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Rex Quondam, Rexque Futurus: Arthurian Legends As Indicators of British National Identity Throughout History

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Rex Quondam, Rexque Futurus:

Arthurian Legends as Indicators of British National Identity Throughout History

by

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by

Madonna Hettinger

Department of History

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INTRODUCTION

ARTHUR: How do you do, good lady. I am Arthur, King of the Britons. Whose castle is that?

WOMAN: King of the who?

ARTHUR: The Britons.

WOMAN: Who are the Britons?

ARTHUR: Well, we all are. We are all Britons and I am your king.

WOMAN: I didn't know we had a king.

...

ARTHUR: I am your king!

WOMAN: Well, I didn't vote for you.

ARTHUR: You don't vote for kings.

WOMAN: Well, 'ow did you become king then?

ARTHUR: The Lady of the Lake, her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water signifying by Divine Providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. That is why I am your king!

DENNIS: Listen, strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony!

ARTHUR: Be quiet!

DENNIS: Well you can't expect to wield supreme executive power just 'cause some watery tart threw a sword at you!¹

While looking at British humor of the past forty years or so, one movie title will invariably pop up: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. A comedic romp through numerous locales in the English countryside leads Arthur, King of the Britons and several of his knights through various adventures on a quest for the fabled Holy Grail. The characters in this scene ask Arthur the question that has perpetuated the existence of the Arthurian Cycle: who is Arthur, and how did he become this mystical king whose legends have persisted for centuries? The characters' questions lead to several more

¹ *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, DVD, directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005.)

related questions from viewers. Why did a famed British sketch comedy troupe choose to make their first film about King Arthur, rather than about unrelated sketch comedy, as they had previously done on television? What about this story makes it so famous that the film is still so beloved over thirty years later? Finally, “what is the airspeed velocity of an unladen swallow?”² The answer to two of “these questions three” can be conjectured as having something to do with the universal appeal of the Matter of Britain, or the Arthurian Cycle.

The Arthurian Cycle refers to the collective story of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table and the adventures surrounding them, as told in every single piece of literature or legend that relates to Arthur in any way. It encapsulates everything from the most ancient Welsh tales to the current BBC television series “Merlin;” anything that adds to or references the legend of Arthur in any way is part of the Cycle. However, some parts of the Cycle are more important than others to the formation of the mythos of Arthur, which will be looked at in this independent study. The Cycle is often also referred to as the Matter of Britain, as the majority of its stories are set in Britain and it is regarded as Britain’s national epic.

Ancient epics, such as Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Homer’s *Odyssey*, or the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, were used to explain the founding of a city or state, or to provide a hero for that particular culture. Despite the rich oral tradition of the British Isles, prior to the story of Arthur there was no truly national epic or story that was told throughout the entirety of the Isles. By looking at the Arthurian Cycle as a mythic cycle, it can be

² *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

regarded as a foundation and creation myth for Britain, a way to answer the Monty Python question quoted above: “Who are the Britons?”³

Of course, this is a difficult question to answer; the British Isles are a land with a history of invaders who settled the land, became the natives, and then were invaded themselves by new groups from mainland Europe. Ultimately, this caused problems with defining the national identity of the ancient Britons. What defined a “Briton” during the earliest existence of the Arthurian Cycle is unimportant to this study. However, when viewed as an epic, it can be conjectured that the Arthurian Cycle became popular in Briton due to its establishment of a national identity under one king, Arthur.

This independent study examines three versions of the Arthurian Cycle, and attempts to connect each version to then contemporary Matters of Britain. Specifically, this study examines Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*, T.H. White’s *The Once & Future King*, and Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon*. *Le Morte d’Arthur*, first published in 1485, has been a major influence on many of the Arthurian works published since. In his work, Malory deals with national identity through his use of contemporary dynastic struggles, such as the War of the Roses, as his inspiration. *The Once & Future King* was first published completely in 1958, with sections published separately starting in 1939. White’s version of the Arthurian Cycle is important due to its social and political commentary, especially on wartime Britain in regards to questions of national identity, and as a different interpretation of Malory’s work than had ever been seen before. With the exportation of British culture throughout the former British Empire and the fact that the monarchs were technically of German descent, not British,

³ *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

White's commentary on national identity was more topical than ever. Finally, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*, first published in 1983, looks at an older Arthurian literary tradition than that used by Malory. This tradition is rooted in a Romanized Britain instead of the feudalistic tradition perpetuated by Malory, and shown by Bradley through a feminist point of view; it is reminiscent of the more matriarchal Britain that existed during the time of women such as Boudicca, and brings up questions of national identity at the time. Bradley looks at national identity in Britain by envisioning Arthur's development of a kingdom on the cusp of abandoning the old pagan ways and embracing Christianity. She succeeds in looking at the mythos through what was, at the time of publication, an entirely new way of viewing the Matter of Britain.

As with many famous works of literature, each of these three works of Arthurian literature are products of the time they were written. By calling them products of the time they were written, we mean that they reflect the social and political status of their authors' lifetimes, oftentimes through the insertion of scenarios or caricatures of people that readers may recognize. Identifying those insertions and possible influences from each author's own personal life, as much as is possible, better allows a reader to understand the historical perspective of the time in which they were written, and therefore to engage the book on a deeper level. Due to Arthur's status as the literary hero of the "Epic of Britain," he is an excellent way of delivering these perspectives to readers through a fictional lens. By looking at Arthurian legends as vehicles for political and social ideals of their day, the importance of each work becomes clear. Arthur can stand for several things politically over the course of the Arthurian Cycle: the importance of rightful and just kingship, the difficulty of uniting a land of diverse peoples, and the best

way to rule a land, at least in that author's opinion. Through this, these authors are able to deliver a historical perspective and a picture of British national identity of their own time through a well-known story: that of Arthur, king of the Britons.

“It is I, Arthur, son of Uther Pendragon, from the castle of Camelot, King of the Britons, defeater of the Saxons, sovereign of all England.”⁴

Origins of Arthur, Origins of Britain

One of the greatest mysteries surrounding the legendary King Arthur is quite simply, who is Arthur; is he a man, a myth, or a legend? The mention of knights in shining armor invariably brings up images of King Arthur's court at Camelot, filled with heroic knights and lovely ladies. But where did this image come from? More importantly, what purpose did it serve? Part of the difficulty with the character of Arthur is reconciling the idea of a real king and a mythical figure. A simple solution would be to state that if Arthur existed, then the portrayal of him was based in fact, and then idealized to become the chivalric idol he is seen as in literature; this assumption will be taken in this study, as it does not deal with the question of the “real” Arthur's life in any way.⁵

Until historians get a time machine, it will be nearly impossible to determine whether or not Arthur as a literary figure was based on a real person. However, it is possible to form a chronology of important works about Arthur throughout history, starting with Arthur as a legendary Welsh war leader, or *dux bellorum*. He first appears

⁴ *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

⁵ Geoffrey Ashe, “The Origins of Arthurian Legend,” *Arthuriana* 5, no.3 (1995): 1, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed February 23, 2012.)

in a Welsh poem called *Y Gododdin*, written around 600 AD by a poet called Aneirin.⁶ In *Y Gododdin*, Arthur appears to have already been established as a Welsh hero, due to favorable comparisons to a hero named Gwawrddur claiming that he “was not Arthur.”⁷ This implies that people exposed to the tale knew enough about Arthur to understand a simple reference to him, no context needed. Arthur is referenced again in another Welsh tale, that of *Culhwch ac Olwen* in the *Mabinogion* from around 1100 AD.⁸ While the rest of the tales of the *Mabinogion*, and indeed *Culhwch ac Olwen*, do not appear to be Arthurian tales upon first glance, they again mention Arthur in passing, as if readers already know who he is. The *Mabinogion* tales also contain many similar elements to later Arthurian tales, such as a disguised king sleeping with the wife of one of his nobles, a Merlin-esque figure, and a tale similar to that of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.⁹ As such, Arthur’s first appearance on the literary scene that we have record of today is in the form of an already-established legendary figure.

Arthur’s next appearance is in the form of a pseudo-historical document on the history of Britain, known as the *Historia Brittonum*, written by Nennius, a monk in the early ninth century. While today it is recognized that Nennius was not, in fact, a master historian, at the time his mentioning of a chronology of twelve battles that Arthur fought was historical proof enough for Arthur’s existence.¹⁰ Arthur is also mentioned in the *Annales Cambriae*, the Annals of Wales, which has yet another discussion of his

⁶ Roger Sherman Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1963,) 16.

⁷ Derek Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003,) 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance*, 24.

¹⁰ Ashe, “The Origins of Arthurian Legends,” 2.

battles.¹¹ These two sources, though vague and seemingly not containing very much information about Arthur, are seen as the true beginning of the King Arthur as he is known today.

Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, or History of the Kings of Britain, written between 1130 and 1136, is regarded as the base for many of the Arthurian legends that will be discussed later.¹² Unlike later Arthurian tales, Geoffrey's work is regarded as a history, though one of dubious factuality. Geoffrey appeared to consider himself a "historian," using sources such as Gildas, Bede, Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*, and the *Annales Cambriae* as his primary sources, none of which are particularly historical documents. However, much of his writing appears to have no source, including almost 4/5 of the story of Arthur that he recounts. Either he used sources lost to current researchers, or he invented portions of the narrative himself.¹³ Geoffrey spent a large part of his life in Oxford, where he was presumably surrounded by learning and libraries; though he may not have been a historian, he was at the least an educated man, as evidenced through his composition of his work in Latin.¹⁴ Much of his Arthurian narrative focuses on Arthur as a "Gallic conqueror," with many continental conquests.¹⁵ Geoffrey also focused on the idea of a united Britain under one leader who was able to

¹¹ Ashe, "The Origins of Arthurian Legend," 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7-8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

¹⁴ Brynley F. Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Brut Y Brenhinedd*," in *The Arthur of the Welsh*, ed. Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991,) 99; hereafter cited as "Geoffrey of Monmouth." Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 13.

¹⁵ Ashe, "The Origins of Arthurian Legend," 10.

defeat the Saxons.¹⁶ Through this, the idea of Arthur as a conquering, uniting hero is mentioned for the first time.

The Arthurian Cycle was most likely introduced to France in the 12th century, through a translation of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* by an Englishman named Robert Wace, who entitled his French translation as the *Roman de Brut*, and presented it to Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen of Henry II of France.¹⁷ It focused more on a court-oriented romance story, instead of the pseudo-historical battles recounted by Geoffrey of Monmouth.¹⁸ A romance was a newer type of story at the time that focused on the love between a man and a woman, but not on physical consummation of said love; it is also referred to as a story of courtly love. They also tend to focus on the details of life, rather than the details of battle, which would interest fashionable women such as Eleanor more than explicit battle scenes.¹⁹ This shift in focus can be attributed to the influence of the court of King Henry Plantagenet and Eleanor, regarded as one of the most interesting courts in Europe at the time due to the active social scene surrounding it.²⁰

Almost one hundred years after the first Latin publication of *Historia Regum Britanniae*, the French *Roman de Brut* was translated into standard English of the day by a man named Layamon, who titled his version the *Brut*.²¹ Seen by Derek Pearsall as the first truly English epic, it retains this title due to its composition in English, not the Latin or French of the upper classes.²² Layamon shifted the focus of the narrative away from

¹⁶ Roberts, "Geoffrey of Monmouth," 102, 105.

¹⁷ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²² *Ibid.*, 16.

the French-inspired court intrigues and back to the battlefield, where warriors were given the opportunity to show off their physical prowess.²³

At this point, the “Matter of Britain,” as the Arthurian Cycle is sometimes referred to, splits into two distinct directions. First, as mentioned in the prior paragraph, there are the stories of French romances. These tales tended to tell of chivalry and courtly love, and sometimes incorporated fantastical elements, which were acceptable because romances such as those portrayed were not expected to be real or historical.²⁴ The other direction is more historical, similar to Geoffrey of Monmouth’s writings, and more often than not written in England.²⁵ Instead of focusing on Arthur, the French romances tend to focus on the courtly love of Lancelot and Guinevere, while English tales had Arthur as the most central figure, fitting for tales in the so-called Arthurian Cycle.²⁶ However, the French style of romances did in fact remain more popular than English style historical tales for many of the following centuries, due to their court-oriented storylines.

The tales of French poet Chrétien de Troyes support this belief on the popularity of French romantic Arthurian legends. Writing in the late twelfth century, de Troyes composed four complete Arthurian-inspired poems and one unfinished one.²⁷ De Troyes’s poems are notable for introducing several important aspects of the Matter of Britain into Arthurian legends, including the Holy Grail, a bleeding lance, the character

²³ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 18.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 20, 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

of the Fisher King, and the idea of Lancelot as Queen Guinevere's lover.²⁸ To this day, Chrétien de Troyes remains one of the more influential authors of French Arthurian romances, and one of the more widely known ones. This is in part due to the fashionable use of French as a first language among the English nobility after the Norman Conquest up until the time of Chaucer, making French literature more widespread in Britain than would be expected.²⁹

Another of the more widely known French Arthurian romances, and one that had a large influence on Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* is the Vulgate Cycle. Most likely written by multiple monks and compiled by other editors, it came together somewhere in France between 1215-1230.³⁰ The Vulgate Cycle is composed of several parts, beginning with the *Estoire del Saint Graal* and the *Estoire de Merlin*, which respectively tell the stories of how the Holy Grail was brought to England and how Merlin placed Arthur on the throne of Britain.³¹ In modern editions, it is a huge work, composed of two thousand pages of text.³² The authors took inspiration for various parts of the Vulgate from Chrétien de Troyes, creating another link between authors of Arthurian legends.³³ The largest and most complete part of the Vulgate Cycle is the *Lancelot – Graal Cycle*, which is composed of the *Lancelot*, the *Queste del Sainte Graal*, and the *Mortu Arthur*.³⁴ These stories deal with the story of Lancelot from his birth until

²⁸ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 26, 36.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 43. Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance*, 93.

³¹ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 44.

³² Edward Donald Kennedy, "The Grail and French Arthurian Romance," in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009,) 209.

³³ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁴ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 44.

death.³⁵ The Vulgate Cycle is thought to have been revised between 1230 and 1240, adding additional stories entitled *Le Roman de Tristam de Léonois* and *Suite du Merlin*.³⁶

Several important parts of Arthurian legend were introduced through the Vulgate Cycle. It was the first time that the character of Galahad, Lancelot's son, appeared in a work of Arthurian literature. His name, which has biblical and Celtic origins, helps reinforce the relationship between the Matter of Britain and the Church, first explored in stories of the Holy Grail that were not associated with Arthurian legends at all.³⁷ The *Estoire de Merlin* is also the first time that the apparently deadly relationship between Merlin and the cunning sorceress Nyneue is explored in literature, giving it an important place in Arthurian legend.³⁸ The lack of Merlin as a wise counselor to Arthur after his seduction by Nyneue can be seen as the reason for the downfall of the Round Table. The Vulgate also is the first time that the sword Excalibur is thrown into a lake upon Arthur's death, returning it to the Lady of the Lake.³⁹ Finally, the *Estoire del Saint Graal* contains the first time it is explicitly stated in Arthurian legend that Joseph of Arimathea brought the Grail to Britain, again displaying a link between biblical and Arthurian stories that was most likely perpetuated by the monks composing The Vulgate.⁴⁰

After the Arthurian Cycle became popular in France, it spread throughout other parts of Europe; in particular, translations of Chrétien de Troyes became popular in German-speaking areas.⁴¹ Of these translations and adaptations, Wolfram von

³⁵ Kennedy, "The Grail and French Arthurian Romance," 208.

³⁶ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 44-45.

³⁷ Kennedy, "The Grail and French Arthurian Romance," 209.

³⁸ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 44.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁰ Kennedy, "The Grail and French Arthurian Romance," 211.

⁴¹ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 50.

Eschenbach's *Parzival* is the most notable for its addition of religious themes to the story, an aspect not focused on by de Troyes.⁴² While German Arthurian stories are no longer as well known as French or British tales, the fact that they became popular across the continent emphasizes the lasting appeal of the Matter of Britain.

When dealing with the story of Arthur, many similar and indeed the same titles are used over and over again. For example, there are at least three works referred to as "Morte d'Arthur": the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, the stanzaic *Morte Arthur*, and Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. While the third work will be dealt with later on in this study, the first two can be explained here. The alliterative *Morte Arthure* is a poem written in "unrhymed four-stress lines with alliteration on stressed syllables," hence the name of alliterative verse and use of the word alliterative to distinguish it from other works of the same title.⁴³ The poem deals solely with the end of Arthur's reign and the heroic deeds that occurred during the final days of Arthur's life. The stanzaic *Morte Arthur* similarly deals with the end of Arthur's life, but instead of looking at it in terms of battles, deals with it in terms of Lancelot and Guinevere's love for one another. It is written in alternate-rhyming eight-line stanzas, which distinguishes it from the other "Morte Arthurs" and gives it the adjective of stanzaic in its name.⁴⁴ These two tales serve as a link between works such as the Vulgate Cycle and works written in the style of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

While the titles of works in the Arthurian Cycle may sometimes be similar, the character names used often change between works in regards to spelling. Though Arthur

⁴² Loomis, *The Development of Arthurian Romance*, 70.

⁴³ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 64.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

himself is generally safe from name changes, characters such as Guinevere, Morgan le Fay, Lancelot, and Merlin go through many different name spellings over the course of the Arthurian Cycle. In fact, within one page of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, it is not uncommon to see Merlin's name spelled three different ways: Merlin, Merlyn, and Merlion being a few examples. Because each of the works in this study spells certain names differently, it seems reasonable to use the correct name spelling in each chapter for the book currently being discussed. In the introduction, the chapter on Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and the conclusion, this study simply uses the most common spelling of the characters' names. Appendix A contains a list of the differing spellings used in this study, and which names they correspond to in the other works examined.

Returning to the historiography of the Arthurian Cycle, the tale of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* follows in the tradition of the alliterative *Morte Arthure* and is also written in alliterative verse. Composed in the fourteenth century by an unknown English poet, the poem focuses on the importance placed on chivalric actions within Arthurian legends.⁴⁵ It shows another aspect of Arthurian legends briefly touched on before, in the Welsh tales; that is to say, it assumes that the reader is well-enough acquainted with tales of Arthur so as not to require a complete explanation of who he is and how his knights are organized. This use of Arthur as a background reference also is present in the *Lais of Marie de France*, particularly the lai of *Lanval*. Written between 1160 and 1180 in England, Marie de France's writing is an excellent example of Arthur as a reference point in literature.⁴⁶ Geoffrey Chaucer also references Arthur in *The Canterbury Tales*, during "The Wife of Bath's Tale," which is set partially in Arthur's court. Through this, a

⁴⁵ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

reference to Arthur is seen in one of the most popular tales to come out of the Middle Ages.⁴⁷

Arthurian romances appear to have waned in popularity during the Tudor monarchy. The only major Arthurian work to appear during the reign of the Tudors was Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, completed in 1589 and revised in 1596.⁴⁸ Though regarded as an important part of the poetic history of England, *The Faerie Queene* is yet another work that uses Arthur as a background reference, and in fact to the unobservant reader appears to have nothing to do with him. However, the composition of the work was a way of honoring a Tudor monarch, Elizabeth, who was of a dynasty that claimed to be descended from Arthur.⁴⁹ The appearance of Arthur as a background character and a focus on the importance of chivalry within the work necessitates the inclusion of *The Faerie Queene* in the Arthurian Cycle.

Arthurian stories proceeded to fall out of style within the writing world until the nineteenth century, where they were resurrected by the popularity of Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott. Scott authored two poems that focused on Arthurian themes, "Sir Tristrem" in 1804, and "The Bridal of Triermain" in 1813.⁵⁰ With these poems, he ushered in a new age of popularity in regards to Arthurian literature. Scott was followed soon by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, who wrote of Arthur in a number of poems. Spanning the time from 1830 to 1885, he composed poems such as "Lancelot and Guenevere," "The Lady of Shalott," "Morte d'Arthur," and the twelve-poem series of "Idylls of the

⁴⁷ Christopher Dean, *Arthur of England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987,) 129.

⁴⁸ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 112.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

King.”⁵¹ Unlike the French Arthurian romances, Tennyson’s works portrayed the very strict Victorian ideal; no sex or adultery was shown in his works. While older Arthurian works may still have been popular during this of revival, Tennyson’s clean poetry based on Malory’s work captured the imaginations of a Victorian audience.

Mark Twain brought the nineteenth century to a close in terms of Arthurian literature. *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, published in 1890, tells the tale of a modern man transported back in time to the court of King Arthur. Instead of focusing on the chivalric actions and courtly romance of earlier Arthurian tales, Twain used his work as a way to contradict old ideals. With the beginning of a new century, his work led the way in taking a familiar story and using it as a vehicle for satire, similar to T.H. White’s *The Once & Future King*.

With the dawn of the twentieth century, the Arthurian Cycle experienced a sharp rise in popularity. In almost every form of media from book to movie to television to music, the tale of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table has appeared time and again to inspire new generations of readers and viewers. Likewise, the Matter of Britain has taken on many forms and crossed genres, from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*’s dry British humor to Terry Gilliam’s movie *The Fisher King*, essentially an adaption of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, to *Camelot 3000*, a comic book series published by DC Comics from 1982-1985 chronicling the adventures of Arthur and his knights as reincarnations of their former medieval selves who save the Earth from aliens led by Morgan le Fay. As times continue to change and evolve, so does the Matter of Britain, displaying why it truly is the English epic.

⁵¹ Pearsall, *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*, 120, 122.

CHAPTER ONE

LE MORTE D'ARTHUR AND THE BIRTH OF A KING

Regarded as one of the primary tales of the Arthurian Cycle, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* was first published in standard English of his time in 1485 by the English printer William Caxton. It is divided into eight different books, each of which contains a different narrative focus. This organization enables Malory to show many different aspects of the story of Arthur and tell the tales of many different characters. The first book, "The Tale of King Arthur," tells the tale of Arthur's birth, and the beginnings of his kingship. It also focuses on the initial founding of the Round Table, and Arthur's fathering of Mordred on his half-sister Morgause. The second book, "The Tale of the Noble King Arthur That Was Emperor Himself Through Dignity of His Hands" focuses on the story of Arthur's conquest of Rome and crowning as the Roman Emperor. The other major event in the book is Arthur's fight with the giant Galapas, who terrorizes women; predictably, Arthur wins. The third book, "The Noble Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake," focuses on Lancelot's numerous adventures while he avoids Arthur's court and at the same time, Guinevere. The fourth book, "The Tale of Sir Gareth of Orkney That Was Called Bewmaynes," tells the story of Gareth's entrance into Arthur's court as an unknown young man. He is christened Beaumains, or "fair hands," by Sir Kay, and wins the respect of the Round Table through his fighting prowess and

love of a lady. This is one of Malory's tales for which no extant source can be found; therefore, it is assumed to be his own original work.¹

The fifth and longest tale is "The Book of Sir Tristram de Lyones." Consisting of close to half of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, it tells the story of Tristram's love for Isolde, along with stories of various other knights. The sixth tale, "The Tale of the Sangreal," tells the story of the search for the Holy Grail, focusing on the stories of Lancelot, Galahad, Percival, Bors, and Gawaine. Of these, only Galahad is truly successful in fulfilling the quest, and dies upon realizing it. The seventh tale, "The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere," discusses the love between the pair, and the obstacles they come up against as they become more and more open about their love. Finally in the eighth tale, "Le Morte d'Arthur," Guinevere and Lancelot's love is openly revealed to Arthur, who is essentially forced to go to war with Lancelot to protect his own masculine honor. In the mean time, Arthur's son by his sister Morgause, Mordred, attempts to take over the kingdom. Arthur is forced to redirect his forces into battle with Mordred's soldiers instead of towards Lancelot and Guinevere. In this final battle, Mordred and Arthur both give each other fatal wounds, leading to Mordred's death. Before his death, Arthur is taken away by barge to Avalon, where he will presumably wait until one day he is called upon to fulfill his title of "The Once and Future King."²

Sir Thomas Malory proves to be one of the most enigmatic authors of Arthurian tales due to a lack of biographical knowledge about him; in fact, anything known for certain about the man comes from the text of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Based on information

¹ Terence McCarthy, "Malory and His Sources," in *A Companion to Malory*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996,) 76.

² *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1947.)

from *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Malory was a knight and a prisoner, and finished writing *Le Morte d'Arthur* between March 3, 1469 and March 4, 1470.³ Beyond this, any information is pure conjecture. So then, who was Sir Thomas Malory? As researchers such as P.J.C. Field have shown, there were several Thomas Malorys alive during the time in which *Le Morte d'Arthur* was written. Field, a leader in Arthurian scholarship, agrees that the most likely candidate for the true author is Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel in Warwickshire, and other writers on the subject accept his decision.⁴ By looking at historical information such as when various Thomas Malorys were imprisoned, which were knights, and whether or not the slang used in *Le Morte d'Arthur* is the slang used in their area of the country, Field concludes that Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel is the author.

After overcoming the hurdle of determining which Thomas Malory is the correct one, the next complication is a lack of information on his life in particular. Nothing certain is known about Malory prior to when he witnessed a land settlement for a cousin on May 23, 1439.⁵ As shown in documents relating to his wife's death in 1479, he held his manor of Newbold Revel as a vassal of John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.⁶ Malory

³ P.J.C. Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993,) 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4-5. Nellie Slayton Aurner, "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?," *PMLA* 48, no. 2 (1933): 362. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed February 8, 2012.) William Matthews, *The Ill-Framed Knight: A skeptical inquiry into the identity of Sir Thomas Malory*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966,) 7, 38; hereafter cited as *The Ill-Framed Knight*.

⁵ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 64-65.

⁶ Matthews, *The Ill-Framed Knight*, 15.

had one recorded wife, Elizabeth Walsh of Wanlip, who bore his heir Robert.⁷ She survived Malory by eight years after his death on March 14, 1471.⁸

By all reports, Malory was not an extremely law-abiding man; within his own work he refers to himself as a prisoner, asking readers to pray “that God sende me good delyveraunce,” adding to this perception of lawbreaking.⁹ However, it is unknown why Malory was imprisoned during the writing of *Le Morte d’Arthur*; searches of the legal records for those years do not state why he was imprisoned or if he ever went to trial. As a result, it is concluded by Field that Malory was imprisoned without formal charges by the Yorkist monarchy in the late 1460s, during which time he composed *Le Morte d’Arthur*.¹⁰

From legal records, it is possible to see the other crimes of which Malory was accused. His criminal record begins around 1450, when he was imprisoned for various violent crimes, including two rapes.¹¹ The same year, he was also charged with leading a band of men in an attempt to murder the Duke of Buckingham, a Lancastrian.¹² Although the list of his supposed crimes is too extensive and convoluted to be recounted here, many of them are against supporters of the Lancastrian side in the War of the Roses, which brings about the general assumption that Malory himself was a Yorkist. As his liege lord, John Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk was a Yorkist, it can be conjectured that Malory’s support of the Yorkists is somehow related to a desire to appease his overlord. He was in fact imprisoned by the Lancastrian government for most of the 1450s, and

⁷ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 133

⁹ *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3:1260.

¹⁰ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 131.

¹¹ Matthews, *The Ill-Framed Knight*, 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

released during the Yorkist seizure of power in 1461.¹³ However, in the late 1460s, Malory was again imprisoned, this time by the Yorkist government.¹⁴ It is unclear due to a lack of documents what would have caused the government he initially supported to throw him in prison, but he remained there until his death. Whatever the reason for his various imprisonments, there is no conclusive way to prove his innocence now. Unfortunately his reputation will remain stained for the time being, only slightly remedied by the chivalric treatises advocated in *Le Morte d'Arthur*.¹⁵

William Matthews, one of the foremost biographers of Malory, views *Le Morte d'Arthur* as an “act of contrition” for earlier crimes committed.¹⁶ Acknowledging his wrongdoing, Malory may have seen his chivalric work as a way of exemplifying what he saw as a better way of life than the life he led.¹⁷ However, if *Le Morte d'Arthur* were an apology for crimes committed, Malory would have most likely mentioned this in his manuscript.¹⁸ The variables are too great to determine whether or not this is true; for example, a publisher could have edited the work, removing any apology. With such a great span of time separating scholars from Malory, it is almost impossible to determine what his true intent was in writing *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Another difficulty surrounding *Le Morte d'Arthur* is the existence of two differing versions of the text. Until 1934 the only text known to exist was a printed text, referred to as the Caxton text, which had been printed by English publisher William Caxton in

¹³ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 54.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁵ Matthews, *The Ill-Framed Knight*, 47.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

1485.¹⁹ In 1934, the Winchester, or Malory, manuscript was discovered within the depths of Winchester College library, and subsequently used by Eugène Vinaver as a basis for his version of *Le Morte d'Arthur* entitled *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*.²⁰ Vinaver's text has been seen as the conclusive text since its publication. His accompanying commentary, proclaiming that Malory had intended to write eight separate tales instead of one complete work, has provided much debate for scholars since its publication in 1947.²¹

While neither of these works is regarded as Malory's original text, the existence of the two different texts brings up the question of authorial intent: which is closer to Malory's original vision of the work? Similarly, why did Caxton and the scribe who copied the Winchester manuscript change what they did in the work?²² As the scribe of the Winchester manuscript is unknown, it is only possible to truly look at Caxton's changes to the work, which must be done by comparing them to his other printed texts.

Caxton was one of the few printers in England in Malory's lifetime, and one of the most prolific. Many of his printed books were translations from other languages, which he then made available to the growing middle class who could only read in English. Other works were simply edited by him, and still others contained interludes or

¹⁹ Bonnie Wheeler and Michael N. Salda, introduction to *Arthurian Studies XLVII: The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte d'Arthur* ed. Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick, and Michael N. Salda, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000,) ix.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, x.

²¹ R.M. Lumiansky, introduction to *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964,) 3.

²² Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 2.

introductions of his own composing.²³ Any changes made by Caxton to Malory's original work were therefore most likely made in the interest of clarifying an element of the text for readers. The main difference between the two copies of the work is the addition of chapter and book headings in Caxton's text, which are missing in the Winchester manuscript. Regardless of how he may have changed the text of *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Caxton is essentially responsible for the entire body of English Arthurian literature, as Malory's work, and not Arthurian literature from other languages, inspired the majority of it.²⁴

Like writers who followed him, Malory took inspiration from other Arthurian tales while composing *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In some instances, he actually translated the works directly, instead of paraphrasing and changing them. However, some of the sources he used, especially French sources such as the Vulgate, were up to ten times as long as *Le Morte d'Arthur*; in these cases, he obviously shortened the stories while adapting them.²⁵ Because of Malory's faithfulness to his original sources, it is possible to figure out which sources he used at different points in the book. He most often used stories from the Vulgate Cycle, such as *Prose Lancelot*, *Suite du Merlin*, and *La Queste del Saint Graal*.²⁶ Instead of focusing on Arthur, these French works focused on the story of Sir Lancelot, a French knight.²⁷ Malory also referenced *Prose Tristan*,

²³ William Matthews, "The Besieged Printer," in *Arthurian Studies XLVII: The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte d'Arthur*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick, and Michael N. Salda (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000,) 41.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁵ Aurner, "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?," 365.

²⁶ McCarthy, "Malory and His Sources," 75.

²⁷ Edward Donald Kennedy, "Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*: A Politically Neutral English Adaptation of the Arthurian Story," in *Arthurian Literature XX*, ed. Keith Busby and

Perlesvaus, *La Mort le Roi Artu*, and the fifteenth century English poem referred to as the alliterative *Morte Arthur*.²⁸ The real mystery is how Malory was able to access his sources while apparently in prison; the most likely answer is the use of a library near his prison, possibly Greyfriars Library in London. Whether or not a prisoner would have access to such a library while imprisoned is unknown.²⁹ Again, like much of the history surrounding Malory's life, this is truly a mystery as well.

Though he referenced many different Arthurian legends while writing, Malory appears to not have read many other works besides those involving Arthur, due to a general lack of literary allusions in *Le Morte d'Arthur*.³⁰ However, he did appear to have been familiar the Arthurian writings of Chrétien de Troyes, as he made several references to him in his book.³¹ Malory also apparently knew various English works of Arthurian literature, due to his preference for using Anglicized knights' names in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Many of the characters associated with these names only appear in English texts, making it certain that Malory had read them.³² Writers are often told to write what they know, and Malory appears to have been no exception; after having been involved in crimes against the Lancastrian side in the War of the Roses, a conflict over a throne, it makes sense that he would write about another conflict for a throne, such as that between Arthur and Mordred.³³

Roger Dalrymple (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003,) 159; hereafter cited as "Malory's *Morte DArthur*."

²⁸ McCarthy, "Malory and His Sources," 75-76.

²⁹ Aurner, "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?," 371.

³⁰ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 172.

³¹ McCarthy, "Malory and His Sources," 81.

³² *Ibid.*, 81.

³³ Aurner, "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?," 365.

The main armed conflict that occurred during Malory's lifetime was the English War of the Roses. Attempts to research which side of the conflict Malory supported has provided contradictory information; P.J.C. Field claims that sources make him out to be a Yorkist.³⁴ On the other hand, Raluca Radulescu claims that Malory had a Lancastrian reputation.³⁵ Furthermore, he was excluded specifically by name from pardons issued by the Yorkist monarch, the side that Field believes he was on.³⁶ Looking at which side he was imprisoned by sheds no light on the question either, as both Yorkist and Lancastrian governments imprisoned him for political reasons at different times. Finally, authors such as Matthews believe that *Le Morte d'Arthur* is a work that is Lancastrian in bias.³⁷ This confusion about Malory's political leanings adds more to the mystery that is the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Due to the massive political changes that occurred during Malory's lifetime, it is easy to take *Le Morte d'Arthur* as a political allegory, and indeed, many readings of the book do portray it as such. For example, Nellie Slayton Aurner believes that different times in Arthur's life correspond with those of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI, and that "whether with definite purpose or unconsciously [Malory] has selected passages from the prose romances and so arranged them as to give an allegorical presentation of the rise and downfall of English knighthood under the leadership of the Lancastrian line."³⁸ Others such as Radulescu and Peverley believe that Arthur's claim to the throne

³⁴ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 128.

³⁵ Raluca Radulescu, "'John Vale's Book' and Sir Thomas Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur'" A Political Agenda," *Arthuriana* 9, no. 4 (1999): 71, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed February 8, 2012); hereafter cited as "'John Vale's Book' and 'Le Morte Darthur.'"

³⁶ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 131.

³⁷ Matthews, "The Besieged Printer," 43.

³⁸ Aurner, "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?," 366, 377.

and the complaints surrounding it mirror those of the first Yorkist king, Edward IV in 1461.³⁹ Radulescu also points out similarities between Arthur's time as Emperor of Rome and Edward IV's attempts to recover English possessions on the continent.⁴⁰ These conflicts mirror the confusion surrounding Malory's personal alliances during the War of the Roses, and supports the explanation that perhaps *Le Morte d'Arthur* was not written in support of either side of the conflict; instead, it provided an example of what life could be like if a country was not engaged in civil war.

One of Malory's major plot points within *Le Morte d'Arthur* is what makes a good king or leader. In fact, according to Field, Malory himself "was continually seeking a 'good lord,'" as it was common for vassals to serve multiple overlords in an attempt to get as many benefits as possible, and Malory appears to have done this.⁴¹ This also implies that Malory has personal experience with a major part of his book. Knights of the Round Table, such as Sir Gareth, come to Camelot in order to serve an overlord that they deem worthy: King Arthur.⁴² It can also be seen as a national preoccupation during Malory's lifetime, when there was much debate over the nature of kingship and government, most obviously shown through the War of the Roses.⁴³ The transfer of power between Lancastrian and Yorkist kings led to general instability in the monarchy, which was not truly steadied until the ascent of Henry VII, a Tudor, to the

³⁹ Raluca Radulescu, "Malory and Fifteenth-Century Political Ideals," *Arthuriana* 13, no. 3 (2003): 38, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed February 8, 2012.) Sarah L. Peverley, "Political Consciousness and the Literary Mind in Late Medieval England: Men 'Brought up of Nought' in Vale, Hardyng, Mankind, and Malory," *Studies in Philology* 105, no. 1 (2008): 26, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed February 8, 2012); hereafter cited as "Political Consciousness and the Literary Mind."

⁴⁰ Radulescu, "Malory and Fifteenth-Century Political Ideals," 45.

⁴¹ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 103.

⁴² *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 1:294.

⁴³ Radulescu, "'John Vale's Book' and 'Le Morte Darthur,'" 69.

throne in 1485. At the time, it was best for a king to be a strong administrator, someone who could take care of his government and his people at the same time.⁴⁴

According to Pochoda, Malory's Arthur was portrayed as "a ruler with an innate sense of justice," which is displayed best by his actions during the Roman War.⁴⁵ As Malory puts it,

The kynge avalyd and lyffte up his vyser with a knyghtly countenaunce, and kneled to hir myldely with full meke wordes and seyde, 'Shall none myssedo you, madam, that to me longis, for I graunte the chartyrs and to thy cheff maydyns, unto thy chyldern and to thy chyff men in chambir that to the longis. But thy deuke is in daunger, my drede ys the lesse. But ye shall have yvelode to leve by as to thyne astate fallys.'⁴⁶

Through this speech, Arthur shows mercy, and thus justice, to the women and children of a town after promising to attack the city. At this point in the narrative, Arthur still has his advisor Merlin to help in making decisions related to the running of the country. Merlin himself can be generalized throughout the Arthurian Cycle, and thus in *Le Morte d'Arthur* as a wise old man who teaches Arthur how to run a country. As a result, Arthur has an obvious advisor to explain right and wrong to him in regards to the ruling of a country. However, once a lady of the lake named Nynue imprisons Merlin under a rock, Arthur is without a wise councilor for the first time in his reign.⁴⁷

Sirs Agravaine and Mordred eventually step in to fill an advisors' spot in Arthur's life, much to the detriment of his kingship.⁴⁸ Essentially, this change of advisors during Arthur's reign mirrors the rest of his reign; at the beginning, when Arthur had a wise

⁴⁴ Radulescu, "Malory and Fifteenth-Century Political Ideals," 38.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth T. Pochoda, *Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971,) 57; hereafter cited as *Arthurian Propaganda*.

⁴⁶ *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 1:241.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:126.

⁴⁸ Radulescu, "'John Vale's Book' and 'Le Morte Darthur,'" 74.

advisor, his kingship was easy and uncontested by his subjects. With the disappearance of Merlin and entrance of Agravaire and Mordred as councilors, Arthur's reign becomes filled with conflict between those he loves best, his knights. It brings up the question of rightful kingship, and how best to rule. Is it better to keep a realm at peace, but have disagreements among one's soldiers, or to go to war against one's enemies, but have peace among one's soldiers? Although it is impossible to determine how best to rule a country, Malory appeared determined show his favorite option through his storytelling in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. However, he also manages to show how it fails as well with the imminent death of Arthur, and therefore the destruction of his kingdom, being obvious from the very title of the book.

Malory's fascination with chivalry also appears as a prominent theme in the book. Chivalry and knighthood were seen as a way to unite the men of the country, while using them to enforce policies of the government as well.⁴⁹ During the time in which Malory lived, an apparent national fascination with chivalry ran through the British Isles; this could have contributed to Malory's own fascination as well. Prior to Malory's lifetime, King Edward III re-established the Knights of the Round Table at Windsor Castle, an organization that eventually became known as the Order of the Garter. King Henry IV attempted the same thing in establishing the Order of the Bath.⁵⁰ Membership in these orders was seen as a way of promoting national pride, and thus chivalric actions as well. However, as with the Knights of the Round Table, not everyone was eligible to join these orders, and even those who did join were often not as chivalrous as the ideal demands, similar to what happens with Arthur's knights. As a result Aurner believes that Malory

⁴⁹ Pochoda, *Arthurian Propaganda*, 55.

⁵⁰ Aurner, "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?," 369.

mirrors the “rise and downfall of English knighthood under the leadership of the Lancastrian line” within his work.⁵¹

Malory manages to show this rise and fall through various actions that his knightly characters engage in. One of the most prominent examples is that of Sir Gareth, or Beaumains, and his actions while associating with the Lady Lyonet during the tale of “Sir Gareth of Orkney.” As Beaumains says, “Damesell...sey to me what ye woll, yet woll nat I go fro you whatsomever ye sey, for I have undirtake to kyng Arthure for to encheve your adventure, and so shall I fynyssh hit to the ende, other ellys I shall dye therefore,” displaying chivalric patience and courtesey to a lady who finds endless reasons to insult and belittle him.⁵² Another example comes when King Arthur himself

Mette with sir Lamorak and justed with hym, and there he smote downe sir Lamorak and wounded hym sore with a speare. And so he rode frome hym, wherefore sir Lamerok was wroth that he wolde nat fyght with hym on foote, howbehit that sir Lamerok knew nat kyng Arthure.⁵³

Though Arthur had every right to finish off Lamorak, he did not, displaying wisdom and mercy, which were important to have as both a king and a knight.

The fall of English knighthood is best represented at the end of *Le Morte d'Arthur* by the strife between Arthur and Lancelot over Guinevere. Initially, Arthur appears reluctant to attack Lancelot; however, egged on by Sir Gawaine who is angry about Lancelot's accidental killing of his brothers, Arthur gathers his forces to march against Lancelot. This, combined with the destruction of Arthur's Round Table through battle with Mordred's forces, is used by Malory to represent the falling of feudalism and knighthood within English society prior to the War of the Roses.

⁵¹ Aurner, “Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?,” 377.

⁵² *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 1:300.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 2:488.

“Is there someone else up there we can talk to?”⁵⁴

Religion in *Le Morte d'Arthur*

One of the most surprising aspects of *Le Morte d'Arthur* is its apparent lack of focus on religion. While it is hard to write an Arthurian narrative involving the tale of the Holy Grail without involving religion, up until his knights begin the search for the Grail Malory appears to do just that.⁵⁵ Of course, as a story set in medieval England, religion is mentioned, such as the holidays of Christmas and Pentecost or the existence of religious crusades against Islam. However, little focus is given to the Christian Church itself, other than the quest for the Holy Grail.⁵⁶ This lack of religion is especially notable when one realizes the power wielded by the Church in Malory's lifetime. Religion is only explicitly shown in *Le Morte d'Arthur* through Malory's inclusion of the Holy Grail quest in his narrative. While this is not the first time the Grail is introduced in Arthurian literature, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is one of the earlier combinations of Grail and Arthurian literature. It is also interesting to note the lack of religion when one regards how Malory deemphasized the mystical and supernatural aspects of his sources when adapting them for an English audience; *Le Morte d'Arthur* focuses on kingship and chivalry, not the religious and mystical as his sources do. As a result Malory can be seen to focus more on the secular, and therefore physical, well being of his knights than their spiritual well being.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

⁵⁵ Dorsey Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003,) 78; hereafter cited as *Gender and the Chivalric Community*.

⁵⁶ Field, *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*, 82.

⁵⁷ Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, 34.

However, as pointed out by Dorsey Armstrong, Malory's knights take what is regarded in the book as an important oath once a year at Pentecost, the Pentecostal Oath. This Oath is original to Malory, not found in any of his sources or other Arthurian works that he may not have had access to.⁵⁸ Sworn every year at Pentecost the Oath is a promise to behave chivalrously and properly, and it is emphasized throughout the narrative.⁵⁹ Armstrong finds a problem with the Oath, claiming that it "is at once too general and too specific; its clauses delineate proper knightly behavior...and improper activity...without addressing a possible intersection of the two."⁶⁰ An example of this occurs when Sir Lancelot is defending Guinevere from her abductor, Meleagant; while Guinevere calls for his death, Meleagant yields to Lancelot.⁶¹ According to the Pentecostal Oath, Lancelot should at once show mercy to his opponent who yields, but also follow a lady's orders. Hence, the confusion regarding the Oath, which not only Malory's critics but his characters struggle with as well.

The Oath brings up the question of why knights of a court where religion is not emphasized view Pentecost as such a holy day. Malory himself does not appear to have any particularly strong religious leanings, so his emphasis is not entirely expected; however, it is impossible to truly know Malory's religious views. Within Arthur's court, Pentecost is a mysterious and miraculous day, even more so than in the Christian tradition. In spite of not appearing to be a particularly religious king, Arthur will not sit down to dinner on Pentecost without some strange event or miracle occurring in his court. People are also allowed to petition the king for whatsoever they choose on

⁵⁸ Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, 29.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 29, 31.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁶¹ *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 3:1138-1139.

Pentecost, such as Sir Gareth's petition upon arriving at court that Arthur grant him three requests.⁶² If Malory was attempting to appeal to a certain patron, his inclusion of Pentecost as a holy day may have made sense, but as far as is known, Malory did not have a patron while writing *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

As compared to the other books examined in this study by Marion Zimmer Bradley and T.H. White, Malory presents a curious lack of focus on the family in his book. While Arthur and Guinevere are unfortunately not able to have children, and Arthur's regrettable fathering of Mordred on his half-sister Morgause is mentioned, nothing else about the family is truly focused on. With Bradley's work, as will be seen in chapter three, a family tree can be drawn uniting every major character but one by either blood or marriage, showing a distinct emphasis on the familial unit. Even the Orkney family of Agravaine, Gareth, Gaheris, and Gawaine, which favors heavily in the works of T.H. White, is barely mentioned as belonging to the same family in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. We might note that it is ironic that, while Malory mentions so few families in his work, readers know next to nothing about the man's own family life. Perhaps due to his extensive time spent in prison, Malory himself may have known very little about his own family after 1450.

Despite his lack of a patron, it is clear that Malory was writing *Le Morte d'Arthur* for a certain audience. Though French Arthurian romances may have been popular at the time among the upper classes, lower middle class English citizens did not often have the schooling necessary to read French. As a result, Malory's tale appears to have been written for those who were educated, but not highly educated enough to read the story of

⁶² *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 1:294.

Arthur when written in French. He is, in fact, credited with establishing almost the entire body of English Arthurian literature; much of it written since Malory's time has been based on his work, and due to the apparent popularity of his work, much written before his time was preserved. Armstrong conjectures that in writing *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Malory may have been trying to appeal to the fantastical side of his readers with an almost revisionist history where England never lost the Hundred Years War to the French, as is shown in the Roman War episode of his work.⁶³ In the Roman War episode, Arthur is portrayed as a conqueror that ultimately takes over Gaul on his way to Rome. When in Rome, he defeats the Roman army and is crowned Roman Emperor before deciding to return to Britain. Due to the survival of the work, it appears that he succeeded in the goal of entertaining his audiences with his stories.

Within the Arthurian Cycle, Malory occupies quite an important spot. *Le Morte d'Arthur* has heavily influenced authors of Arthurian works ever since its publication, including Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Mark Twain, and T.H. White. Malory can be seen as the beginning of truly English Arthurian literature; prior to him, Arthurian literature from Britain was either written in a language such as French or Welsh, or was regarded as a purely historical work, not entertainment.

However, besides the importance of his work as a lasting Arthurian influence, Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* is unique among earlier Arthurian legends due to what Armstrong says is his "intent to de-emphasize the elements of the spiritual and supernatural...[in favor of] chivalry."⁶⁴ By making Merlin into a mere advisor, instead

⁶³ Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, 10. *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, 1:181-247.

⁶⁴ Armstrong, *Gender and the Chivalric Community*, 27.

of a magician, and by de-emphasizing the role of mystical women such as Morgan le Fay, Malory decreases the appearance of the supernatural in Arthurian literature for one of the first times. Although the mystical elements reappear in later Arthurian literature, it is still notable that they once disappeared; indeed, they are often the focus of modern Arthuriana, such as the BBC's television show "Merlin," or, as will be mentioned later in this study, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*.

Malory focused on the political aspect of Arthurian legend, not the mystical enchanting aspects of other legends, such as those of the French romantic tradition. The political aspects were most likely more relatable to a man who lived through the War of the Roses, and the ensuing declarations of loyalty for the Lancastrian or Yorkist side. The decision behind this sort of declaration can mirror that of Arthur's personal choice in *Le Morte d'Arthur*: allow his knights to stand united against an "outside" enemy, Mordred, or the splitting apart of the kingdom by internal fighting between his and Lancelot's forces. While Malory's Arthur brings about his own death by choosing to fight Mordred's forces, as a king his protection of his country rather than his own honor as a married man mirrors what many of Malory's fellow countrymen may have desired from their monarch: peace in a strife-filled country, regardless of what effect it may have had on a monarch's personal life. Thus, the national identity of an England filled with men that just wanted peace no matter the cost is shown in Malory's work. Through this, one can conclude that Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* provided a picture of a realistic alternative to the reality of kingship during and directly after the War of the Roses. In a time of political instability due to the rapid changing of leadership between the Yorkist and Lancastrian monarchies, a legend containing a well-known mythical figure such as

Arthur, was just what readers needed to understand their own rapidly changing national identity in reference to the unstable monarchy. Malory's use of contemporary dynastic struggles as inspiration for portions of *Le Morte d'Arthur* helped to develop British national identity, and through this, provides a perspective to readers of the future on how the British defined themselves during the War of the Roses.

CHAPTER TWO

THE ONCE & FUTURE KING: ARTHUR IN A NEW ERA

First published completely in 1958, T.H. White's *The Once & Future King* had been amusing readers for almost twenty years prior. It had been published in three separate volumes prior to complete publication, with *The Sword in the Stone* being published in 1939, *The Witch in the Wood* following the same year, and *The Ill-Made Knight* appearing in 1940. In its entirety, *The Once & Future King* tells the story of how the young Wart became the King Arthur of legends, and recounts the major events of his reign. It is divided into four books, "The Sword in the Stone," "The Queen of Air and Darkness," "The Ill-Made Knight," and "The Candle in the Wind," each of which focuses on a different part of the legend of King Arthur. A fifth book, "The Book of Merlyn," was written but not published in the complete edition of *The Once & Future King* at the insistence of White's editors; instead, it was published as a separate volume in 1971, after White's death. Parts of "The Book of Merlyn" were inserted into other books, mainly "The Sword in the Stone," thereby making it redundant to publish an edition of *The Once & Future King* including "The Book of Merlyn."

The first book of *The Once & Future King*, "The Sword in the Stone," tells the story of the Wart's childhood growing up in the castle of his foster father, Sir Ector, with his foster brother Kay. Merlyn, a wizard that the Wart found in the forest, tutors the two boys; however, the Wart receives special tutoring apart from Kay in the form of transformations into various animals to learn about different forms of government. At the end of the book, the Wart pulls a sword out of a stone in an attempt to get a sword for

Kay to compete in a tournament with. As a result, he is crowned King Arthur of Camelot, which leads into the second book, "The Queen of Air and Darkness." This book deals with Arthur's first few years as king, and his difficulties in determining the proper method for governing his kingdom. Eventually, he comes to the idea of the Round Table as a way of channeling his knights' "Might for Right." The book also has a secondary plot that tells of the childhood of the Orkney clan of brothers, Gawaine, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Gareth, who are the children of Queen Morgause and King Lot of the Orkney Isles. Morgause, Arthur's half-sister, seduces him at the end of the book and conceives a boy named Mordred who will ultimately bring about both Arthur's and Camelot's downfall.

The third book of the novel, "The Ill-Made Knight," focuses less on Arthur and more on the story of Sir Lancelot and Guenever. Lancelot originally appears jealous of Guenever, as he greatly idolizes Arthur and does not like having competition for his attention. Guenever and Lancelot fall in love, in spite of knowing that it is wrong to betray Arthur in this way. Lancelot is often gone on quests, in an attempt to stay chaste for God, who is the fourth part of a love quadrangle in Lancelot's life. His internal conflict between his love for Arthur, for Guenever, and for God is the overarching tension in the book. Lancelot is tricked into sleeping with a woman he rescued named Elaine, who bears his son Galahad, and marries her though he still loves Guenever. "The Ill-Made Knight" also deals with the quest for the Holy Grail, and the story of a love affair that spans years; by the end of the book, neither Arthur, Lancelot, or Guenever are young anymore, which is unusual in Arthurian legend, as time usually seems to stand still.

The final book of the tetralogy, “The Candle in the Wind,” describes how Mordred’s hatred for his father ultimately brings about the destruction of Arthur and the entire kingdom of Camelot. Part of this destruction comes about through the revelation of Lancelot and Guenever’s affair, which the entire court knew about already, and the chaos that follows as Guenever is sentenced to death and subsequently saved by Lancelot. The two then hide out in Lancelot’s castle in France, until the pope pardons Guenever and she returns to Camelot. Arthur is forced to fight Lancelot’s forces to defend his own honor, until word comes that in Arthur’s absence from Camelot, Mordred has claimed the throne. Arthur and his forces return to Camelot, and wage battle against Mordred. “The Candle in the Wind” ends on the eve of the Battle of Camlann, with Arthur telling a young page, Tom of Warwick, to spread Arthur’s ideal of peace. Tom, intended to be a reference to Sir Thomas Malory, agrees, and thus Arthur faces battle with a clear conscience, knowing his ideals will live on.¹ The book then ends, as White assumes readers know that Arthur has either died of wounds inflicted by Mordred, or that he waits in Avalon or underground until he will one day rule again, inspiring the title of the work, *The Once & Future King*.² The first book of *The Once & Future King*, “The Sword in the Stone,” was adapted by Disney as an animated movie in 1963, while “The Ill-Made Knight” and “The Candle in the Wind” were adapted for the stage in 1960 as the musical *Camelot*. Through these books, movie, and musical, White’s story has continued to amuse audiences as an accessible way of looking at Arthurian legends.

¹ Elisabeth Brewer, *T.H. White’s The Once & Future King* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993,) 120.

² T.H. White, *The Once & Future King* (G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1958.)

While writing *The Once & Future King*, White mentioned in a letter to his friend L.J. Potts that he thought that the book would be the work he would be most famous for.³ Though he was correct in this assumption, White did not write the book simply as a vehicle towards authorial recognition; instead, his intent was to impart various political and social ideals that he personally believed in. White claimed that the humorous elements in *The Once & Future King* were inserted to make these ideals easier to digest. His humor especially shows up in the description of Merlyn's fascinating cabin in the woods, and his talking owl Archimedes.⁴ Through his humor, White made the mythology of Arthur more relevant to the time he lived in.

At the time when White was writing "The Sword in the Stone," there were few, if any, sources of Arthurian legend that mentioned Arthur's childhood.⁵ The first part of *The Once & Future King* is usually regarded as more of a children's tale than the other three parts as a result of this, due to the connection between the story of Arthur as a child and the boys who were supposedly White's intended audience. Thus, the book appealed to a wide audience while cleverly delivering its political message.

White's introduction to Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* came in college, in an essay written for his final exam for the English Tripos.⁶ Like many college students, he admitted to not actually having read the work before writing the essay, which

³ François Gallix, ed., *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1984,) 118.

⁴ Stephen P. Dunn, "Mr. White, Mr. Williams, and the Matter of Britain," *The Kenyon Review* 23, no. 2 (1962): 365, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011.) White, *The Once & Future King*, 25.

⁵ Evan Lansing Smith, "The Narrative Structure of T.H. White's 'The Once and Future King,'" *Quondam et Futurus* 1, no. 4 (1991): 41, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011); hereafter cited as "Narrative Structure."

⁶ Brewer, *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*, 3.

discussed how Malory portrayed an unrealistic view of life in King Arthur's court.⁷ This view was years later supported by L.J. Potts, his tutor at Queens' College, in a letter written while White was working on *The Once & Future King* in 1940. At the time, Potts himself was reading Malory and remarked on how strange and impractical a story it is.⁸ Unfortunately, White's original essay on Malory is no longer extant and the exact contents of it have also been lost in time. However, the influence of one college essay on White's career cannot be underestimated. After all, it was the main inspiration behind *The Once & Future King*.

As in many young peoples' lives, college was when Terence Hanby White, or Tim, became friends with most of the people he would correspond with throughout life. White was not a social butterfly by any means, preferring to carry on many friendships almost exclusively through letter writing. As he himself put it, "I am afraid of people, of personal contacts," almost seeming to demonstrate symptoms of social anxiety through his habits and preference for impersonal contact.⁹ Despite this, he managed to become part of a group of friends while at Queens' College consisting of I.A. Richards, E.M.W. Tillyard, and T.R. Henn.¹⁰ A woman named Elsie Phare was also part of his circle of friends, though their acquaintance died out after he confessed his homosexuality to her.¹¹

While White corresponded with several of these men, most notably Tillyard, after finishing college his chief correspondents were L.J. Potts, Sir Sydney Cockerell, a famous museum curator, and David Garnett, an author whose friendship with White was

⁷ John K. Crane, *T.H. White* (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974,) 75.

⁸ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 115.

⁹ T.H. White, *England Have My Bones* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936,) 69.

¹⁰ Brewer, *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*, 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 4, 7.

almost exclusively through letter writing.¹² These men provided advice, edited White's manuscripts, loaned money, and were occasional vacation companions to White.

Despite this, it took many years for White to consider them his friends. As he told Potts in a letter, "I have no friends – I have never considered other people, so why should they consider me?" showing blatant disregard for the fact that he was writing to a man who had considered himself his friend for several years at this point.¹³ Later in life, White became more secure in his friendships, and as a result began to come out of his shell a bit. A budding friendship with Julie Andrews, the star of the musical *Camelot*, based on *The Once & Future King*, shows how he had embraced fame, a characteristic that seems rather unlike White, and how he opened himself up to friendships with new people.¹⁴

"The best thing for being sad is to learn something."¹⁵

Forever a Schoolmaster

Even outside of his writing, White thought of himself as teacher; in fact, he taught at several English prep schools before settling down to write full-time. While he claimed to dislike teaching, saying "I would rather have no money at all than be a schoolmaster," he seemed to enjoy being able to teach boys what he deemed was necessary to survive in the world.¹⁶ Later in life, White even admitted to David Garnett that he regarded himself as a "good schoolmaster," showing that despite his long dislike of teachers stemming

¹² Brewer, *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*, 3, 7.

¹³ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 76.

¹⁴ Brewer, *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*, 15.

¹⁵ White, *The Once & Future King*, 185.

¹⁶ David Garnett, ed., *The White/Garnett Letters* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968,) 11.

from years in an English boarding school, he knew how to win his students' hearts.¹⁷ To White, the purpose of education was to become self-sufficient, to be able to take care of one's self.¹⁸ An important part of this was to teach a person to think for himself, so that he is able to remain self-sufficient.¹⁹ As he was seemingly obsessed with learning and being independent, White himself was full of apparently useless skills, such as how to train a hawk to hunt, and the desire to share these skills with others, showing how he was naturally a teacher. Even after being fired from a post teaching Latin because he was not a harsh enough disciplinarian, White was able to continue teaching through his books. In fact, White seemed to miss his schoolmaster post. He asked Potts for help in getting back into academia with a position as a Cambridge don several times over the years, phrasing it as a joke when it was actually a serious request.²⁰

Many of White's books contain characters in the position of educators; in *The Once & Future King* alone, Merlyn, the hermit Toirdealbhach, Lancelot's Uncle Dap, and Arthur himself are all regarded as teachers, giving White an opportunity to put to use his time spent at the front of the classroom.²¹ He even has Merlyn describe himself as having been "a third-rate schoolmaster in the twentieth century," which can certainly be taken as an example of how White must have thought of himself while in front of the classroom, though his students may have thought otherwise.²² Reportedly, he was a

¹⁷ Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 110.

¹⁸ C.M. Adderley, "The Best Thing for Being Sad: Education and Educators in T.H. White's 'The Once and Future King,'" *Quondam et Futurus* 2, no. 1 (1992): 63, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011); hereafter cited as "The Best Thing for Being Sad."

¹⁹ Brewer, *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*, 166.

²⁰ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 122.

²¹ Adderley, "The Best Thing for Being Sad," 56.

²² Brewer, *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*, 146.

fairly popular teacher. As Gallix puts it, “[White] always remained a teacher at heart; the number of teachers among the characters in his works...is a clear sign that White was for ever ready to learn and to teach,” and to thereby pass on his lifelong love of learning.²³

T.H. White had the habit, as is common with authors, of identifying personally with one or more of his characters. Throughout *The Once & Future King*, glimpses of White are seen in various characters. As can be expected from a former schoolmaster who taught young boys, White identified with the character of Merlyn, the magical tutor in *The Once & Future King*. Interested in subjects as varied as falconry, twentieth century politics, and magic, Merlyn is portrayed as a man of many interests and of infinite knowledge who leads the young Wart through his childhood education and first several years of kingship. Merlyn shows both sides of White’s personality, a serious but fun loving man who, as David Garnett described him, “seemed to be unaware of the modern world. He was, and still is, an anachronism.”²⁴ When compared to Merlyn’s problem of living life backwards, having been born at the end of time and living until the beginning, White is as much of an anachronism as a character that references Hitler in a novel set in medieval times.²⁵ White’s dedication to learning all he could about subjects that interested him, much like a true Renaissance Man would, resulted in knowledge of subjects that are often regarded as unimportant in a modern world, such as hawking; as a result, Garnett’s assessment of him as an “anachronism” is accurate.

²³ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 44.

²⁴ Brewer, *T.H. White’s The Once & Future King*, 142.

²⁵ White, *The Once & Future King*, 274,

The most obvious character that White can be seen in is that of the Wart, or the young King Arthur who is the central character in “The Sword in the Stone.” In showing the Wart’s rather idealized upbringing, at least in terms of how a young boy would see it, White gave himself the kind of childhood he never had, full of inattentive but loving guardians, a magical teacher, and plenty of masculine outdoor sports.²⁶ As *The Once & Future King* progresses, however, the identification of White with King Arthur becomes harder to justify; in growing into the man who was King Arthur, he simply is no longer seen as an image of White.

While writing the first part of *The Once & Future King*, “The Sword in the Stone,” White found he could relate to two of the central characters, that of the Wart and Merlyn. However the second book, “The Queen of Air and Darkness,” contained no such characters.²⁷ Merlyn and King Arthur may have appeared in the book, but they were not as centrally important as the characters of the Orkney family, none of whom White identified with. White did, however, insert a reference to himself in the form of the character of Toirdealbhach, a Christian “saint” and teacher of the young Orkney boys. Toirdealbac is the Gaelic version of the name Terence, an obvious reference to the author himself.²⁸ Although not embodying White in personality and mannerisms as completely as Merlyn, Toirdealbhach’s name, occupation, and love of alcohol explicitly embody the author.

In the third part of *The Once & Future King*, “The Ill-Made Knight,” White once again had a character to identify with while writing. In Malory, as well as in other

²⁶ Brewer, T.H. *White’s The Once & Future King*, 22.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

Arthurian texts, the character of Lancelot is portrayed a suave, good-looking man that all the women want. White instead portrays him as an intensely self-critical man who is not the attractive man seen in earlier Arthurian texts. In fact, his nom de plume of the “Ill-Made Knight” can be seen as referring to both Lancelot’s regard of himself as unattractive and his intense self-criticism, both of which are characteristics that can be found in White himself. His description of Lancelot in a letter to Potts could almost be seen as a self-portrait of White himself as “an intensely *ugly* man, quite startling to look at...He was also a sadist and very much muddled up psychologically...He...wanted to ‘do miracles.’”²⁹ If one regards miracles as publishing a book that made an actual profit for its author, the description fits White’s perception of himself perfectly.

The tradition of an author associating him or herself with one of their characters is a rather common tradition; for example, J.K. Rowling has stated before that she identifies with the character of Hermione in her *Harry Potter* series.³⁰ However, White’s inserting of himself into the story through multiple characters makes him fairly unique in his ability to showcase multiple parts of his personality. His scholarly yet kindly schoolmaster persona is seen in Merlyn, his eager-to-learn younger self is seen in the Wart, and his insecure self is seen in Lancelot, as White himself admitted on various occasions.

²⁹ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 111.

³⁰ J.K. Rowling, Interview by Christopher Lydon, *The Connection*, WBUR Radio, October 12, 1999. <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/1999/1099-connectiontransc2.htm>

“P.S. I am a brave man in some ways.”³¹

White and War

Upon the beginning of World War Two, White began to exhibit a previously unseen streak of patriotism. He tried in several different ways to enlist in the British armed forces, being turned down multiple times due to having had tuberculosis in college and his age of thirty-three in 1939.³² In his letters to David Garnett, White begs for help in obtaining a post that in some way helps England with the war effort. However, he ended up spending the duration of the war in Ireland, writing novels the entire time. It may have seemed unfortunate at the time, but as White was ultimately a pacifist, it was not too big of a problem. White felt an obligation to join the war effort due to the message he imparts in *The Once & Future King*. In a letter to Garnett written early in the war, White says “...unfortunately I have written an epic about war, one of whose morals is that Hitler is the kind of chap one has to stop. I believe in my book, and, in order to give it a fair start in life, I must shew that I am ready to practise [sic] what I preach,” showing that he was willing to stand behind what he wrote in order to enforce its message.³³

Besides his personal ideals, White put timely references into *The Once & Future King*. Most notable are anachronistic comments from characters such as Sir Grummore, who at one point states “Some red propaganda, no doubt” and is the source of several other obviously anti-Communist statements.³⁴ Similarly anti-Communist statements

³¹ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 71.

³² Sylvia Townsend Warner, *T.H. White: A biography* (New York: The Viking Press, 1967,) 184.

³³ Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 103.

³⁴ White, *The Once & Future King*, 200.

come from the mouth of Cully the hawk in “The Sword in the Stone,” implying that White was well aware of anti-Communist feelings prior to the start of World War Two.³⁵

White also used current affairs as symbolism when it came to proclaiming Mordred’s evil nature. The uniform of his followers, an entirely black outfit, was similar to the black uniform of Fascists in the 1920s and 1930s. As he came from the Orkney Isles, Mordred himself was technically of Pictish descent and thus could have had ancestors from Ireland; White used this idea to imply that Mordred was the sort of rebellious young man that would be involved in the Irish Republican Army.³⁶ Finally, Mordred is made to seem an analogue with Hitler, through the storytelling of a maid to Guenever. As she put it “...there are all these speeches about Gaels and Saxons and Jews...” which can be seen as a clear reference to Hitler’s persecution of Jews, while bringing races that the British had disliked in the past into the story.³⁷ Mordred’s mania about one race being better than another reeks of the totalitarianism that Hitler was known for. White’s references to current events help make *The Once & Future King* into the commentary on society that it is.

As John K. Crane put it, “...*The Once & Future King*, is, ultimately, an examination of mankind’s addiction to warfare and of his moral and physical destruction by it.”³⁸ While this is certainly true, as White’s arguments about “Might versus Right” show in the book, he also showed his personal view of pacifism as the best idea for a governmental policy by having it be the policy that his main self-analogue, Merlyn,

³⁵ White, *The Once & Future King*, 74.

³⁶ Brewer, *T.H. White’s The Once & Future King*, 108.

³⁷ White, *The Once & Future King*, 645.

³⁸ Crane, *T.H. White*, 18.

advocates.³⁹ However, as a king, Arthur is more concerned with finding a suitable outlet for all of the “Might” that his knights possess; if one is not found, history has shown Arthur that the knights will use their strength for evil deeds, instead of good. With Merlyn’s help, he comes to the idea of using “Might FOR Right,” or using force to keep the peace. Merlyn would prefer that his pupil bring about absolute pacifism in his kingdom, but unfortunately this seems to be an impossible task, as there must be some outlet for the knights’ strength and aggression. Eventually, Arthur begins to rule the kingdom with justice, where the rule is by the law, not by might before right.

Though each book of *The Once & Future King* has its own individualized minor theme, White’s major overarching theme for all four books is this dichotomy of Might versus Right. In “The Sword in the Stone,” the Wart learns about the world as it currently is in regards to Might and Right, while in “The Queen of Air and Darkness” he learns about ways in which he can frame the realm he now rules. In “The Ill-Made Knight,” Arthur realizes that it is almost impossible to impose ideals upon an entire population, and in “The Candle in the Wind,” Arthur watches the ideals he attempted to establish on his country fall apart thanks to the machinations of his son Mordred.⁴⁰ Put together as one, all four books display White’s idea that “man is essentially good, but possesses power he has not yet learned to properly channel or control;” in other words, man has his power of Might, but has not yet figured out how to use it to benefit the world around him.⁴¹

³⁹ Brewer, *T.H. White’s The Once & Future King*, 144.

⁴⁰ Crane, *T.H. White*, 107.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

Arthur's education as a child by Merlyn is how White works his comments on different "-isms" into *The Once & Future King*.⁴² Throughout his childhood, Arthur is transformed into a fish, a hawk, an ant, a goose, and a badger in attempts by Merlyn to teach him about the various forms of government. Each animal, to White, exhibited a different form of government; the fish are an absolute monarchy displaying "Might is Right," the hawks are a military state, the ants are a totalitarian state similar to Nazi Germany, the geese are pacifists, and the badgers are an Oxford college of dons.⁴³ The order in which the Wart is transformed into the animals displays the importance that White placed on each form of rule; while Might is Right is shown to Wart first, meaning that White placed the least amount of esteem on this as a form of rule, White clearly regarded both pacifism, and a peaceful community of scholars without government as the best ways to live.

For much of the world, personal peace, and therefore the best way to live, comes from religion. White was not raised in an openly religious household; in fact, the first manifestation of religion in his life appears while in Ireland during WWII. Due to the influence of his Irish landlords, and the belief of most of the surrounding countryside, White at one point considered converting to Roman Catholicism. Indeed, he even thought about becoming a priest, going so far as to arrange to be baptized in preparation for such an event.⁴⁴ As Martin Kellman put it, "White's...attraction was only partially theological. He liked the tradition, the order, and the rules...Mostly he coveted the sense of belonging he got when on a pilgrimage," which is mirrored in his writing on King

⁴² Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 117.

⁴³ Smith, "Narrative Structure," 41.

⁴⁴ Warner, *T.H. White: A biography*, 160, 165.

Arthur's Knights of the Round Table.⁴⁵ To White, the Round Table was founded through the assumption that it would be a traditional order of knighthood, where knights could feel a sense of belonging and where the rules were clearly laid out, similar to a religion such as Catholicism. In the end, White did not go through with the baptism or convert to Catholicism, but this interest in God clearly influenced *The Once & Future King*, most notably "The Ill-Made Knight."

"The Ill-Made Knight," a moniker that Lancelot uses as an alias in the book, focuses on Lancelot while pushing Arthur more towards the background of his own story, similar to what was done with French Arthurian romances such as those by Chrétien de Troyes. As in Malory, Lancelot has several loves in his life, Arthur, Guenever, and God. "The Ill-Made Knight" shows Lancelot's attempts to reconcile all three of these loves while remaining faithful to each one in its own way: faithful to Arthur as his vassal and friend, Guenever as her physical and emotional lover, and to God as a chaste and holy man. Obviously, it is impossible to physically love Guenever while remaining chaste for God, and to be a faithful friend to Arthur while sleeping with Guenever. As a result, Crane says that "White questions the compatibility of heavenly perfection and earthly humanity within the same person," apparently modeling this on his own conflicting thoughts about religion.⁴⁶ David Garnett perhaps states it best in a letter to White on "The Ill-Made Knight" where he states "It is the most *profound* of your books: the only one which touches serious things and reveals you yourself except for passages in *England*

⁴⁵ Martin Kellman, *T.H. White and the Matter of Britain: A Literary Overview* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988,) 220; hereafter cited as *T.H. White and the Matter of Britain*.

⁴⁶ Crane, *T.H. White*, 99.

Have My Bones.”⁴⁷ In this sense, it is an extremely thoughtful book, and brings up important questions of faith.

“I can only say that I loathe all women indiscriminately.”⁴⁸

White’s Female Problems

One of the things that White reveals in his writings are his personal views of women. Like many men of his generation White had limited contact with women while growing up, especially those his own age, resulting in complete and total befuddlement when it came to dealing with women both in his writing and in real life.⁴⁹ This confusion can be traced back directly to the influence of White’s mother, Constance White. Her personality demanded love and affection from everyone while not giving anything in return, even to her only child. As a result, White’s first writings tended to contain women who were “either maternal or bitchy, but never real” and who often channeled Constance White.⁵⁰ This theme of using his mother as a character carried through to *The Once & Future King*, where White himself would admit to Garnett, “Morgause is the villain of the piece. (I may mention that she is my mother.)”⁵¹

In the first drafts of “The Witch in the Wood” which later became “The Queen of Air and Darkness,” the second book of *The Once & Future King*, most of White’s problems emerged in his characterization of Morgause. As the mother of Mordred, Arthur’s illegitimate son who ultimately brings about his downfall, Morgause is an evil

⁴⁷ Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 83.

⁴⁸ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 215.

⁴⁹ Brewer, *T.H. White’s The Once & Future King*, 87.

⁵⁰ Kellman, *T.H. White and the Matter of Britain*, 27.

⁵¹ Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 87.

character. However, in first drafts of the work, she was a direct characterization of Constance White; White was unable to separate his mental image of his mother from that of a rather vile witch mother. Due to editing by David Garnett's son Richard, White was able to temper down his portrayal of Morgause into a merely dislikeable mother, as opposed to the purely evil way White viewed his own mother.⁵² "The Witch in the Wood" therefore became "The Queen of Air and Darkness," and became a much more readable part of *The Once & Future King*.

Following "The Queen of Air and Darkness," White's focus shifts to Lancelot, and as a result, Guenever. As Lancelot is seen as an analogous figure to White in terms of religion, he also shares White's views of women, or rather his views of women that appeared after he refrained from basing all of his female characters on Constance White. Thanks to Ray Garnett's⁵³ suggestion that he read the works of Russian authors such as Vladimir Nabokov to learn how to better portray his female characters, White began to write women not based on his mother.⁵⁴ While they were still not as well fleshed out as his male characters are, White's women were given more varied personalities and motives, especially in regards to Guenever, due to the influence of Russian writers.⁵⁵

However, the female regarded by authors such as Elizabeth Brewer as one of White's most successful female characters was written before his reading of the Russian novelists: Maid Marian of "The Sword in the Stone."⁵⁶ A character borrowed from the

⁵² Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 95.

⁵³ David Garnett's first wife.

⁵⁴ Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 69.

⁵⁵ Florence Field Sandler, "Family Romance in 'The Once and Future King'" *Quondam et Futurus* 2, no. 1 (1992): 73, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed October 3, 2011); hereafter cited as "Family Romance."

⁵⁶ Brewer, *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*, 38.

Robin Hood mythology, Marian is essentially one of the boys; she dresses in practical yet pretty clothing, is able to shoot a bow more accurately than the Wart can, and is trained in all manner of woodcraft. She is for all intents and purposes a man, except for her dress and her implied romantic relationship with White's character of Robin Hood. As a result, it can be said that White's most successful female character is accurate in her characterization because she is more masculine than feminine for most of the time she is portrayed in the novel, and therefore White was able to better understand Maid Marian while writing.

Arguably the most important female in *The Once & Future King* is Guenever, who does not appear until "The Ill-Made Knight." Other than Morgause, she proved to be the most difficult female characterization White faced while writing the novel. The challenge with Guenever is to portray a woman who, while thankful for her marriage to as important a man as Arthur, was married to him at a young age before she had the chance to experience much of the world. As a result, Guenever is a multi-faceted woman; she takes on the roles of an unfaithful wife, a jealous lover, an unreligious woman, a barren womb, and a childlike-adult due to a lack of life experiences before marriage. White did not especially like the character of Guenever either, which made her even more difficult to write.⁵⁷ However, he was ultimately satisfied with his portrayal of her, and felt that she was a sympathetic character while at the same time remaining a bit unlikeable in the eyes of a reader.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Brewer, T.H. *White's The Once & Future King*, 87.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

“...I suddenly recognised the fact...that I was not a normal human being.”⁵⁹

White as an Outsider

As White put it in a letter to David Garnett, “Six months ago I suddenly recognised [sic] the fact (with pleasure) that I was not a normal human being.”⁶⁰ While at the point this letter was written White was reconciled with the fact that he was not “normal” in his own sense of the word, he did not always feel that way about himself, especially in regards to his romantic relationships. Early in life he attended an English prep school that was, by his reports, full of sadism and homosexuality as ways of enforcing discipline.⁶¹ Due to this, he claimed he was a “sadistic homosexual” and at one point underwent psychotherapy in an attempt to cure himself of what he viewed to be a problematic sexual identity.⁶² Psychotherapy seems to have been ineffective, as later in life he mentions feeling desire for young man referred to by his biographer as “Zed.”⁶³

Whatever his sexual orientation or preferences, it is clear that White was reluctant to become romantically involved with anyone due to a fear of hurting or scaring someone with what seems to be a fondness for sadistic elements in the bedroom. In various letters written to L.J. Potts, he discusses attempts at relationships with a barmaid, a sixteen-year-old girl, a twenty-one year old girl, and a nurse who tended him when he had his appendix taken out.⁶⁴ Describing the unnamed sixteen-year old, he stated “...I was stronger than she was and should have ended in the satisfactory position of having a good excuse for slapping her. But I really liked her, particularly when she defied and bossed

⁵⁹ Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 126.

⁶⁰ Garnett, *The White/Garnett Letters*, 126.

⁶¹ Adderley, “The Best Thing for Being Sad,” 55.

⁶² Warner, *T.H. White: A biography*, 310.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁶⁴ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 60, 83, 228, 82.

me” showing that even though he never had a sexual relationship with her, he definitely thought about her in a sexual manner.⁶⁵ White’s diaries, rumored to contain very explicit sexual content, are still kept locked up in spite of his hope that in the future they might be published to help others suffering from the desire for the same sorts of sexual kinks.⁶⁶

White’s romantic life is a sad story, due to his fear of becoming close to people in case they reacted badly to his sexual kinks; this is related to his feelings of being friendless, and his fear of letting people into his life. Characters in his writings who were “loners,” such as Lancelot, help show White’s true mindset to the world. Whatever his personal feelings, one of White’s letters to Potts shows a view that ought to be more common throughout the world, as White said “I dont [sic] know whether I am Heterosexual or homosexual at the moment, and dont [sic] much care.”⁶⁷

White’s open-minded attitude about issues such as sexuality reflected an overarching change in British thought towards open-minded thinking. At this time, the British Empire was in the process of ending, forcing the British people to look outwards from their Empire to the outside world. As a result, what it meant to be British, in essence their national identity, had to change as well. They were forced as a nation to interact with the outside world, and had to redefine the country as something other than the head of the British Empire. As unfortunate as the World Wars were, they did help Britain with the task of engaging in the outside world and becoming a global citizen.

The Once & Future King can be seen as commentary on this process as well. White, through his use of a well-known story such as that of Arthur, was able to insert

⁶⁵ Gallix, *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*, 84.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

ideas on how the country should be run, and what to do in the face of the changing role of Britain in the world. This is shown through the change of government implemented by Arthur: justice and law, as opposed to “Might is Right,” or rule by the sword. White recognized that as time goes on, roles must change, whether they are the role of a government in the lives of people, or the role of a nation in regards to the rest of the world. As a result, his commentary on the changing national identity of the British people was more relevant than ever before.

CHAPTER THREE

WOMEN EMERGING FROM THE *MISTS* OF ARTHURIAN LEGEND

First published in 1983, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* can easily be described as the story of King Arthur through the eyes of the women most deeply involved in his life. When looked at more in-depth, the novel becomes a story solely about women. Most specifically, the novel focuses on Arthur's half-sister Morgaine, and the struggles surrounding her life. Narrated in the third person, with occasional first person insights from Morgaine, the book begins with the story of Morgaine's mother, Igraine's, relatively unhappy marriage to Gorlois, the duke of Cornwall, and subsequent marriage to King Uther Pendragon of Britain. Igraine is one of three sisters who were raised on the island of Avalon, which was the home of the priestesses of the Goddess, and as such the sisters were not raised as Christians. This opposition of beliefs between Christians and worshippers of the Goddess forms the main conflict in *The Mists of Avalon*, and provides a parallel to the conflict between the masculine and feminine spheres of the world as well.

At a young age, Morgaine is taken from her mother by her aunt Viviane, the current Lady of the Lake, and raised as a priestess of the Goddess on the island of Avalon. There, she learns the skills of a priestess, including how to see possible futures through the use of the Sight. Though she is in love with Viviane's son Lancelot, Morgaine gives her virginity to the Goddess in a fertility ritual with a king. In the morning, however, she learns that the king she slept with was actually her half-brother Arthur. Morgaine becomes pregnant that night and has her only child, Gwydion, later

called Mordred. Arthur takes over the throne of Britain, vacant since Uther's death, and is crowned through the power of the Goddess bestowed on him during the fertility ritual.

Leaving Mordred with her other aunt, Morgause, Morgaine lives at Arthur's court in Caerleon for a time as one of Queen Gwenhwyfar's ladies in waiting. While there, she becomes friendly with Gwenhwyfar, and ultimately loses her faith in the worship of the Goddess. Morgaine cannot believe that she would have been forced to sleep with her half-brother by Viviane, who as the Lady of the Lake is the Goddess's representative on earth. However, no amount of persuasion can turn Morgaine into a Christian despite her anger with the Goddess and Viviane.

One of Christianity's strongest advocates at Arthur's court is Gwenhwyfar, due to the influence of her father and time she spent in a convent at a young age. Gwenhwyfar begins to believe that her infertility is punishment from God, both for allowing Avalon to influence Arthur's rule of the kingdom, and for her adulterous love of Lancelot. Due to Gwenhwyfar's influence, Arthur ultimately turns from worship of the Goddess, whose representatives set him on his throne, to Christianity. With this, his relationship with Avalon and those who worship the Goddess is strained. Along with the priestesses of the Goddess, others such as the male druids are associated with Avalon, including Kevin, the Merlin of Britain. The Merlin of Britain, Druid and Bard is a title taken by the leader of the druids, who is regarded as the male counterpart to the Lady of the Lake; in this part of the novel, the Merlin is Kevin. After receiving encouragement from Kevin, Morgaine returns to Avalon and taken her rightful position as the Lady of the Lake. Through Morgaine, who is now the Lady of the Lake, Avalon withdraws its support from Arthur's kingship.

Once Arthur's Knights of the Round Table leave on the quest for the Holy Grail, Mordred reenters the story in earnest. After gaining the trust of his father and the majority of the court, Mordred shows his true colors by attempting to take Arthur's throne. Arthur and Mordred lead their respective armies into battle, and in the end each is the instrument of the other's death, much like Malory's and White's endings. Due to the lack of a king who believes in Avalon, the island will retreat into the mists, and the world will fall under Christianity's influence. Morgaine ends the tale by relating her realization that, while worship of the Goddess may appear to wane in popularity in a world full of Christians, the Goddess looks after herself. She will always be worshipped in some form, whether it is as the Virgin Mary or St. Brigid, whose statue brings Morgaine to this realization. While Avalon may fade away, a universal Goddess figure will always exist.¹

Very little has been written on Marion Zimmer Bradley's life compared to T.H. White and Sir Thomas Malory, due to the relatively short amount of time that has elapsed since her death in 1999. However, a few details can be gleaned from an article written by her sister-in-law, Diana Paxson. Bradley was born in 1930 on a farm east of Albany, New York, and was the elder sister of two brothers.² While growing up, she had a healthy love for fantasy novels; in fact, she would have been of the age group targeted by White when *The Sword in the Stone* was first released.³ It is unknown, however, whether she read White's books upon their first being published, or picked them up later

¹ Marion Zimmer Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1982.)

² Diana L. Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" *Arthuriana* 9, no. 1 (1999): 110, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011.)

³ *Ibid.*, 111.

in life. She did however encounter the story of Arthur in a copy of the Sidney Lanier edition of the *Tales of King Arthur*, based on Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, which was given to her by her grandfather.⁴

Bradley studied music at the Teachers' College in Albany, New York, planning to become a singer. At this time, she discovered both the existence of science fiction fandoms and the Western Esoteric Tradition,⁵ both of which were to be very influential in regards to her publication of *The Mists of Avalon*.⁶ She married Robert A. Bradley, who was thirty-two years older than she was, after meeting him through a science fiction fandom. At a time before the Internet, the science fiction fandom consisted of fans that communicated through various "fanzines" and mailing lists. While Robert supported her, Bradley stayed home and had one child; she began writing science fiction to deal with the boredom of a housewife's life. First published in 1954, Bradley soon became a popular writer of commercial or "pulp" fiction novels.⁷ In her novels, she portrayed psychic powers and mysticism as a normal phenomenon in every day life, which led to readers looking to her to learn about various aspects of the occult.

Bradley left her first husband to marry Walter Breen in 1964. Bradley and Breen also met through the science fiction fandom, and Bradley had two more children with Breen. Her interest in the occult continued, and she and her husband founded a Ceremonial Lodge.⁸ Through the Lodge, Bradley met Diana L. Paxson, who would

⁴ Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" 111.

⁵ Western Esoteric Tradition is a combination of beliefs in things such as alchemy, herbalism, occult tarot, astrology, and ritual magic, with a large emphasis on expanding inner knowledge. A more common example would be that of the Wiccan tradition.

⁶ Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" 111.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸ A group of like-minded occultists who gather to practice their traditions together.

eventually become her sister-in-law. Together, the two women formed Darkmoon Circle, a female Lodge that can be seen as an influence on the College of Priestesses on Avalon in *The Mists of Avalon*.⁹ However, Bradley herself was also a priest in the Pre-Gnostic Nicene Catholic Church, which although separate from Roman Catholicism, is still considered to be a type of Christianity.¹⁰ Her personal combination of beliefs in occultism and Gnostic Christianity in her worship gave her a unique perspective on the debate between paganism and Christianity.

Returning to her memories of Arthurian legends from her youth, Bradley decided to retell the story with a new spin: the story of Arthur from a female point of view. First published in 1982, *The Mists of Avalon* did just that while incorporating Bradley's own personal spiritual beliefs and advocating female power. Unfortunately, Bradley passed away in 1999, leaving behind a hefty book that is associated with both feminism and questions of spirituality, though Bradley did not consider herself to be a feminist.¹¹

Growing up in a household surrounded by brothers, Bradley bonded with her mother over literature and music.¹² *The Mists of Avalon* places a strong emphasis on the importance of relationships between females, whether they are mothers and daughters, aunts and nieces, sisters, or sisters-in-law. This emphasis on female bonds, echoed by the use of "mother" or "daughter" as an honorific within religious communities in the book, is a version of the female community that Bradley apparently sought among the

⁹ Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹² *Ibid.*, 110.

female members of her occult Lodge and in her relationship with her mother.¹³ As a result, this aspect of Bradley's life is clearly shown in relationships between females in the book.

Though Bradley was clearly in favor of feminine power in the world, as evidenced through her occult beliefs, she did not consider herself to be a feminist in name.¹⁴ However, through her actions and the way she lived her personal life, Bradley appears to fit the definition of a feminist. She also did not label *The Mists of Avalon* as a feminist book herself; the title of a feminist work was thrust upon it by publishers and readers.¹⁵ Essentially, *The Mists of Avalon* is regarded as important in reference to the place it holds in literary circles as a feminist retelling of a typically masculine tale, despite not being intended by the author to be seen that way at all.

The women of *The Mists of Avalon* often act in ways that can be considered feminist. This differs from the usual motif of Arthurian legends, where women who assert themselves in any way, be it verbally or sexually, are put down by a male character.¹⁶ Many female characters in *The Mists of Avalon*, especially Morgaine, are seen as being in control of their own destinies in all things, including their own sexual and reproductive rights.¹⁷ According to Marion Wynne-Davies, Bradley portrays women's liberation as "an inalienable right, an inevitable resurrection of an essential

¹³ Ann F. Howey, *Rewriting the Women of Camelot: Arthurian Popular Fiction and Feminism* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001,) 75; hereafter cited as *Rewriting the Women of Camelot*.

¹⁴ Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" 113.

¹⁵ Karen E.C. Fuog, "Imprisoned in the Phallic Oak: Marion Zimmer Bradley and Merlin's Seductress," *Quondam et Futurus* 1, no. 1 (1991): 73, <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 29, 2011); hereafter cited as "Imprisoned in the Phallic Oak."

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁷ Marion Wynne-Davies, *Women and Arthurian Literature: Seizing the Sword* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996,) 181; hereafter cited as *Seizing the Sword*.

aspect of gender identity, which had at some point become unjustly repressed.”¹⁸ This gives Bradley’s characters license to act in ways that were not common during the time the work is set, but which were steadily becoming more common in the society in which she herself had grown up. For example, Morgaine often travels without company over the course of the novel, oftentimes for long distances, such as the distance from Camelot in Southern England up to Lothian in Scotland.¹⁹ This mirrors the freedom that women in the twentieth century gained as families began to own multiple cars. Access to cars allowed women to be seen in a sphere outside of the home more often, creating more opportunities to step outside of prescribed gender roles.

Morgaine also demonstrates both sides of the abortion question at two points in the novel, an issue that is a female concern. It was a topical subject prior to the publication of *The Mists of Avalon*, due to the legalization of abortion in 1973 with the U.S. Supreme Court Case, *Roe v. Wade*. Though the novel was published nine years after *Roe v. Wade*, the portrayal of a society where a woman had the right to choose without being judged can be seen as topical. The first time abortion is mentioned in the novel, Morgaine contemplates ending the pregnancy created incestuously with her half-brother Arthur during his Rite of Kingmaking. This choice ultimately results in her choosing to give birth to her son, Mordred.²⁰ Mordred is a child of both the royal line of Avalon through Morgaine, and that of Britain through Arthur, making him doubly royal, despite his bastard status and incestuous parents. The second consideration of abortion

¹⁸ Wynne-Davies, *Seizing the Sword*, 181.

¹⁹ Jan Shaw, “Feminism and the Fantasy Tradition: *The Mists of Avalon*,” in *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Helen Fulton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 471; hereafter cited as “Feminism and Fantasy.”

²⁰ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 225-226.

occurs when Morgaine discovers she is pregnant by either her husband King Uriens or his son, Accolon. Knowing that her age of forty-nine would make the pregnancy difficult, she plans to end it with the help of an herbal concoction; instead, Morgaine miscarries before she is able to end the pregnancy herself.²¹ However, the intent to knowingly end her pregnancy is still there, showing Bradley's authorial intent of advocating a woman's right to choice. This also is a specific example of feminist belief in the text.²² The midwife who takes care of Morgaine after her miscarriage talks about abortions as if they were a fairly common occurrence. This makes a feminine aspect of life appear to be normal, and therefore not something to be ashamed of. Another wholly feminine aspect of life, menstruation, is discussed in openly among the priestesses of Avalon as well, as if it is nothing to be embarrassed about or hidden away.²³

Finally, the character of Morgaine is unique due to her role in life. She is neither mother nor wife for the majority of the book, and she does not truly occupy the given alternative for an unmarried woman, that of a religious figure, until the very end of the book. It is not just that she is not any of these things, but that she actively avoids fulfilling a "normal" feminine role, a position often associated with feminists as well; both Morgaine and feminists in the twentieth century can both be considered "others" for this reason.²⁴ Through these examples, a feminist viewpoint can be found in *The Mists of Avalon*.

²¹ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 737-740.

²² Wynne-Davies, *Seizing the Sword*, 180.

²³ Fuog, "Imprisoned in the Phallic Oak," 77.

²⁴ Howey, *Rewriting the Women of Camelot*, 67.

“I could make him desire me.”²⁵

Sex and Sexuality in *The Mists of Avalon*

The freedom of the women of Avalon is shown most outwardly through their sexual practices, and the way in which they view their bodies in a sexual light. For example, though Morgaine decided to save her virginity until the Goddess determined the time for it to be taken, it was her choice; she believes that a woman’s body is hers to give to whomever she wishes, and if that person is the Goddess, then so be it.²⁶ Morgaine’s sexual partners after Arthur demonstrate this, as she chooses to sleep with men including Kevin and Accolon, the son of her husband Uriens. In spite of the fact that birth control is not explicitly mentioned in the novel, Morgaine’s sexual freedom mirrors the experiences many women had after birth control entered the commercial market in 1960.

On the other hand, though Morgaine’s aunt Morgause is also viewed as a very sexual woman, mentioning several different lovers at one point in the book, Morgaine views her aunt’s love life contemptuously.²⁷ This demonstrates the differing views of sexuality between different generations. Morgause is one of Morgaine’s elders; ergo, by general assumption, she ought to abide by a stricter moral code in accordance to her sexual practices. Therefore it is not an example of the positive female sexuality portrayed in other parts of the novel.²⁸

²⁵ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 481.

²⁶ Marilyn R. Farwell, *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives* (New York: New York University Press, 1996,) 151; hereafter cited as *Lesbian Narratives*.

²⁷ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 217.

²⁸ Kristina Hildebrand, *The Female Reader at the Round Table: Religion and Women in Three Contemporary Arthurian Texts* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, Tryck & Medier, 2001,) 121; hereafter cited as *The Female Reader*.

The sexuality shown in *The Mists of Avalon* is not strictly relegated to heterosexual acts; in fact, Morgaine herself is a participant in several homosexual acts with another priestess of Avalon, Raven, and while in the fairy world with a maiden who looks like Raven. It should be noted that Morgaine is never the initiator of these trysts, but always goes along with them when the other initiates. As Farwell says, “Depictions of women loving women in Avalon are made without negative comment, as if this were as natural as heterosexual love,” showing a blatantly feminist respect for different sexualities within the book.²⁹ In fact, *The Mists of Avalon* is regarded as the first piece of Arthurian literature to view lesbianism with “no ‘surprise or shame.’”³⁰

However, not all homosexuality is treated equally within the narrative. Only one male character truly outs himself as a homosexual, and even then he spends more of the book engaging in heterosexual acts than homosexual. This character is, of course, Lancelot. He is seen as one of the most masculine characters in traditional Arthurian literature, and *The Mists of Avalon* is no exception, showing Lancelot in the stereotypical position of a “knight in shining armor.” Bradley paints the picture of a Lancelot who is a “man with a guilty secret,” in this case his homosexuality.³¹ She claims to have based him on White’s Lancelot of *The Ill-Made Knight* and thus by association on White himself.³² This secret, sexual desire for Arthur is buried deep within Lancelot, hidden

²⁹ Farwell, *Lesbian Narratives*, 149.

³⁰ Wynne-Davies, *Seizing the Sword*, 181.

³¹ Parke Godwin, “The Road to Camelot: Parke Godwin talks to Marion Zimmer Bradley,” Afterword to *The Chronicles of the Round Table*, ed. by Mike Ashley (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1997,) 442; hereafter cited as “The Road to Camelot.”

³² *Ibid.*, 442.

underneath his masculine outer appearance and his apparent heterosexual love for Gwenhwyfar.³³

Lancelet's entrance into the priesthood at the end of the novel can be seen as yet another way of denying his sexual orientation, by making it so that it is acceptable for him to avoid all sex.³⁴ He denies, even to himself, that he is homosexual, but in a moment of weakness admits to Morgaine that "As we lay together - ...I touched Arthur...I love [Gwenhwyfar], mistake me not, but had she not been Arthur's wife..." referring to a threesome he had had with Arthur and Gwenhwyfar at the festival of Beltane.³⁵ Bradley wrote *The Mists of Avalon* in the midst of a time when alternate sexualities were becoming more prevalent in society. While it was generally not any more acceptable than it had been twenty years prior, the 1970s and 1980s saw the rise of homosexuality and the beginning of the AIDS epidemic which hit its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s, making the plight of the homosexuals all the more visible.

Compared to the sex lives of women such as Nimue, Morgaine, and Igraine, Lancelet's sex life is rather sad. The women mentioned in the prior sentence are those who are allowed to have sex with the ones they love, and from the sexual act, they gain a sense of empowerment. To Bradley, sex is power. Lancelet, on the other hand, is only allowed to become intimate with the object of his desire once, in a drunken threesome with Arthur and Gwenhwyfar, which is not enough for him to gain a sense of

³³ James Noble, "Feminism, Homosexuality, and Homophobia in *The Mists of Avalon*," in *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend*, ed. Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994,) 288; hereafter cited as "Feminism and Homosexuality."

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 295.

³⁵ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 482.

empowerment via sex.³⁶ The failure of Lancelot, who is arguably the most masculine character in the book, to gain empowerment in this simple, extremely masculine way is another example of feminism within the book. In most patriarchal cultures it is the males who freely have sex and are able to achieve sexual empowerment; thus this role reversal places the females on top, in more ways than one.

As Christopher Dean puts it, “A major weakness of the book is that Bradley can make the women strong only by making the men weak.”³⁷ While he purports to strengthen his argument with evidence from *The Mists of Avalon*, it is possible to disagree with his view. For example, Dean claims that Arthur is seen as weak because there is no real reason given in the text for why he is a great leader. The fact that the character he is discussing is Arthur, a well-known legendary figure whose story is usually thought to be common knowledge, takes away from his argument. Through this association, the character of Arthur brings to mind a strong warrior king who unites a kingdom and brings together the greatest order of knights the world had ever seen; no reader would believe, coming into the story, that Arthur is a weak man. Connecting Arthur with President John F. Kennedy, whose White House was referred to as “Camelot” while in office, also brings to mind a strong male leader. Though *The Mists of Avalon* is meant to be a female-oriented work, thanks to prior knowledge of the story of Arthur as a story set in an intensely patriarchal society, Bradley’s male characters can be seen as no weaker than her female characters.

³⁶ Noble, “Feminism and Homosexuality,” 292.

³⁷ Christopher Dean, *The Lady of the Lake in Arthurian Legend* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993,) 54; hereafter cited as *Lady of the Lake*.

One of the most completely patriarchal structures portrayed in *The Mists of Avalon* is that of the Christian Church; in contrast to this is the matriarchal Goddess-centered religion of Avalon developed by Bradley. This religion focused on the Goddess is similar to the occult worshipping that Bradley practiced herself. As such, she purposefully wrote it into the book and saw *The Mists of Avalon* as a “story of a quest for direct spiritual experience – not accepting what people tell you about God, but going out and searching for it yourself.”³⁸ Due to this, Bradley feared that people would think she was “attacking the basics of Christianity, rather than the enormous bigotry and anti-feminism that have become grafted on to Christianity.”³⁹ In fact, it must be remembered that Bradley herself was a priest in the Pre-Gnostic Nicene Catholic Church, and as such had Christian leanings at certain times in her life.⁴⁰ Claiming that Bradley attacked the basic tenets of Christianity implies that she was attacking something she personally believed in.

In spite of Bradley’s claims that her novel was not an attack on Christianity, it does portray a rather harsh view of the Christian tradition as shown in her book. As stated previously, it is one of the most patriarchal structures shown in *The Mists of Avalon*, and the women associated with it, such as Gwenhwyfar and other maidens of Camelot, are often seen in a negative light. They outwardly fulfill the stereotypes of meek, virginal Christian women who willingly sit at home and sew while men ride about on business.⁴¹ Though Gwenhwyfar is not technically a negative character, she can be

³⁸ Godwin, “The Road to Camelot,” 443.

³⁹ Marion Zimmer Bradley, “Thoughts on Avalon,” *Marion Zimmer Bradley Literary Works Trust*, <http://www.mzbworks.com/thoughts.htm> (accessed January 19, 2012.)

⁴⁰ Paxson, “Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of ‘Avalon,’” 114.

⁴¹ Farwell, *Lesbian Narratives*, 151; Hildebrand, *The Female Reader*, 109.

viewed as such due to her lack of mental strength when compared to women who worship the Goddess, such as Morgaine. When contrasted with the strength of character in priestesses of Avalon, this lack of strength in female Christian characters implies that women need a matriarchal religion to become truly self-actualized and therefore strong. It is important to note, however, that the view of Christianity in *The Mists of Avalon* is rather biased, as most of it comes from either Morgaine or Viviane's point of view, both of whom were raised to worship the Goddess.⁴²

The contrast of patriarchal Christianity with the matriarchal Goddess worship of Avalon provides much of the conflict within the book, as according to Davies it is "a simple novel in thematic terms," and therefore very distinct lines are drawn between what is good and evil.⁴³ While these lines may be simple, the Goddess based religion imagined by Bradley is fairly complex when compared to Christianity in the book. As a religion, it is entirely run by females; despite the existence of men devoted to the Goddess, such as the Druids, Goddess worship only allows for priestesses, not priests.

Goddess worship's goal is explained as being a way to invoke the Goddess within each woman.⁴⁴ This confirms Morgaine's realization at the end of the novel, that the Goddess will protect herself and live on in other forms, such as that of the Virgin Mary, Christian saints, or within the female worshipper herself.⁴⁵ These ideals align with Marion Zimmer Bradley's own personal ideals, though as she put it, she "...was not a Medium, but a Large," referring to the fact that she did not want to become a reader's

⁴² Howey, *Rewriting the Women of Camelot*, 39.

⁴³ Wynne-Davies, *Seizing the Sword*, 182.

⁴⁴ Hildebrand, *The Female Reader*, 111.

⁴⁵ Bradley, *The Mists of Avalon*, 875.

own personal priestess or representative of the Goddess.⁴⁶ While she obviously wanted to put her own personal viewpoint into the book, the reader would have to make the journey towards the Goddess their own, much as every author who deals with Arthurian legend finds a way to make it their own.

As Bradley's sister-in-law Diana Paxson said, "More than almost any other mythos, the Matter of Britain – the Arthurian Cycle – lends itself to reinterpretation, and any analysis of a given work must consider the environment in which it originated."⁴⁷ Bradley took this idea to heart, finding a way to remake the Matter of Britain in her own unique way that reflects the time in which it was written. However, as it is a mythos that has been reinvented so many times, writers using Arthurian legends as a starting point obviously take inspiration from other works. Bradley was first introduced to Arthurian legends through the Sidney Lanier edition of the *Tales of King Arthur* given to her at a young age by her grandfather.⁴⁸ Other than this work, the sole article containing bibliographic information for *The Mists of Avalon* does not mention any other Arthurian sources that she may have consulted, so it is difficult to determine what may have influenced her. However, in an interview Bradley mentions that she does not like comparing her tale to that of T.H. White's *The Once & Future King*, as it is a very anachronistic version of Arthur's story and "it's political satire, but [she] can't see much application to the Matter of Britain."⁴⁹ In other words, she views White's work as an entirely different category of writing from her own: a moralistic satire, as compared to *The Mists of Avalon*, a feminist retelling of a well-known tale.

⁴⁶ Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" 117.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴⁸ Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" 111.

⁴⁹ Godwin, "The Road to Camelot," 441.

Bradley is one of several female writers who have written on Arthurian legends recently. Others include Mary Stewart, who focused on the story of Merlin, and Jane Yolen, who has dealt with many aspects of Arthurian legend in her poetry and prose, including Merlin and Guinevere's stories.⁵⁰ The Matter of Britain being a legend so rooted in a patriarchal world, it makes sense that it has taken women this long to start writing about it in earnest; all three of these women writers wrote their stories after 1960, which is fairly recent when thought about in terms of the extent of time in which Arthurian literature has been written. With the addition of female writers, Arthurian legends have become more female friendly. While Dean has described the women of Arthur's world as "lifeless cardboard cutouts possessing no individuality of their own," this has changed due to the addition of female writers to the circle of Arthurian legends.⁵¹ Women are less of a stereotype, and indeed, take control of the mythos thanks to female writers. For example, in *The Mists of Avalon*, the sword Excalibur is associated with the matriarchal line of Avalon. Usually a phallic symbol, in this case the masculine sword Excalibur is taken control of by the females of Avalon, similar to how female writers have taken control of the Arthurian Cycle.⁵²

As a female author, Bradley has influenced the Arthurian Cycle in other ways as well. With its narrative joining together women from different generations, *The Mists of Avalon* is more of a family story than other stories of Arthurian legend, which focus on fighting or love, not the relationship between relatives.⁵³ In fact, all of Bradley's major characters but one can be placed on a family tree that relates them by blood or marriage.

⁵⁰ Wynne-Davies, *Seizing the Sword*, 176.

⁵¹ Dean, *Lady of the Lake*, 57.

⁵² Wynne-Davies, *Seizing the Sword*, 177.

⁵³ Paxson, "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon,'" 118.

Bradley's most obvious addition to Arthurian canon, the fact that her work is entirely female-centric, and thus feminist, is another notable reason to applaud her work.⁵⁴

Bradley also returns to an Arthurian tradition set in Romanized Britain, instead of feudal Britain, which is unique considering most writers focus on the feudalistic part of Arthurian legend. Through this combination of her personal influences, outer influences in regards to the feminist movement that was running rampant in the United States at the time Bradley was writing, and her unique approach to an ancient mythos, *The Mists of Avalon* reflects the changing world around it at the time it was written. It embodies the British national identity in the 1980s and beyond, a country that was looking to the future in terms of equality and the rights of its citizens, but also remembering where it came from, as shown in *The Mists of Avalon* through its focus on Roman Britain, and in actual Britain by its renewed interest in its own historical heritage at this time. Bradley's definition of Britain as a nation on the brink of change embodies what British national identity is in regards to the Arthurian Cycle: a way to demonstrate the inevitable changes in society, through a story of a feudalistic, in Bradley's case Romanized, society in flux.

⁵⁴ Wynne-Davies, *Seizing the Sword*, 179.

CONCLUSION

Finally, we return to the Monty Python quotation mentioned at the beginning of this study: “Who are the Britons?” The question is simply answered in the movie: “Well, we all are. We are all Britons.”¹ In life, however, the definition is not so simple; as a result, authors such as Sir Thomas Malory, T.H. White, and Marion Zimmer Bradley attempt to define a “Briton” through their use of the Arthurian Cycle as the basis for their respective works of literature: *Le Morte d’Arthur*, *The Once & Future King*, and *The Mists of Avalon*. The use of historical references and personal analogues within their works provide perspective of what life was truly like at the time these works of Arthurian literature were composed. As such, a picture of British national identity can be obtained through the Arthurian Cycle.

Sir Thomas Malory’s use of references to contemporary political events in the form of the War of the Roses is in fact the main source of known historical reference within *Le Morte d’Arthur*. This contemporary dynastic struggle defines the period of time spanning from 1455 to 1485, and as a result was an important part of defining the national identity of Britain at the time. Malory’s work uses the story of Arthur’s conflict with his son Mordred to reflect the dynastic turmoil between the houses of York and Lancaster. Through this story, Malory mirrors the way in which British national identity developed as a result of the War of the Roses. It became a country that was solely concerned with peace; whether or not the monarch was happy was irrelevant. As a

¹ *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*.

result, national identity of the British of the 1400s mirrored that portrayed in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Much like Malory, T.H. White also was writing his work in the shadow of a war. Written just prior to and during the beginning of World War Two, *The Once & Future King* brought up entirely different definitions of national identity than those found in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. White's political commentary on wartime Britain, covert advocating of a civilization ruled by pacificism, and not-so-covert negative opinions of Communism in his work bring about a very different definition of national identity. Instead of a Britain solely focused internally on itself and its own struggles, the country ought to turn outwards and realize that there is indeed a world beyond the boundaries of the British Empire. Through his use of Arthur as an advocate for changing government from "Might is Right" to a law-based system of justice, White mirrored the changing role of Great Britain in the world. Thus, Britain's national identity of a country learning to look outwards at the time of White's writing mirrors ideals shown in *The Once & Future King* through Arthur's implementation of a new way of governing.

Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* quite obviously belongs to a different aspect of Arthurian legend than the prior two works mentioned. By focusing on a Romanized Britain, instead of the feudalistic one used by Malory and White, Bradley allows her work to return to a time period in which a British matriarchal society may have existed, thus setting the stage for such a feminist work. Her use of her characters to exemplify sexual freedom, a woman's right to choose, and her ultimate point of free religion reflects the definition of national identity in Britain of the 1980s. With the rise of female politicians such as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, it is obvious that Britain

was becoming a more female-friendly country; open discussion of the AIDs crisis and homosexuality in general leads one to believe that the country was becoming more open to alternative lifestyles as well. As a result, the picture of a nation on the brink of change is embodied both in the history of Britain at the time of publication of *The Mists of Avalon*, and within the book itself, through its ending that deals with the changing of dominant religions within Arthur's realm.

By looking at the Arthurian Cycle through these selected works, one thing in particular stands out: the fact that all of these works were written at times of upheaval and change within British society. While one cannot generalize that every work of Arthurian literature was created at a time of upheaval, in the case of these three works it is significant due to their presentation of the national identity of the time. They present a society in flux, that is, one moving towards a new future. After all, the Arthurian Cycle is just that, a cycle. The most constant part of a cycle is that it is always moving and changing; the best example is possibly water going through the water cycle. Though its stages are generally the same, water is always moving and thus always changing in some way. The Arthurian Cycle is similar; it has similar scenarios that appear in most works, but also always changes in some way along the way, reflecting the time in which the works were written. As a result, it is an excellent way to represent the national identity of the Britons: always changing, and working towards a better Britain.

APPENDIX A

Name differences between chapters

Introduction/Chapter One/Conclusion	Chapter Two	Chapter Three
Guinevere	Guenever	Gwenhwyfar
Lancelot	Lancelot	Lancelet
Merlin	Merlyn	Merlin (title)
Morgan le Fay	Morgan le Fay	Morgaine
Nyneue	---	Viviane, Nimue, Niniane

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Bradley, Marion Zimmer. *The Mists of Avalon*. New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1982.

Bradley's feminist work tells the story of Arthurian legends from the point of view of various female characters, such as Morgaine, Gwenhwyfar, Morgause, Igraine, and Viviane. As opposed to other classic works of Arthurian literature, the book hardly focuses on male characters at all. *The Mists of Avalon* is notable as both a feminist and a religious work of literature.

---. "Thoughts on Avalon." *Marion Zimmer Bradley Literary Works Trust*. <http://www.mzbworks.com/thoughts.htm> (accessed January 19, 2012).

The author's thoughts in essay form on her novel *The Mists of Avalon*. It discusses what sorts of religious influences were used in the novel, and why she felt she was not attacking Christianity in her novel. This essay is helpful in understanding the way in which Bradley viewed her own work.

Gallix, François, ed. *T.H. White: Letters to a Friend*. Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing Limited, 1984.

The book consists of letters from T.H. White to Mary and L.J. Potts, and a few to their children, with several of Mary and L.J. Potts's letters back. Very informative in explaining White's mindset from 1930 until his death in 1964, and the motivations behind many of his literary works.

Garnett, David, ed. *The White/Garnett Letters*. New York: The Viking Press, 1968.

An in-depth look through letters at the relationship between a private author and one of his closest friends over the course of 30 years. Extremely important when discussing how he was influenced by his friends while writing his main work, *The Once & Future King*.

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Caxton's Malory: A New Edition of Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur*. Edited by James W. Spisak, based on work begun by William Matthews. 2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.

A project started by noted Arthurian scholar William Matthews and finished after his death by James W. Spisak, due to a desire for a newer text of the Caxton text, which had not been updated since the late nineteenth century.

---. *Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur*. Edited by Keith Baines. New York: Penguin Group, Inc., 1962.

A classic of Arthurian literature translated into easily understood modern English. Based on a variety of older English and French tales of Arthur, *Le Morte d'Arthur* has one of the most complete stories of Arthur and his knights of the round table known from the time period. Baines's translation is based on the newest manuscript of the work, the Winchester manuscript.

---. *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. Edited by Eugène Vinaver. 3 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1947.

Malory's classic tale of Arthurian literature, published in three volumes. Vinaver's edition is based on the Winchester manuscript, which had been found while he was in the midst of editing another version of Malory based on the Caxton text. He dropped the project and began editing the Winchester manuscript, which is the text he ultimately published. It is regarded as the text that is closest to Malory's original authorial intent with the work.

Quilligan, Maureen. "Arthur's Sister's Story: Review of *The Mists of Avalon* by Marion Zimmer Bradley." *The New York Times*. January 30, 1983.
<http://www.nytimes.com/1983/01/30/books/arthur-s-sister-s-story.html> (accessed January 19, 2012).

Original positive review of Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* in *The New York Times*. This review is the initial publicity that alerted many readers to the existence of the book, and was very influential in the novel reaching readers outside of the science-fiction fandom.

White, T.H. *The Book of Merlyn*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977.

White's previously unpublished fifth book of *The Once & Future King*. While some scenes from this work were used in other books of *The Once & Future King*, those that were not give insight into the true, very different conclusion to the work that White desired for *The Once & Future King*.

---. *England Have My Bones*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936.

White's hunting, fishing, and flying journals for the year of 1934. Provides an insight into the mind of a very complex and private man, as well as basic instructions on how to do all of the activities mentioned above.

---. *The Ill-Made Knight*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958.

The third book of *The Once & Future King*, published as a singular volume prior

to its inclusion in the tetralogy. This American first edition differs significantly from the version included in *The Once & Future King*.

---. *The Once & Future King*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958.

Written during the Second World War, the novel deals with the difference between Might and Right, and the best way to rule a kingdom through the use of an amusing Arthurian legend generally known to many. It tells the story of King Arthur from his childhood until his death.

---. *The Sword in the Stone*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.

The first book of White's *The Once & Future King*, which was first published as a single volume in 1939. It is still published this way currently, as the story contained is generally more appealing to younger readers than the rest of *The Once & Future King*. This copy, appearing to be an American first edition, is significantly different from the "Sword in the Stone" that is published in *The Once & Future King*.

---. *The Witch in the Wood*. London: Collins, 1940.

The second book of White's *The Once & Future King*, as printed in Great Britain. This copy, a first edition, differs significantly from both the American first edition, and the final version printed in *The Once & Future King*, newly titled as "The Queen of Air and Darkness."

---. *The Witch in the Wood*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1939.

The second book of White's *The Once & Future King*, as printed in America. This American first edition differs significantly from both the British first edition and the final version printed in *The Once & Future King*, newly titled "The Queen of Air and Darkness."

Secondary Sources

Books

Armstrong, Dorsey. *Gender and the Chivalric Community in Malory's Morte d'Arthur*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.

Armstrong's work is helpful when looking at possible reasons why Malory may have written *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and in determining whom his audience was. She is an assistant professor of medieval literature at Purdue University, and at the time of this publication was researching William Caxton and early English printed

works in general. Finally, she addresses the problem of religion or lack thereof in the work, especially in regards to the Pentecostal Oath that Arthur's knights all must take.

Brewer, Elisabeth. *T.H. White's The Once & Future King*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993.

Brewer, a researcher of medieval history, tends to focus on Arthurian legends and Geoffrey Chaucer, having edited several other books on Arthurian literature and how it changed literature. This book contains a short biography of White, mostly based on Warner's, and literary analysis of *The Once & Future King*. It relates many events in the book to parts of White's life that influenced his writing, and seems to paint one of the best pictures of him written by someone who did not know him personally.

Crane, John K. *T.H. White*. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974.

Crane, an English professor at The Pennsylvania State University, has studied a wide range of British literature, ranging from the time of Chaucer to more modern authors such as T.H. White. The book contains a brief overview of White's life in terms of his works, and an examination in what the author hopes is details of each work. Contains very detailed explanations of what in White's life influenced him to write the books he did.

Dean, Christopher. *Arthur of England*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.

In this book, Dean looks at the way the English viewed the story of King Arthur and his knights during the time spanning from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.

---. *The Lady of the Lake in Arthurian Legend*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993.

This book contains the transcription of a series of lectures given by Dean in 1992 at St. David's College in Wales, which give an overview of the character of the Lady of the Lake in Arthurian Literature from the time of Malory until Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*. The final lecture in particular is useful for its argument that Bradley's "women are made strong only by making the men weak."

Farwell, Marilyn R. *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives*. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

Farwell discusses the ways a female can be regarded as a hero in reference to the character of Morgaine in *The Mists of Avalon*. She also looks at the ways erotic actions can be seen as spiritual events, and the way that the structure of the

patriarchy in reference to the Christian Church in *The Mists of Avalon* is used to bring the character of Gwenhwyfar down.

Field, P.J.C. *The Life and Times of Sir Thomas Malory*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993.

Field, a professor of English at the University of Wales and noted Arthurian scholar, uses the most current information about men named Thomas Malory in England at the time in which *Le Morte d'Arthur* was written to paint a picture of the man assumed to be the author of the work. After eliminating the other candidates from the picture, Sir Thomas Malory of Newbold Revel appears to be the most likely author; Field then describes what little we know of the man in great detail. While at times it seems like much of the work is just using other sources to say that Field does not actually know who wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur*, it does provide great detail about the man who most likely did write it.

Godwin, Parke. "The Road to Camelot: Parke Godwin talks to Marion Zimmer Bradley." Afterword to *The Chronicles of the Round Table*, ed. by Mike Ashley. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1997.

Presented as a dialogue between Bradley and Godwin, the short afterword to a compilation of short stories about the Knights of the Round Table provides insight into the way Bradley thought *The Mists of Avalon* was different from other works of Arthurian literature. The discussion between the two authors, both famous for their reinterpretations of Arthurian legends, provides insight into the reasons why the Matter of Britain has remained a popular story for the many years that it has.

Hildebrand, Kristina. *The Female Reader at the Round Table: Religion and Women in Three Contemporary Arthurian Texts*. Uppsala: Uppsala University, Tryck & Medier, 2001.

Hildebrand's published dissertation for her Doctorate of Philosophy in English from Uppsala University in Sweden. While examining the text of three modern Arthurian texts including *The Mists of Avalon*, Hildebrand discusses the way in which gender and religion are intertwined as themes within the texts, and the way they are treated differently in each of the three books she examines.

Howey, Ann F. *Rewriting the Women of Camelot: Arthurian Popular Fiction and Feminism*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Howey, a lecturer in English at the University of Alberta, looks at the ways women have been viewed in various Arthurian legends over time, and discusses *The Mists of Avalon* towards the end of her book. The book was helpful in discussing in greater depth the female characters of *The Mists of Avalon* and shedding light on possible motivations behind their actions.

Kellman, Martin. *T.H. White and the Matter of Britain: A Literary Overview*. Lewiston:

The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988.

Kellman attempts to write a literary overview of all of White's works. He seems to solely cite Sylvia Townsend Warner's book and nothing else. Most of the information given can be found in other books, but there is a good description of White's intentions with each book in it, and his way of describing what he believes White intended in *The Once & Future King* is very clear.

Loomis, Roger Sherman. *The Development of Arthurian Romance*. London: Hutchinson & Co., 1963.

Loomis, a noted Arthurian scholar, provides a brief introduction to the origins of Arthurian literature in his book. He covers a time span from the very beginnings of Arthurian literature up until Sir Thomas Malory, and was especially helpful in providing information on the Vulgate Cycle.

Lumiansky, R.M. Introduction to *Malory's Originality: A Critical Study of Le Morte Darthur*, edited by R.M. Lumiansky. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1964.

With essays by a variety of authors, this book contains literary criticism and discusses the goals Malory may have hoped to achieve by writing the work. Lumiansky is a professor of English at Duke University, and his introduction is helpful in explaining basic differences between the Caxton and Winchester texts of Malory.

Matthews, William. *The Ill-Framed Knight: A skeptical inquiry into the identity of Sir Thomas Malory*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

Matthews, a noted Arthurian scholar who taught English at the University of California, puts his book space to good use while conjecturing about the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Written in the 1960s, before more current information became available on the topic, Matthews's book is still one of the most notable, complete general sources available on Sir Thomas Malory.

Pearsall, Derek. *Arthurian Romance: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2003.

Pearsall is a Professor of English, Emeritus at Harvard University, and has published prior works on both Chaucer and Spenser. His work provides a general introduction to the history of Arthurian literature, and how they have evolved through time. An extremely complete work, this book was essential to the completion of the short historiography in the introduction of this study.

Pochoda, Elizabeth T. *Arthurian Propaganda: Le Morte Darthur as an Historical Ideal of Life*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1971.

Pochoda discusses how Malory used *Le Morte d'Arthur* as a way to make public his ideas about kingship, knighthood, and chivalry. She also argues against the idea that the only way to interpret Malory's work is as a political allegory; her thesis for the book states that interpreting it that way "is to miss the really significant issues of the book." (27.) The book is helpful when looking at the context of Arthur as a king.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. *T.H. White: A biography*. New York: The Viking Press, 1967.

First and most widely read biography of White, written by an author that he was a fan of and respected soon after his death. Many of White's friends were still alive at this time so Warner had access to letters and information on White that would have otherwise been lost. Despite being forty years old, this is still by far the best and most complete biography of White available.

Wynne-Davies, Marion. *Women and Arthurian Literature: Seizing the Sword*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996.

Wynne-Davies examines the ways in which women have attempted to reclaim Arthurian legends as their own throughout time, despite the story's close relationship with a patriarchal society. While look at *The Mists of Avalon*, she discusses how the characters reclaimed the sword Excalibur as a female symbol, and various feminist views shown in the book.

Articles

Adderley, C.M. "The Best Thing for Being Sad: Education and Educators in T.H. White's "The Once and Future King"." *Quondam et Futurus* 2, no. 1 (1992): 55-68. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011).

Adderley discusses White's use of education in his writings. Also references White's time spent as a schoolteacher at an English public school. Adderley has a very focused view of how education was shown in *The Once & Future King*, and discusses absolutely nothing else in the article.

Ashe, Geoffrey. "The Origins of Arthurian Legend." *Arthuriana* 5, no. 3 (1995): 1-24. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed on February 23, 2012).

Ashe's article focuses on the basics of the question of Arthur as a historical figure. He deals generally with using literary works as historical evidence, but concludes that it is impossible to determine the existence of a real Arthur from these.

Aurner, Nellie Slayton. "Sir Thomas Malory – Historian?" *PMLA* 48, no. 2 (1933): 362-391. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed February 8, 2012).

Aurner's article helpfully focuses on connecting the events in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* with historical events from the time period. She claims that through this, Malory was simply being faithful to the time in which he lived. Since this article was written, more evidence has come to light disproving several of Aurner's claims, but it is still helpful in examining possible interpretations of Malory's work.

Dunn, Stephen P. "Mr. White, Mr. Williams, and the Matter of Britain." *The Kenyon Review* 24, no. 2 (1962): 363-371. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011).

An article comparing T.H. White and Charles Williams, a poet who wrote on the subject of Arthur as well. It discusses their similar dislike of the modern world, and notes some of White's objects in writing *The Once & Future King*. Several quotations describing White's writing were helpful, but for a reader who does not know much about Charles Williams, the article can seem a little pointless.

Fuog, Karen E.C. "Imprisoned in the Phallic Oak: Marion Zimmer Bradley and Merlin's Seductress." *Quondam et Futurus* 1, no. 1 (1991): 73-88. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 29, 2011).

Fuog, a lecturer at the University of Michigan, discusses how the seduction of Kevin the Merlin by Nimue in Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon* demonstrates feminism in the novel. It also discusses the general themes followed by authors writing about Merlin's seduction by a Nimue character.

Kennedy, Edward Donald. "The Grail and French Arthurian Romance." In *A Companion to Arthurian Literature*, edited by Helen Fulton, 202-217. Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2009.

Kennedy, a noted Arthurian scholar, uses this article to give an overview of French Arthurian romances, primarily focusing on the contents of the Vulgate Cycle.

---. "Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*: A Politically Neutral English Adaptation of the Arthurian Story." In *Arthurian Literature XX*, edited by Keith Busby and Roger Dalrymple, 145-169. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003.

In this article, Kennedy deals with the questions surrounding which side of the War of the Roses Sir Thomas Malory supported. He also looks at the different ideals of government presented in *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Kennedy finally concludes that Malory did not support either side, but just wanted to get out of prison.

Lupack, Alan. "'The Once and Future King': The Book That Grows Up." *Arthuriana* 11, no. 3 (2001): 103-114. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed on September 27, 2011).

Lupack's article discusses the ways in which *The Once & Future King* changes genre throughout the work. Beginning as a children's story, it slowly becomes a tragedy by the end of the book. The changing of genre reflects the ways in which various characters grow up over the course of the book.

Matthews, William. "The Besieged Printer." In *Arthurian Studies XLVII: The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte Darthur*, edited by Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick, and Michael N. Salda, 35-64. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000.

Matthews, a noted Arthurian scholar who especially dealt with Malory, writes about how Malory's printer, William Caxton, was viewed during his own lifetime. He also acknowledges how difficult it must have been to be a printer at the time *Le Morte d'Arthur* was published.

McCarthy, Terence. "Malory and His Sources." In *A Companion to Malory*, edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G. Edwards, 75-96. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1996.

McCarthy's article contains helpful information outlining the various sources Malory referenced while writing *Le Morte d'Arthur*, and which sources correspond with which parts of the text. A very detailed article, it spells out exactly which sources correspond with which parts of Malory's text.

Noble, James. "Feminism, Homosexuality, and Homophobia in *The Mists of Avalon*." In *Culture and the King: The Social Implications of the Arthurian Legend*, edited by Martin B. Shichtman and James P. Carley, 288-296. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Noble's essay deals with homosexuality and its implications in *The Mists of Avalon*, mostly in reference to the character of Lancelot's sexuality. Through this, Noble believes that an argument can be made for homophobia within the book due to the influence of the patriarchal setting surrounding typical Arthurian legends, including the feminist version presented by Bradley. The article is very helpful in unraveling the character of Lancelot as a whole.

Paxson, Diana L. "Marion Zimmer Bradley and The Mists of 'Avalon.'" *Arthuriana* 9, no. 1 (1999): 110-126. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed on September 27, 2011).

Paxson, a close family friend of Marion Zimmer Bradley, discusses briefly Bradley's life and how *The Mists of Avalon* can be considered a spiritual feminist work. The article is one of the few sources available that discusses Bradley's life, and Paxson's relationship with Bradley makes it likely that the information given is accurate, though possibly biased.

Peverley, Sarah L. "Political Consciousness and the Literary Mind in Late Medieval

England: Men 'Brought up of Nought' in Vale, Hardyng, Mankind, and Malory." *Studies in Philology* 105, no. 1 (2008): 1-29. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed on February 8, 2012).

Peverley looks at the way medieval English society portrayed politics within some of their literary works, and claims that this is how political ideals of the time were transmitted. In reference to Malory, Peverley believes that he had Edward IV in mind while writing about King Arthur.

Radulescu, Raluca. "'John Vale's Book' and Sir Thomas Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur': A Political Agenda." *Arthuriana* 9, no. 4 (1999): 69-80. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed on February 8, 2012).

Radulescu's article discusses how Malory and contemporary writers documented the unrest in English government during their lifetime in their works, and how this affected their presentation of kingship.

---. "Malory and Fifteenth-Century Political Ideas." *Arthuriana* 13, no. 3 (2003): 36-51. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed on February 8, 2012).

Radulescu, a foremost Arthurian scholar focusing on Sir Thomas Malory, discusses how Malory used political ideals of his time in his writing. The article also questions whether or not Malory was writing as a way to look back at the past, or as a way to provide political commentary on his present.

Roberts, Brynley F. "Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Historia Regum Britanniae* and *Brut Y Brenhinedd*." In *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature*, edited by Rachel Bromwich, A.O.H. Jarman, and Brynley F. Roberts, 97-116. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991.

Roberts' chapter in this book is helpful in providing details on the history of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.

Sandler, Florence Field. "Family Romance in 'The Once and Future King'." *Quondam et Futurus* 2, no.1 (1992): 73-80. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed October 3, 2011).

Sandler's article, while using the term "family" in the title, tends to focus solely on the female members of a family, such as a mother (Morgause) or a wife (Guenever) in *The Once & Future King*. The article relates White's time in psychoanalysis to parts of his book, particularly those parts relating to women. While several of her arguments are incorrect upon close reading of the details of *The Once & Future King*, other points are valid in reference to White's difficulties with women.

Shaw, Jan. "Feminism and the Fantasy Tradition: *The Mists of Avalon*." In *A Companion*

to *Arthurian Literature*, edited by Helen Fulton, 463-477. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Shaw discusses how fantasy is used in *The Mists of Avalon*, particularly in regards to the book as a feminine escapist text. As the characters, especially the women, act in ways that are still not always common among women, Shaw argues that the book can therefore be seen as an expression of repressed desires.

Smith, Evan Lansing. "The Narrative Structure of T.H. White's "The Once and Future King"." *Quondam et Futurus* 1, no.4 (1991): 39-52. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011).

Smith discusses the way White organized his writing in *The Once & Future King* to further his goal of imparting ideals to his readers. The article is obviously written with a focus on the more technical aspects of writing, instead of the plot itself.

Wheeler, Bonnie and Michael N. Salda. Introduction: The Debate on Editing Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* in *Arthurian Studies XLVII: The Malory Debate: Essays on the Texts of Le Morte d'Arthur*. Edited by Bonnie Wheeler, Robert L. Kindrick, and Michael N. Salda. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2000.

Wheeler is an editor of *Arthuriana*, Salda an associate Professor of Medieval Literature at the University of Southern Mississippi. Their introduction to their compilation of essays on the differences between the Caxton and Winchester texts of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* discusses ways in which the texts can be edited and a brief history of the ways in which they have been edited in the past.

Worthington, Heather. "From Children's Story to Adult Fiction: T.H. White's "The Once and Future King"." *Arthuriana* 12, no.2 (2002): 97-119. <http://www.jstor.org/> (accessed September 27, 2011).

Worthington's article discusses how *The Once & Future King* starts out as a novel appropriate for children, then morphs through each passing book into a more tragic and adult story. It focuses on images of sex in the books, notably conjecturing that King Pellinore's love, Piggy, is a dominatrix. However, sometimes, a commanding woman is just a woman, nothing more.

Other Works

Monty Python and the Holy Grail. DVD. Directed by Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005.

A farcical retelling of the legend of King Arthur by famed British comedy troupe, Monty Python, where they encounter “just a little bit of peril” while they seek the Grail.

Rowling, J.K. Interview by Christopher Lydon, *The Connection*, WBUR Radio, October 12, 1999. Accessed on <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/1999/1099-connectiontransc2.htm>

This interview with J.K. Rowling was conducted prior to the publication of the fourth Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. It contains the much quoted and well known by Harry Potter fact that Rowling considers Hermione to be similar to how she herself was at that age.