offer some precedent to the Norman ambitions of conquest — while also gaining the favor of authority figures and making them more receptive to Wales. *The Life of Merlin* presents a reinterpretation of Welsh characters and folktales originated mainly from oral literature; it is possible to note that, even though many of these stories were first put into writing by Monmouth or in posterior manuscripts, they had long been a part of Welsh tradition, likely dating back to the 9th century (ARCHIBALD; PUTTER, 2009). By

taking that into consideration, one could argue that *The Life of Merlin* is a work which encompasses an act of cultural translation, for it displays the literature and culture of one people to those who sought to suppress it.

2. Cultural translation

The concept of cultural translation is outlined by Homi Bhabha (1994) when debating the condition of migrant peoples in the postmodern age; with the developments of postcolonial theories, the author describes the movements and the displacement of people from the "margins" (or "former" colonies) into the Western "centers". Cultural translation, then, would be these individuals' acts of survival within a new social and political context. As Bhabha (1994) points out, "culture is translational because such spatial histories of displacement (…) make the question of how culture signifies, or what is signified by *culture*, a rather complex issue." (p. 172); thus, the peoples who dwell in the transitional spaces between two locations discover a need to reinterpret symbols and build different systems of signification. Acts of cultural translation, as the theorist calls them, essentially challenge and redefine the "center's" discursive institutions,

> It becomes crucial to distinguish between the semblance and similitude of the symbols across diverse cultural experiences – literature, art, music, ritual, life, death – and the social specificity of each of these productions of meaning as they circulate as signs within specific contextual locations and social systems of value. The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification. (BHABHA, 1994, p.172)

Gerson Roberto Neumann, in the article "*Lê-se o que se quer ler: Questões em torno da tradução cultural*" expands on Bhabha's notion of cultural translation by relating the reading of a social context to the attentive reading of a literary text; the author debates that the process of translation is not simply the "transposition of a text and a space" (NEUMANN, 2013, p. 147), but that it consists of a dialogue between two contexts, which implies a movement and a displacement from the starting text to the receiving language text. Such displacement results in the creation of a third space, which Neumann describes as the "in-between", according to Homi Bhabha's theory in *The Location of Culture* (1994).

It seems important to debate Monmouth's works as a part of Wales' in-between cultural location precisely because they have been produced during such times of colonization and cultural oppression. Geoffrey of Monmouth's place of birth has been extensively discussed by Arthurian scholarly: Lewis Thorpe, translator to the 1966 English edition of *The History of the Kings of Britain* points to several passages within this work that could indicate a connexion between that author and Wales, even if other studies have pointed out that Monmouth was likely born to a Norman family which had settled in Great Britain.

When it comes to Geoffrey of Monmouth's biography, it is widely understood that "the epithet Monemutensis, meaning from Monmouth, in south Wales, was once taken as evidence that he was Welsh, though it is more common today to suggest he was of Breton extraction" (ECHARD, 2011, p.46). The few registers about the author's life point to a position in which one might have experienced fragmented identity and ambiguous sense of belonging, which very much recall Bhabha's concept about an intermediate cultural location,

> Being in the 'beyond', then, is to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also, as I have shown, to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to reinscribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond', becomes a space of intervention in the here and the now. (BHABHA, 1994, p.7)

In so far, one could argue that Geoffrey of Monmouth writes from an in-between cultural position; is not possible to be sure whether he was born in Wales or in France – but still, his works carry elements of both cultures. The author himself is possibly an immigrant adjusting between two cultures, and his works express the moment in which the displacement of Welsh people began, intermingling with the Norman invaders. That is precisely the moment which Bhabha (1994) describes as the "interstice" space, the time of translation of cultural difference: "that graphic a moment of transition, not merely the continuum of history; it is a strange stillness that defines the present in which the very *writing* of historical transformation becomes uncannily visible" (p. 224).

Such aspect is crucial to the definition of the in-between, as it results from the articulation of cultural differences which emerge with the creation of identity, be that of an individual or of a nation. Arguably, one of the most relevant notions to emerge in the twelfth century's burst of scholarly is a conception of the "inner-self", which evolved into an early notion individuality; developed mainly through the renewal of religious

views in this "new age", and a deeper practice of self-examination (BENSON et al., 1999), that concept would soon become subject of other cultural manifestations,

> They contributed to the growing sense of individualism, or of individuation, both of people and of groups, which was founded on an examination of the inner life and awareness of self; they contributed also to the emerging doctrine of the dignity of man, based far more on religious then on secular sources and attitudes. The concept of experience, conscience, and virtue were the discoveries of the twelfth-century renaissance no less than of the later Italian Renaissance. (BENSON et al., 1999, p. XXIII)

In the opening lines of *The History of the Kings of Britain*, Geoffrey of Monmouth introduces himself as a translator, and his work as the translation of a very old text of the British language – which indicates that author's consciousness over his own writing process, and the role his work would play as mediation between two cultures. Monmouth states that he has added and reshaped the contents to his "own homely style"; in adapting Welsh poems to the Norman literary aesthetic, Geoffrey of Monmouth articulates both the culture of the invaders and of those oppressed by them. His efforts were focused towards elevating the British (Welsh) in the eyes of the new foreign aristocracy, while not undermining the latter's rule. The author's inclinations seem to not directly challenge the Norman kings, but instead to present the Welsh as possible allies to their system – therefore, joining both peoples as he himself stood in-between the two; it's a political stance, which recalls Bhabha's (1994) considerations on acts of cultural translation as "the ability to shift the ground of knowledges, or to engage in 'the war of position'" (p. 162), and thus exploring different forms of signification and identification.

As Neumann (2013) argues, a translation is essentially a reading of a text, and so, represents a process of mediation between clashing cultural elements. The author points out that when an individual moves to a new location, she is certainly confronted with material and social aspects which would, up to that point, be foreign and strange to her. That notion echoes Bhabha's (1994) statement that "the transfers of meaning can never be total between systems of meaning" (p. 163). A dialogue and mediation of those contrasting elements between cultures is, therefore, a core aspect of translation. About such acts of cultural transitions, Neumann (2013) writes,

> In that moment there is a transference of the cultural baggage already acquired by an individual to the new location so that, departing from the knowledge one already has, a reading of the new environment can take place through comparison, seeking to find similarities with what is known, or also through approximation and

separation with that which is familiar, in order to understand the different.[3] (p. 149, translated by me)

Cultural translation can then be understood as a re-creation of both a person's experiences and of cultural discourses. Bhabha (1994) outlines cultural translation as a relocation of a text's "intentionality" to another context, "repeating and reinscribing" (p.226) the text or experience into another space. One can debate that Geoffrey of Monmouth's works pay testimony to a moment of historical transition and display an attempt at reinterpreting Welsh culture to the new rulers of Great Britain, which then were colonizers – and thus create a new text, a new location. In being so, Neumann's (2013) description comes into play: translations often originate a third space, as it is not possible to simply replace cultural and linguistic aspects from one space to another.

As stated in the previous section, it is unlikely that either *The Life of Merlin* or *The History of the Kings of Britain* were translated into Latin from any specific Welsh texts; it is understood that these works were Monmouth's own creations, through the interweaving of Welsh and Norman literature and the compilation of several different oral and written texts. Still, some aesthetic aspects are recognizable when comparing the poems of *The Red Book of Hergest* to Geoffrey of Monmouth's Latin versions; in being mindful of both languages and the differences between them, Monmouth has made several adaptations when translating the Welsh oral literature and tradition into a Latin manuscript, which will be discussed in the next section.

3. Early expressions of Anglo-Welsh literature

Now, this article turns to the comparative analysis of *The Life of Merlin* and "A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd". *The Life of Merlin* was one of Monmouth's last works; it tells the tale of Merlin, a character presented for the first time in *The History of the Kings of Britain*. This figure was invented by Monmouth as a reinterpretation of characters which belonged to Welsh folktale and earlier medieval manuscripts.

Merlin's first appearance presents a figure which is similar to the prophet Ambrosius, featured in Nennius' work, *Historia Brittonum* (c. 828). In *Life*, however,

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[3] Neste momento ocorre uma transferência da bagagem cultural já adquirida de cada indivíduo para o novo local para que, a partir do conhecimento estabelecido, a leitura do novo meio possa ocorrer por meio de uma confrontação, buscando-se semelhanças com o conhecido ou então, por meio de aproximações e distanciamentos com aquilo que se conhece para definir o alheio.

Merlin seems much closer to the Welsh poet and hero Myrddin; the plot of this narrative also echoes Welsh stories about this legendary figure. Such aspects can be observed when comparing Monmouth's text to earlier poems, for instance "A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd". This poem appears within the manuscript *The Red Book of Hergest*, first transcribed in late 14th century (*c.* 1382), and its transcription is attributed to the scribe Hywel Fychan fab Hywel though its contents belonged to the oral tradition of Wales. However, as Lupack (2007) points out, the material which composes this book "dates to a time significantly earlier than when the manuscripts were written" (p. 329), which indicates that Monmouth might have known about these stories of oral literature and taken them as sources for his own writing. For the purposes of this work, the focus shall remain mainly on the poem's plot and sequence of narrated events. In regards to the formal aspects of the text, Skene (1868) describes,

> The first poem in the *Red Book of Hergest* is the *Cyvoesi Myrddin*, and its peculiar form requires special consideration. It is a species of chronicle written in the shape of a dialogue between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd, in which the latter appeals to her brother's prophetical power to foretell the successive rulers over Britain. This is a device of which there are other examples, and it is a favourite one in rude times. A record of past events is written in the shape of a prophecy of future events, and the period of its composition is indicated by the termination of a distinct and literal record, and the commencement of one clothed in figurative and obscure language. This is a species of poetic chronicle which is peculiarly adapted to addition and interpolation. (p. 235-236)

"A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd" displays several prophecies in which Myrddin describes the line of Welsh monarchs and Gwendydd, his twin sister, takes on the role of interlocutor by making questions about the rulers and by inciting the prophet to continue talking. Myrddin mentions a battle during which the king Gwenddoleu had been killed; he expresses mourning for the lord to whom he had pledge his service by stating that his "reason is gone with ghosts of the mountain" (A CONVERSATION, 1868, p. 464).

The text further implies that Myrddin was overrun by madness after the battle, but still, throughout the whole poem in which the stanzas intercalate the voices of the prophet with that of his sister, Gwendydd refers to him as "great" and "deep". Mirddyn's prophecies are never put into question, and Gwendydd declares,

> Alas! thou dearest, for the cold separation.
> After the coming of tumult,
> That by a sovereign brave and fearless

> Thou shouldst be placed under earth.
> The air of heaven will scatter
> Rash resolution, which deceives, if belíeved:
> Prosperity until the judgment is certain.
> By thy dissolution, thou tenderly nourished. Am I not left cheerless?
> A delay will be good destiny when will be given
> Praise to him who tells the truth. (A CONVERSATION, 1868, p. 476)

The siblings speak of one another with affection and respect, and the truth of Myrddin's prophecies is constantly emphasized. He eventually tries to turn down his sister's questions, but to no avail – he resumes his answers about the future monarchs of Britain. Gwendydd questions him until finally Myrddin finds nothing else to say; he then makes a prediction about the end of the world, and declares that there will be no more rulers, informing his sister simply that "extermination, lady, will be the end" (A CONVERSATION, 1868, p. 475).

Myrddin and Gwendydd show up in Geoffrey of Monmouth's fiction as Merlin and Ganieda, the Latinized version of the original Welsh names – which is a strong indication of the translator's mindfulness of the cultural gaps his text attempts to bridge, for the sound "Myrddin" would have seemed like a rude word (*merde*) to French-speaking readers (LUPACK, 2007). Monmouth altered the characters' names, possibly foreseeing they could be seen as comic or uncomfortable to Norman audiences. Those characters remain siblings and their approach towards prophecy in *Life* seems to greatly diverge from that presented in "Conversation". Welsh literature has a long and stout tradition of prophetic texts, and the narrative's stance about that subject seems to be another indication of cultural translation within *The Life of Merlin*.

Monmouth's text, unlike the poem, has a narrator which introduces the story telling of Merlin's descent into madness after the death of Gwenddoleu on the Battle of Arfderydd. The narrator presents this figure as a famous king and prophet from the south of Wales, who is vessel to powerful foresight. *Life* describes how Merlin fought the battle alongside Gwenddoleu against Peredur, and the immense grief which took his being and led him to wander the Welsh forests "for a whole summer" (MONMOUTH, 1973, p. 57). In time, a traveler finds him, uncovers his identity, and convinces the man to go to king Rhydderch's court, for he was the husband to Ganieda and Myrddin's brother-in-law.

Geoffrey of Monmouth weaves a scene focused on Merlin's prophecies alone, which contrasts, at least at the start, from what is presented in "A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd". In that scene, Merlin reveals that Ganieda was

supposedly cheating on her husband. The woman, in turn, denies these accusations and attempts to fool him into prophesying the wrong thing, to prove him a fraud: Ganieda orders the same child to be brought into the throne room three separate times, and each time the boy is dressed in a different garment. She tells Merlin to predict the child's death, and he indeed describes a different death to each time the boy appears.

That shows the contrast between Gwendydd's attentive observations towards her brother's prophecies and Ganieda's behavior who, in self defense, frames Merlin's visions as fake ravings of an insane mind:

> Why so gloomy, my love? Why so angry over this, and so unjust in your blame of me, and why do you believe a lunatic who muddles lies and truth together because he is out of his wits? Anyone who believes him becomes many times more fool than he. Now watch, and, if I am not mistaken, I shall prove that he is talking nonsense and has not told the truth. (MONMOUTH, 1973, p.67-69).

However, shortly after this episode, the narrator tells that all of Merlin's prophecies would become true; Ganieda truly had a lover, and the boy would, a year from then, suffer through all the scenarios Merlin had described, resulting in the child's demise. The tale goes on with Merlin once again running away into isolation, but he requests that Ganieda bring him from and drink to his hiding location within the forest every now and then. At this point, the tone of the prophecies shifts, and seems to become closer to that which is presented by *The Red Book of Hergest*.

Just as in the Welsh poem, at this moment Merlin begins to utter prophecies of destruction and extermination of the peoples of Britain, describing a dynasty of kings while having Ganieda as an interlocutor. Merlin foresees battles with the Anglo-Saxons, and then, the arrival of the Normans – thus, making references to facts which Monmouth's readers would know to be true. That aspect is important when contextualizing this work, because it was written during a time in which there was uncertainty and conflict about the Norman line of succession. The anxiety the Norman aristocracy would have experienced because of that created a certain need for reassurance, as they sought answers for the future; Monmouth's literary work met the audience's interest by featuring prophecies. In doing so, Geoffrey of Monmouth managed to keep and reinforce the precision of Merlin's predictions, which were already a core aspect of Myrddin's character.

Merlin and Ganieda's initial characterization places them first in an environment of war, followed by a king's court. Those ambiances were possibly another of Monmouth's strategies to mediate two cultures: by connecting the Welsh tradition of

prophecy in some spaces which are very close to the Norman courtly circles, the author invites the audience to relate to his text. Aspects of cultural translation are also apparent in the text's structure; by altering the poem's structure, which is displayed in direct dialogue, and by adding a narrator to the story, Monmouth connects his work to the knightly romance tradition.

During the twelfth century, the idea of chivalry was first created and developed mainly through literature and the romance tradition, particularly within French courts; Geoffrey of Monmouth reinterpreted the tale of *The Red Book of Hergest* in a way to make its aesthetic more familiar and appealing to this target readers. *The Life of Merlin* displays several similarities in tone and theme to the poem "A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd", and ends with a dialogue between Merlin and the bard Taliesin, which is quite possibly also adapted from other Welsh poems.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's work is permeated by a set of diverging voices; the author introduces himself as a translator, showing an intent and understanding of his role, and indeed his texts display several traits which could point to an attempt at mediation between two clashing cultures. Monmouth's design of Merlin embodies the conflicting discourses of his time; in fact, Merlin himself seems to be constantly localized in the borderlands – of civilization, of sanity. By recreating characters from Welsh folktales and literature, Monmouth presents some Welsh cultural elements to the Norman colonizers, which in turn showed interest in the history of Great-Britain, which they sought to dominate.

Thus, the author selects a few traits of the original Welsh poem – such as adventure and prophecy – which could be familiar and agreeable to the Norman readers; in his translation, Geoffrey of Monmouth develops on these elements, inviting his target audience to relate and get involved with the text. Such effort in adaptation, in a way, allows for both cultures to fuse, creating a new, in-between space. In light of that, one can argue that *The Life of Merlin*, as with Monmouth's other works, is constituted by complex, ambiguous approaches towards identity and belonging, and consists of an act of cultural translation. The concept of in-between cultures can explain several aspects of the struggle for Welsh identity, which, because of constant attacks and attempts at erasure, has adapted and reinvented itself. The prophetic tales, very prominent within Welsh medieval poems, have become also a part of English Literature.

In *The Life of Merlin*, Geoffrey of Monmouth translates the mystical tone of the prophecies contained in "A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd", and his text reinforces the truth of such foresight, which is also presented by the poem. That is one of many strategies the author engages in order to mediate between cultures, which points to his work being that of a Norman-Welsh translator looking to create a cultural translation of a Welsh tale into a Latin text. *The Life of Merlin*, then, is an interpretation – a reinvention – of Welsh characters, and that creation process further indicates that this work might be considered as a cultural translation.

Conclusions

The present study has attempted to explain the ambiguous position of Geoffrey of Monmouth and how that relates to his role as a translator and mediator between Welsh and Norman culture. Through the presented analysis, this article has sought to suggest a possible interpretation of Great Britain's history and peoples, looking to the complex social relations which were established between them. A further understanding on the context behind the creation of such a prevalent character like Merlin unveils the processes of cultural domination – and some attempts at mediation – which rooted the formation of national identities and literature within Great Britain. The works of Geoffrey of Monmouth enabled prevalent characters of Welsh literature to be reinvented and inserted into English culture – some of which, like King Arthur, have even become iconic to English identity. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in a process that was at the very least partially conscious, reinvented figures and stories in order to accommodate the expectations of the Norman audience while also registering Welsh culture.

These medieval texts undoubtedly express a hybrid identity – they mediate between two cultures and places. Welsh literary aspects are manifested in such a way that both resists and adapts to the Norman culture, which attempted to erase theirs. Thus, a third location is created, attesting to the complicated processes involving the birth of Welsh national and cultural identity. Whether Geoffrey of Monmouth's works consist of translations of any singular texts, or whether they were new creations, it sustains that their role was that of cultural translations; they transcribe some of the hybrid and complex Welsh identity and adapt into another language. Bhabha (1994) describes the act of translation as an effort in survival, and Geoffrey of Monmouth

undoubtly played a part in the survival of Welsh literature. One can argue that there are in fact different facets of translation in Monmouth's work: a possible textual translation (from Welsh to Latin, or of some specific books that may or may not have existed), and a more verifiable cultural translation, which can be observed through the comparative analysis of his literary works and the Welsh manuscripts of *The Red Book of Hergest*.

The Life of Merlin displays the ambiguous and hybrid nature of Wales; in both embracing some of the invader's cultural aspects and perpetuating its own, this piece of literature stands as the expression of a partial culture, which Bhabha (1994) describes as "the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures" (p.54). Through the analysis of *The Life of Merlin* and "A conversation between Myrddin and his sister Gwendydd", one can observe the portrayal of a unique cultural space which was formed by the complex mingling of two peoples through a colonial process. From the early steps of a budding Welsh cultural identity, which was created in opposition to that of the Normans (later English), there are instances of Welsh literature written in different languages. Wales' ever in-between location has remained a relevant subject to the arts through the centuries and its adaptability has proved a crucial aspect in surviving cultural erasure.

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