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Humor, Romance, Horror and Epic in Text and Film of Arthurian Legend Adaptations

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MA Thesis Fall 2012

City College of New York

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Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction: The Early Warrior Lore of Arthur	3
Dissatisfaction and Doubt: Humor in T.H. White's <i>The Once and Future King</i> and <i>Monty Python and the Holy Grail</i> (1975)	9
Background and influences of White, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones	10
Humor in structure and tone	14
Merlyn and wizard representation are parodied	22
Time is transcended and every time period mocked	25
Chivalry, combat and knighthood are satirized	28
Imbalance of femininity and masculinity are comedic	38
Conclusion	44
Beauty and the Grotesque: Romance and Horror in Tennyson's <i>Idylls of the King</i> and Disney's <i>The Sword in the Stone</i> (1963)	46
Background and Influences of Tennyson and Disney	47
Romance in structure, language and tone	52
Arthur is destined to be King by higher forces	58
Arthur is elevated to Jesus Christ and a humanized to a Young Boy	67
Beauty and the Grotesque found in femininity	73
Conclusion	82
Mortal Behind the Legend: Epic in Malory's <i>Le Morte d'Arthur</i> and <i>Excalibur</i> (1981)	83
Background and influences of Malory and Boorman	84
Epic in Structure, language and tone	94
Strange and different femininity disrupt epic society	104
Natural and Unnatural Gender Relationships disrupt epic society	114
Conclusion	121
Conclusion: The King lives on	122
Bibliography	124

Abstract

Early folklore, legend and history praised King Arthur as a great warlord, and linked him to superhuman feats. But these early texts only list Arthur's accomplishments like in a history book. Later Arthurian texts weave a delicate and beautiful story of life, love and destruction. Though humor is not the only element, humor is a vastly important device in T.H. White's 20th-century novel *The Once and Future King* and the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) to reveal dissatisfaction with tradition, authority and society. Parody, satire and caricature are used as social commentary to mock the Arthurian and contemporary society. Authority is questioned, chivalry and war are described as ridiculous and silly, and both fictions critique the Arthurian tradition and their contemporary society. In Tennyson's 19th-century poems *Idylls of the King* and Disney's film *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), there are romantic and horrific elements side by side to reflect the tension and change in their contemporary times. Romance manifests in idealization, fantasy and biblical, and horror manifests in grim, bleak and stark. Romance and horror are used in these fictions to reveal the desires and fears of the characters and the authors. Malory's 15th-century prose *Le Morte d'Arthur* and the film *Excalibur* (1981) both have epic qualities such as a wide time span, heightened meaning and exaggerated circumstances. These epics show the significance, purpose and connection of even minor characters to Arthur and Britain, and also the importance of Camelot to modern societies. The human is the central focus of both fictions and every individual is important, connects to and affect King Arthur, Britain and the world. The myth of King Arthur and his knights live on in adaptations and continue to affect audiences from generation to generation.

Introduction: The Early Warrior Lore of Arthur

The term Arthurian has been used to describe a vast amount of material from text to art, from before the medieval times to the 21st century. The themes of King Arthur, Camelot and the Round Table have been called legend, folklore and even historical. They have been written as prose, poetry, staged as plays, musicals, and interpreted into film and animation. The characters and themes of King Arthur and Camelot have fascinated and endured in so many different forms for centuries because of their adaptability and sympathetic themes. The characters are diverse and allow empathy to a wide range of audiences, and the themes are universal, relevant and still explored.

Chapter one will explore how humor used in White's 20th-century *The Once and Future King* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) reflect the author and directors' dissatisfaction with their contemporary world. The fictions mock, critique and undermine traditions. Chapter two will discuss the binary of romance and horror utilized in Tennyson's 19th-century *Idylls of the King* and Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963). The author and director imagine the human world as both a utopia and an apocalypse. The last chapter will examine Malory's 15th-century *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *Excalibur* (1981). These epic fictions show the author and director's understanding of the human world as intensely connected, meaningful and emotional. Early Arthurian stories were passed on in a variety of ways from oral traditions that idolize Arthur as a historical figure to folklore of a mystical Arthur possible of superhuman feats, to written texts that lists Arthur's accomplishments in war. Later artists use the Arthurian legend to share their sentiments about their contemporary time. They adapt the Arthurian legend with new structure, tone and themes from the genre comedy, romance, horror and epic.

Early folklore, legend and history praised King Arthur as a great warlord, and linked him to superhuman feats. But these early texts only list Arthur's accomplishments like in a history book. Later Arthurian texts weave a delicate and beautiful story of life, love and destruction. Arthur's earliest mention may be in the Scottish poem the *Gododdin*. The poem is a funeral lament for warriors from the tribe of Gododdin and "a warrior named Gwawrddur is praised for his prowess and is said to have 'fed black ravens on the rampart of a fortress| Though he was no Arthur'" (Lupack 13). The ravens feed on enemies killed by Gwawrddur, and though Arthur's mention is small, Arthur is elevated to a high-status warrior. He has defeated even more enemies than the best warrior of the tribe. The *Gododdin* praised warriors killed in a battle in 600AD, and the poem was written down in the 9th century and survives in a 13th-century manuscript (Lupack 13). The Welsh Nennius wrote around 800 the *Historia Brittonum* (History of the Britons). In the history, Arthur is the battle leader of the British and defeated the Saxon invaders in 12 battles. The last battle at Mountain Badon is when "Arthur alone kills 960 of his enemy" (Lupack 15). Arthur is again only admired for his military skill, and perhaps superhuman strength because he single-handedly killed many enemies. He may be a leader of warriors in these texts, but he is not described as a king yet. Arthur's individual tactical abilities are what gain the victory for the Britons, not teamwork or his leadership skills as in later stories of the Round Table. Nennius mentions a child born without a father who solves the riddle of underground dwelling dragons. He is Ambrosius, son of a Roman consul, and this character is early development of Merlin (Lupack 15). But in this early text, Ambrosius has no connection to Arthur and Ambrosius is far from the powerful and helpful wizard Merlin of later literature. Arthur is also linked to mystery, wonder and magic in Nennius' work because Arthur's dog Cafal. The dog's footprint on a stone always reappears on top of a stone pile no matter where the footprint is taken. The mysterious

tomb of Arthur's son Amr always magically fluctuates in length when it is measured as well (Lupack 15). Nennius wanted his work to be taken as accurate and historical, and claimed himself as a first-hand witness to the footprint and tomb. But he never had any real sources or credibility.

Culhwch and Olwen is a Welsh tale dating to 1100 that described Arthur as a supernatural helper. This tale is the start of the Knights of the Round Table, of Arthur as a divine savior and prince. Arthur and a list of "all of those who serve Arthur" help Culhwch win his bride Olwen (Lupack 16). Arthur became linked with success against impossible odds and has unique warriors ready to serve him. This folktale is the beginning of the Knights of the Round Table and Arthur's characterization beyond a warlord, but a divine helper in times of need. Culhwch was Arthur's cousin, and some of Arthur's servants are Cei, Bedwyr and Taliesin who are later known as the knights Kay, Bedivere and Taliesin. Olwen's father Ysbadadden tells Culhwch he should thank Arthur because only with Arthur's assistance could Culhwch marry Olwen. Alan Lupack, author of *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, believes that Culhwch is only confident and successful because he had Arthur and his "band of superheroes" and "extraordinary warriors" (Lupack 17). Arthur is recognized as a leader of adventurous warriors and Culhwch calls Arthur "sovereign prince of this Island" (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 25). Guinevere is mentioned as "the first lady of this Island" (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 25) but there is no elaboration about her until later literature. Arthur's warriors perform violent acts in the tale such as shaving Ysbadadden of his beard, skin and flesh to the bone, then beheading him (Lupack 17). Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff, authors of *The Arthurian Handbook*, describe the tale as "barbaric, colorful, sometimes comic production" (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 25) and Ronald Hutton thinks Arthur was described as, "supreme warlord of all Britain, with a retinue of heroes

ready to go on quests and to take on superhuman foes and magicians” (Archibald and Putter 23). Though the tale departs from earlier stories of Arthur since Arthur is described as a leader of remarkable warriors and a prince, the tale still does not deviate far from Welsh tradition, straightforward good and evil, and fairy tale structure. The tale followed a repetitive structure of impossible tasks, violence and inevitable success. There is no doubt that Culhwch will marry Olwen, and Culhwch even boasts to Ysbadadden after each demand, “It is easy for me to get that, though thou think it is not easy” (Lupack 17). With Arthur on Culhwch’s side, success is clear-cut in this tale. But as Arthurian literature is further transformed and adapted, success and failure becomes ambiguous and uncertain.

Largely influential in Arthurian literature is Geoffrey of Monmouth’s 1138 *Historia regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*). Geoffrey was the first author to call Arthur a king, and changed Arthur’s reputation from a strong warrior to a king and messiah of Britain. Geoffrey wrote from his imagination and later authors followed his example. They wrote freely about Arthur using the Arthur motif, but elaborated from their concerns with their contemporary society. Geoffrey was from Wales and was a teacher, cleric and bishop (Lupack 24). The history starts with the founding of Britain and the first king, who is the great-grandson of Aeneas, the mythological founder of Rome. Included are other “legendary history of Britain” such as King Lear and this material led up to King Arthur, which “makes up more than a third of the book” and was “the narrative focal point” (Lupack 25). Other authors have taken liberties with these legends only found in Geoffrey’s work. Virgil used Aeneas as the main character in his *Aeneid*, and Shakespeare used King Lear in his tragedy *King Lear*. Geoffrey claimed his source was an old Breton or Welsh book from his colleague in Oxford, but the book was never named. Geoffrey said he translated this old book into his history, but no sources have been found and he

might have invented these sources for credibility because medieval authors commonly did (Archibald and Putter 39). Ad Putter, author of chapter “The twelfth-century Author” in the *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend*, says,

Geoffrey relied mainly on his fertile imagination, though he was careful to use accepted methods of historical reconstruction (especially etymology) and to bolster inventions by including whatever ‘facts’ could be garnered from earlier authorities (Archibald and Putter 40).

The characters and plots that Geoffrey singlehandedly introduces in his description of King Arthur’s reign are still central to Arthurian texts in later centuries such as Merlin’s foresight, Arthur’s magical conception, Mordred’s usurpation, Guinevere’s adultery, and Arthur’s end in Avalon (Lupack 27). Arthur is more than a war leader and king in Geoffrey’s text. He is a “messiah” who saves Britain from invaders, restores rightful rule and peace (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 40). Arthur even elevates Britain “to a high level of civilization and prestige” during his reign, creates a respected knighthood and ensures Britain a beautiful and unforgettable history (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 38-39). However, Geoffrey holds back from over elaboration and writes in a “factual manner” because he wanted King Arthur and his reign to be thought of as fact and history (Archibald and Putter 40). His text suggests other themes, but does not fully explore them as later authors do. His text is a perfect mock-factual artifact that later Arthurian literature will rely on as a starting point to depart from. Ad Putter describes the text as flirting with ‘romantic possibilities’, one that “provide[s] glimpses of the chivalric pageantry associated with courtly romance” and has “a tragic shape that made it memorable to later writers” (Archibald and Putter 41-2).

Geoffrey wrote without historical fact and gave Arthur significance beyond a war leader in the *Historia*, which opened up possibilities for later authors. Like Geoffrey, they write adaptations of Arthur unrestrained by history, use their imagination as source and only loosely

follow the Arthurian structure. Later authors were not trying to prove Arthur's existence as earlier authors did, but instead they explore the psychology, struggles and themes of Arthur and his knights. Knights struggle between loyalty to family or to their state, female characters struggle between wanting power or love, and Arthur struggles with being a godlike king or a flawed mortal. The challenges that cause the fall of Camelot can be taken as universal evils that always stalk the good like Arthur and his knights. This evil will continue to cause the ruin of future good societies as well. Later authors incorporate their influences of literature, their contemporary times and what they considered evils of their time into their work. They combine evils of their contemporary time as the evil in Arthur's time, and offer alternatives to the failure of Camelot in hopes to save their contemporary society from further ruin.

Dissatisfaction and Doubt: Humor in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975)

Comedy and humor are prevalent throughout the later Arthurian material. There are many types used such as irony, sarcasm, ridicule, social commentary and even ridiculousness. Parody, satire and caricature are used as social commentary to mock the Arthurian and contemporary society. Authority is questioned, chivalry and war are described as ridiculous and silly, and both fictions critique the Arthurian tradition and their contemporary society. Though humor is not the only element, humor is a vastly important device in T.H. White's 20th-century novel *The Once and Future King* and the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) to reveal dissatisfaction with tradition, authority and society. In T.H. White's *The Once and Future King*, jousting, war and knights are foolish and mocked because White discourages violence and war. He encourages education and rule of brain over brawn in his novel because he lived through both World Wars, the British Empire and he felt that war was destructive and absurd. *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) breaks from definition because it uses a variety of genres and its humor comes from the juxtaposition of what is expected of traditional films and what actually occurs in this film. The directors reflect the tension of Britain and America during the 1980s, when authority and tradition were questioned. In both works, humor is used as a device to draw attention to controversial subjects, critique the upper and lower classes alike and encourage change to save the contemporary society from destruction like Camelot.

Background and influences of White, Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones

T.H. White lived through both World Wars, the fall of British Empire and personally understood colonization because he grew up in India in the 1900s. White used Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* as an inspiration, and incorporated his strong antiwar sentiments into *The Once and Future King*. White uses humor to undermine, critique and mock military, violence and war, which will be discussed later. Andrew Lynch, author of the chapter "Imperial Arthur: home and away" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legends*, describes T.H. White's background.

White was a child of Empire, born to English parents in India, and a patriot for English heritage and countryside. He was also deeply pessimistic about the aggressive tendencies of the human race, its 'incurable irrationality and wickedness'. He loved Malory's work, but rejected the interpretation of it as a celebration of chivalric prowess, and had come to believe that 'the central theme of *Morte d'Arthur* is to find an antidote for war' (Archibald and Putter 181).

White believes man is naturally violent and bestial, and humans' sinful nature would surface if not kept in check. Violence in jousting, killing and war is used galore in White's novel, but White emphasizes the destruction resulting from these activities. Camelot is a society based on rule by military aggression and its fall was a message to the readers, a warning of the dangers of human nature. White also presents a better society ruled by brain over brawn. The fall of Camelot is important because young Tom Malory will pass on the failures of Camelot and teach the future. Lynch writes,

The literary result was a half-nostalgic, half-despairing retelling of the medieval story as a challenge to the European legacy of violence and militarism: 'White...constructs a social and political order which we are invited to compare with our own present-day systems' (Archibald and Putter 181).

White believes his novel and his message is a universal one for all human societies because all humans are capable of slipping back to their crude and bestial nature. White believes that the

Arthurian legend, in Malory's text and in his own text, is to remind the readers of the failure of Camelot and the need to change from Camelot in order to have a lasting golden age.

Terry Gilliam and Terry Jones, the directors of *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, base the film loosely on a variety of texts and resonate with the contemporary 1980s British and American audiences. The film's style of resisting definition by using many sketches, genres and cultural references made the film largely popular in America and Britain at its release. Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff write,

The film demonstrates an acquaintance (mostly through Malory) with Arthurian conventions and characters but develops them in a decidedly original way, as a frame for physical comedy, puns, anachronisms, and parodies of film conventions. The result, a masterpiece of cinematic humor (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 263).

The directors use humor to undermine all existing establishments of film, Arthurian legends and medieval worship. In past traditions, the medieval knight in shining armor and their honor code have been admired as heroic and King Arthur's Round Table was a respected court that delegated justice and equality. But when the Monty Python troupe mentions medieval motifs, they parody them with comedic results. The film draws attention on how ridiculous and foolish these medieval motifs are. Gilliam and Jones use Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* as inspiration, and make reference to medieval motifs to parody and critique them. Alan Lupack writes,

Its popularity derives not only from its outrageous humour but also from the many motifs its creators adapt from medieval literature. The fabulous beasts, the dangerous trials, the perilous bridge crossing, the combat that continues when one knight is severely wounded, the rescue of a maiden imprisoned in a tower, the fabulous ship that takes the knights to the Grail castle- all these stock motifs from medieval romance are parodied in the film. Also parodied is the kind of anachronism found both in medieval literature and in modern renders of the medieval (Lupack 279).

The typical hero of the medieval motif is turned into a fool by the Monty Python film, like when Lancelot charges into a wedding party and butchers many wedding guest, including the bride.

When asked, Lancelot says, "when I'm in this idiom I sometimes get a bit carried away"

(Archibald and Putter 182). His explanation makes him not seem in control of his own strength and instead of a hero, he is a murderer.

During the 1980s, there were struggles with power and authority of government in Britain and America. The author of *Hollywood Knights: Arthurian Cinema and the Politics of Nostalgia*, Susan Aronstein, writes,

In many ways the Pythons' take on Arthurian narrative results in a uniquely British film, one that resonated very specifically in the context of a heated reexamination of the role and relevance of the monarchy, and a renewed and violent nationalism in Ireland and Wales. However, it also resonated in America (Aronstein 6-7).

There were Irish and Welsh rebellions for independence from Britain in the 1980s and the need of the British monarchy was questioned. The film was understood as anti-establishment when it was released because it pokes fun at everything from King Arthur and the silly Camelot he avoids, to the murdered medieval historian and the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch. British audiences understood this desire to break from old, tired and established tradition. Lynch writes,

Most of the Python team were products of the English public-school system and Oxbridge colleges. They were familiar with medievalist educational and religious models of manly behaviour, but also with actual medieval history and literature. Their humour, like White's, worked through a parodic connection of existing modern idioms to the medieval scene, including television history documentaries, movie 'swashbucklers', church ritual and musical comedy. Some of this satire works by obvious anachronism, while some has close medieval analogues (Archibald and Putter 181-2).

Gilliam and Jones know how to devise a coherent plot in film and what the Arthurian legends are, but they decide artistically for a collage of legend, history and satire. Aronstein writes,

In its deconstruction of history, tradition, and multiple genres, it offers both apocalypse and parody, exposing the absurd at the core of the Arthurian legends and the authoritative social and political structures that had appropriated them... *The Holy Grail's* deconstruction of authority and the discourses with which it justified and preserved its power and privilege still resonated with young (and not so young) audiences across the country. In the wake of Vietnam, the Pentagon Papers, Kent State, and Watergate, the film's postmodern carnival spoke to a generation both weary and wary of all authoritative institutions; soon the nation was in the grip of 'Pythomania' (Aronstein 111).

To the American audience, Python understood the shackles of government, tradition and authority, but they intentionally break away from tradition in the film. An example of the deviation from tradition is the film's ending.

The film's abrupt and inconclusive ending is when a police officer arrests Arthur and Lancelot for murder accusations. It is an interjection of authority that makes no sense, and it shows how intrusive, conventional and strange authority really is. David Day, author of "*Monty Python and the Holy Grail: Madness with a Definite Method*", writes about the ending of the film,

...the ending was something of a disappointment...The film thus satirizes not just particular views and ideas that we have of the Middle Ages, but the modern obsession with making and holding them all. The film seems to say that the enterprise of historical recreation simply cannot be maintained (Harty, *Cinema* 133).

The ending does not follow film conventions because medieval times is mixed with the 20th century, there is no climax or resolution, the heroes do not succeed and the quest is never finished. Donald Hoffman, author of "Not Dead Yet: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in the Twenty-first century", writes,

The Pythons are primarily playing with the anachronism of the intrusion of the twentieth century on the fifteenth, and commenting on the chronic violence inherent in the practice of chivalry, commenting as well on the ironic lawlessness of a quest dedicated to the recovery of a spiritual order...it is almost a feature of the Quest that it remains unachieved (Harty, *Cinema* 146-7).

People make laws, authority and convention, but it is difficult to break out of. British audiences connected with this when Britons struggled with its monarchy. American audiences understood when Americans grew distrustful of their government, and Gilliam and Jones reflected British and American anxieties in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Lupack agrees that the ending "is meant to indicate that the modern mindset so intrudes on our reception of medieval story that it is impossible for us not to imprison the original narrative in our own preconceptions" (Lupack

279). Once tradition, law and authority become so ingrained in the mind, it becomes assumed and automatic. But these conventions were being challenged in Britain and America, and this film represents this time period by breaking film conventions.

Humor in structure and tone

The structure of the fiction is important since it sets the tone and influences how the fiction will be interpreted. Humor is purposefully integrated into the structure of these fictions. In T.H. White's novel, humor matures as the books change and in the Monty Python film, humor is as formless, timeless and senseless as the lack of structure of the film. White structures his novel *The Once and Future King* into four books that change in genre, focus and tone. The characters, humor and audience mature at the same time. He published the four parts in 1958. The humor progresses from satirical and ridiculous in the first book to dark, critical and jaded by the last book. There is a last and fifth book, *The Book of Merlyn*, published in 1977 after the original four. White had planned the fifth book to be part of his complete novel, but it was removed by his editor and later published separately from the first four. This book repeats what happens in the first book with a hopeless and cynical humor. White thought, "the central theme of *Morte d'Arthur* is to find an antidote to war" and Lupack believes that T.H. White's novel was meant to teach about war and how to avoid, recover and cope with turbulent life (Lupack 188). Lupack says,

The ending of the 1958 *The Once and Future King* implies that the best answer to macrocosmic sorrows like war is indeed to learn something-from the examples of books like Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and White's own sequence. At the end of the 1958 novel, White writes of a youth, not Wart but a young Tom Malory, who will learn and then inspire others to learn (Lupack 191).

The structure of the book is integrated with time and Lupack notes, “White’s playing with time is not, however, just for purposes of humor and satire; it is part of the very fabric of the book” (Lupack 189). Merlyn lives backwards in time, the characters age and the genres of the parts “mature from a children’s story to a Bildungsroman, to a romance, to a tragedy, to a philosophical treatise” (Lupack 190). Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff track the humor in T.H. White’s novel, saying,

Although the subject of the first volume is ostensibly a serious one—the education of the young Arthur—the tone is light and the method pure fantasy... The tone quickly changes as we enter the second volume and watch the King confront problems of war and politics. There is still comedy, in the episodes dealing with Pellinore and his unending chase of the Questing Beast, for example, but the comedy is juxtaposed with scenes of cruelty, especially to animals (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 181-2).

In *The Queen of Air and Darkness*, Morgause and her four sons Gawain, Agravaine, Gaheris, and Gareth are introduced trying to earn their mother’s love unsuccessfully. The twisted and dark humor comes from Morgause’s sons and Merlyn. The sons bring a unicorn head to their mother as a gift and Merlyn becomes “increasingly confused and forgetful” (Brewer and Taylor 293). He still advises Arthur but is unable to prevent Mordred’s conception. Brewer and Taylor, authors of *The Return of King Arthur: British and American Arthurian Literature since 1900*, write about Gawain and his brothers.

By such psychological exploration of the upbringing and circumstances of his characters, White endeavors to prepare and account for that eventual downfall of the Round Table (Brewer and Taylor 292).

The damaged, deprived and desperate characters surrounding the Round Table such as Morgause’s sons and Merlyn lead to the eventual destruction of the Round Table. Though the mentally unstable Morgause raised them, all her sons somehow manage to become trusted knights of the Round Table. From a young age, her sons are encouraged to kill and behead, and are taught that a trophy is a victim’s head. Gawain and his brothers bring their psychological

issues of neglect and need of mother's approval to Camelot. Merlyn does not know he is unfit to advise Arthur anymore, and he will be lured by Vivien and disappear, leaving Arthur without guidance and doomed. Lancelot thinks himself as having monkeylike features in *The Ill-Made Knight*, but many people, including Elaine and Guenever, think of him as attractive. *The Candle in the Wind* shows an old Arthur regretting his failure but comforted by dream and legend, and lastly in *The Book of Merlyn*, the animals ridicule and criticize humans, suggesting humans be renamed *Homo ferox* and *stultus* for being ferocious and stupid (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 182). Even the great Arthur and Merlyn are humans and susceptible to weakness, flaws and frailty by excessive emotions, inflated ego and irrationality unlike animals. The humor continues throughout *The Once and Future King*, aging and darkening as Arthur grows, from silly childhood lessons and games, to dark and twisted humor of motherhood and psychopaths (Lupack 189), to excessive and foolish romance rituals and raging jealousy, and finally cynical reflection and regret in satire.

In *The Sword in the Stone*, Merlyn transforms Arthur into animals to teach him about the world, different political systems and to help him form his own opinion. In *The Book of Merlyn*, Arthur is described as ashamed, vanquished, with "an old man's misery", a drowned man "who was nearly too far gone", and old (White *The Book of Merlyn* 3, 7). Merlyn is very aware and breaks the fourth dimension as he tells Arthur they are in a book. Merlyn wants the readers to realize that "children are more intelligent than their parents" because "children have resilient, plastic brains" (White *The Book of Merlyn* 13). Also adults have incorrect beliefs about 20th-century adults being more superior than animals, people of the past and children when actually, animals are superior to humans (White *The Book of Merlyn* 13). Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff write, "*The Book of Merlyn*, originally intended to be the concluding section of the whole, is bitter,

misanthropic, and unsubtly didactic” (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 182). The novel comes full circle as Merlyn again turns Arthur into animals and “White here concludes simply that humans are fundamentally inferior to them” (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 182). There is even a committee of animals gathered to discuss the failures of human kind and Arthur’s rule as an experiment to learn from. Arthur admits, “I suppose I had better go away and drown myself. I am cheeky, insignificant, ferocious, stupid and impolitic” and the animals reply,

Honestly, we were trying to help... We were telling you these things as a sort of foundation, so as to make it easier to solve your puzzle later (White *The Book of Merlyn* 11, 39).

Animals have a set of rules they actually follow for peaceful relations in their society and between other species to function smoothly whereas humans kill for pleasure (White *The Book of Merlyn* 26, 35). When Arthur wonders why his use of law instead of force to rule failed, the problem is reveal not to be Arthur, but the irrational, volatile and violent nature of humans. Elizabeth Brewer believes the humor in *The Book of Merlyn* is “polemic and facetious humor” and agrees that “the return to the animals ‘creates a circular pattern’ that would have some structural merit” (Lupack 190). Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff explain *The Book of Merlyn* as,

This volume is clearly marked by White’s hatred of war, as well as of people, and some readers also find in it further biographical reflections, such as guilt at his own pacifism in time of war.

They believe the entirety of *The Once and Future King* is “an antiwar social commentary that comes more and more to use the legend as a convenient structure and pretext” (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 182). What starts out as a light-hearted and humorous lessons from Merlyn to Arthur in *The Sword and the Stone* matures and becomes a cynical, depressing and stark depiction of reality in *The Book of Merlyn* where knowledge is passed from animals to Merlyn to Arthur and

finally to the readers. White suggests that the most informed and intelligent living creatures are the animals.

The animal committee has no right to teach Arthur because they do not know how to be a king, and the animals' lives have failure and success as well. Arthur could not avoid failure just as no living being could avoid death. Arthur learned from animals when he was a child, and Arthur admits "there were his earliest friends-the preposterous committee" (White *The Book of Merlyn* 17). But even after the animal lessons, his kingdom still falls and he hears from the animals again at his own failings. The animals and children who are praised as better than adult humans live their humble animal societies and can never measure up to the power, prosperity and influence that Arthur and humans have. Yet the animals still criticize, theorize and try to teach Arthur as if they knew better or could do more than he ever did. The committee members include a badger, snake, owl and hedgehog (White *The Book of Merlyn* 20). All of them, including Merlyn, are not qualified to give Arthur advice. Arthur had experienced life as an ant, a bird, a goose, but the animals had not lived as Arthur. Even Merlyn only observes life and events happen. He does not experience and act in his own life, and is removed from reality. The humor is the creatures at the lowest power and social class, such as ants and birds, teach Arthur but their animals lives are failures. When he is a child, Arthur embraces such lessons hoping they will bring him success. As an old man, Arthur still accepts these lessons but the audience recognizes these lessons have brought success and failure, and no living beings, animals, humans and even Merlyn know how to live without failure. Life is unpredictable, though humans and animals try to understand and live it better, there is no better. There is just what happens and what does not happen. Brewer and Taylor think, "*The Book of Merlyn* is sentimental and polemical, and it does not complement *The Once and Future King*, nor finish the story more satisfactory" (Brewer and

Taylor 295). They prefer the ending in *The Candle in the Wind*, where Arthur wonders about goodness in humanity. Brewer and Taylor write about Arthur's thoughts,

All his efforts had ended only in total warfare, total hatred, 'the most modern of hostilities'. The old king ponders the unanswerable questions: is man only a machine in an insensate universe? What was Right, what was Wrong? Here, White's characteristic nineteen-thirtyish liberal pacifism is put into the mouth of Arthur, as he concludes that wars are fought about nothing, and that the sole hope for the future can lie in culture, and the establishment of a new Round Table. Arthur sends his young page, Tom Malory, away from the coming battle to ensure that the story is preserved for the edification of posterity (Brewer and Taylor 294-5).

There is a naivety and inevitability in this ending, as all hope again lies in the hands of one young man to improve the human condition. First there was Jesus Christ, then Arthur, and lastly Tom Malory. The human condition, its frailty and its strive for improvement will continue on but the hope is slim that any one person can be responsible and successful in saving the entire human race from war, destruction and pain. The twisted humor is after all the failure and wars of humans, there is still hope put into the same volatile and unstable human. There are no other choices; humans are capable of great creation and destruction, so they continue that cycle because that is all they know how to do.

Monty Python and the Holy Grail is a film entirely of sketches similar to the Monty Python Flying Circus British television show. Though it seems without a cohesive plot and storyline, the chaos and separation add to the humor and overall intention of the work. Terry Gilliam, an actor and co-director of the film, describes the film as having a "mad energy" and Umberto Eco, an Italian literary critic, says, "the film thrives on 'its glorious incoherence'" (Umland and Umland 64). The individual adventures allow the knights to explore different aspects. Since they are caricatures known only by one attribute, and they explore different parts of one whole person's psychology. When the knights are introduced, they are given one descriptor: Sir Bedevere the wise, Sir Lancelot the brave, Sir Galahad the pure and Sir Robin the

not quite as brave as Sir Lancelot. Sir Robin is a completely fictional knight, and he is the most expressive and funny in his facial expressions and actions. He has a chicken on his shield and when his squire sings a song about his bravery, Sir Robin must cut him off because it gets too violent and Sir Robin is disgusted, afraid and a coward. Sir Robin is a parody of a knight, and the squire's song praises a knight's excessively grotesque violence in a comedy film. So Sir Robin, the song and the film are all not to be taken seriously because they already break the expected mold. Hoffman writes, " 'Sir Robin' celebrates the defects of a not too effective knight, whose most successful combat technique is 'to bravely run away'" (Harty, *Cinema* 141). The best trait of Sir Robin was the worse trait of traditional knights, but Robin relies on his one defining trait, his consistent cowardice.

Animation shows the human actor knights as animated knights. The animated situation is usually solved without the knight's earning it, and the humor is the anti-heroic knights and the film without a plot or message. The scene of the Black Beast of Arrghh is animated. The beast chases Arthur's group until the animator has a fatal heart attack, beast ceases to exist without an animator and the knights are saved. David Day calls the sequence, "illusion is juxtaposed with the means of creating it" (Harty, *Cinema* 131). The audience is reminded that this is a film; an animator is responsible for the monster and the animator can easily die and the monster will disappear. The scene is only a mock chase, quest and game of the beast. The animator and plot are finished when the knights are terrified and hopeless, the director is then satisfied enough to let the knights go without being killed. The knights do not learn how to solve their problem, the nontraditional plot occurs where the problem magically disappears. The knights have just survived the deadly attack of the white rabbit, and Hoffman calls the white rabbit "the grim comedy of gore and corpses" and the Beast of Arrghh as,

an exuberantly grotesque creature, with hints of Cerberus, Argus, Hydra, and other mythical monsters...the artist himself dies and his final spasms scribble the monster into scraggly fragments and name him in his dying gasps, 'Arrghh!' (Harty, *Cinema* 144).

The humor is in the shock and discontinuity of the events, one to the next without sense of time, rules or accuracy. At one point in the film, there is animation and a voice-over that says, "In the frozen land of Nador, they were forced to eat Robin's minstrels. And there was much rejoicing" (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*). The cannibalism is never mentioned of again, and the disturbing, jesting and animated nature of the scene makes it easy to be overlooked. This is how far beyond limits and rules that Monty Python has gone; they even have heinous and condemned acts like cannibalism to be laughed and rejoiced over. King Arthur and his knights are anti-heroes because they run from beasts, eat humans and survive by mere luck. They are not respected heroes anymore like in the traditional legend, but bumbling, entertaining fools.

The film spans different genres and resists being defined to the very last minute, when it ends abruptly without closure. Rebecca and Samuel Umland, authors of *The Use of Arthurian Legend in Hollywood Film: From Connecticut Yankees to Fisher Kings*, describe the film as,

animation, documentary, musical, and slapstick comedy), self reflexivity ("Scene 24"), and fairly tales ("The Three Billy Goats Gruff"). In short, it is an attempt to subvert any logics of signification (Umland and Umland 64).

The humor is that the film cannot be all explained. The film is unique of its time and has an odd humor that keeps the audience hooked. Even when it ends inconclusively and absurdly with the police arresting Lancelot and Arthur for a crime they did not commit, the audience still wants to watch more ridiculous action. This is an interjection of modernity and reminder of the power structure in modernity, where power has been transferred from king and brutality to government and law enforcement. David Day calls the ending 'modernity intrusion' and explains,

The film thus satirizes not just particular views and ideas that we have of the Middle Ages, but the modern obsession with making and holding them all...historical recreation cannot be maintained (Harty, *Cinema* 133).

Humor, controversial topics and human nature cannot be maintained in the film and in the imagination of the directors. The audience is invited to participate and imagine what will happen after the arrest. The film is wildly reckless, fun and dangerous. Rebecca and Samuel Umland write,

the quest the holy grail merely serves the function, namely, to draw a number of heterogeneous stories and sketches together. There is no casual-chronological logic linking the episodes-the quest is a red herring- only a contrived device... The film's episodic, open-ended nature, in addition to its frequent citation of other films and film genres, as well as its disjunctions, ruptures, non sequiturs, and disconnected images ultimately make it as equally compelling an example of the principle of 'the cult film as intertextual collage' (Umland and Umland 68-69).

Using the quest of the Holy Grail loosely, Gilliam and Jones have transformed the Arthurian legend to a film that reflects the 1980s Britain and America. The film's humor comes from its variety and senselessness. It is funny because it is not controlled, and to try to label and limit the film to one interpretation would reduce the intended humor, meaning and tone.

Merlyn and wizard representation are parodied

Merlyn and Tim are the magical representations in *The Once and Future King* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. These magical representations are the most powerful characters in the entire fiction, however they are disrespected, mocked and ridiculed in appearance and behavior. The magical figures try to be helpful and generous to others to mixed results, but they are unable to live a fulfilling mortal life. These authoritative figures end up looking foolish because they are unable to help Arthur or his knights, unable to live contently and eventually are

distrusted and forgotten. In *The Once and Future King*, Merlyn explains to Arthur that Merlyn experiences life,

backwards and inside out...one gets confused with Time, when it is like that. All one's senses get muddled, for one thing. If you know what is going to happen to people, and not what has happened to them, it makes it difficult to prevent it happening, if you don't want it to have happened, if you see what I mean? Like drawing in a mirror (White 29).

Though he can see into the future, he does not know the past. This makes it difficult for him to live an ordinary life and relate with others, he becomes detached from the world and apathetic. He describes his backwards living as seeing the world through a mirror; he is like a mirror's reflection. He is removed, he cannot relate and he does not understand human behavior such as culture, relationships and power struggles. He becomes more like nature than human, with a bird nesting in his hair like he is a tree, his hair mixed with feathers, bird droppings and sticks. When Arthur meets Merlyn, Merlyn is already a part of nature and far removed from humanity. Arthur describes Merlyn the first time they meet,

The Wart was familiar with the nests of Spar-ark and Gos, the crazy conglomerations of sticks and oddments which had been taken over from squirrels or crows, and he knew how the twigs and the tree foot were splashed with white mutes, old bones, muddy feathers and castings. This was the impression that he got from Merlyn. The old man was streaked with droppings over his shoulders, among the stars and triangles of his gown, and a large spider was slowly lowering itself from the top of his hat, as he gazed and slowly blinked at the little boy in front of him (White 23).

Merlyn's clothing resembles the night sky and mountainous landscape, and his face and eyes like the moon looking down at the humans. His favorite activity is to nap and escape life; this is his vacation, escape and relaxation (White 88-89). Though Merlyn has the gift of foresight that many would value and admire, Merlyn actually lives like a tree, the sky and the moon. He does nothing for himself, only serving others like birds, spiders and Arthur. The humor is he appears old with white hair, funny with a pointed hat and ridiculous because of his disheveled, dirty hair.

But inside, he is a great magician and seer who Arthur relies on heavily to become king. He holds all this power but he cannot live a normal life, is disrespected and unappreciated.

Merlyn does not appear in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, but there is Tim the enchanter who assists King Arthur on the ridiculous adventure of the white rabbit beast. He proves himself to be useless, full of tricks and showmanship, but not helpful in defeating the beast or locating the Holy Grail. The wizard is similar to Merlyn because he gives guidance to the king and his knights to progress their quest. Though he is not as important and influential as Merlyn, he serves the same role as Merlyn as a wise old man. When the wizard is introduced, he wears a long blue robe and skullcap, has a long white beard and long mustaches just like Merlyn's description in T.H. White (White 23, 25). His skullcap has ram horns while Merlyn had a pointed hat on his skullcap, and Merlyn had a wand whereas Tim has a staff. Tim's name is unimpressive since it is a nickname instead of a proper name just like his advice and appearance. He is a common street magician, a shadow of what he could have been which is Merlyn. His clothes are outdated and impractical for battles. His beard is ridiculously long to his knees, unruly and hindering him in physical encounters as well. He looks ridiculous and out of place in a quest because he is dressed up like in a stage costume and has no emotions. Tim stands in a rocky terrain far away from the protagonists, and wherever he points, there is a loud and smoky explosion. Tim then appears in front of the protagonists and when their exchange begins, Tim creates more explosives in between dialogue. Tim has no expression, when he speaks he is serious and warns the group of a beast in a cave. Tim lives isolated like Merlyn, and seems to flaunt his power like a showy but purposeless performance. No one fears or respects the wizard, he is like a prop magician who does tricks but is not useful in combat or real matters as they soon find out. When the group meets the beast, they underestimate it because it appears to be a

harmless white rabbit. The group disrespect the wizard by scoffing off his warning and go right into their death. The wizard seems unconcerned at the wellbeing or success of King Arthur, he only raises his voice when the beast confirms the wizard's warning. The humor besides the carnivorous, shrieking cave beast hidden in the body of a white rabbit is the wizard. Tim can create explosions out of thin air and teleport himself, but he is unable to handle this beast. He may show off and boast of his powers, but against a real enemy, he is helpless and hides behind a rock. His advice is unheeded and he actually is the least capable of the protagonists because he has no fighting abilities. Tim enters and leaves in ambiguity and no one notices his disappearance. Tim is only a parody of Merlyn; the typical authority figure has been reduced in this film to an ineffectual, common showman. There is no need for this figure and his power depended on the knight's belief in his abilities. Once the knights distrusted him, Tim was just another character. Authority depends on belief and respect of the masses as well, so the masses should be able to choose, trust and influence their authoritative figures but that was not the case with the monarchy in Britain and the presidency in America in the 1980s.

Time is transcended and every time period mocked

Social commentary has been presented under the cover of humor in Arthurian literature, film and media. The criticism can reveal dissatisfaction with the past, present or where the future is headed. T.H. White utilizes Merlyn and his unique ability to live backwards through time to mention all time periods from the 21st century to the medieval times. Merlyn can compare the future with the past so therefore he has a modern gaze. His comments seem senseless and strange to the characters in the novel, but are meaningful to the modern readers. When Merlyn comes to become Arthur's tutor, Sir Ector asks for testimonials, which Merlyn makes appear in his hand

(White 33). This is the modern practice of job application including resume, interview and references. The process is parodied and shown to be ineffectual since Merlyn makes these credentials from magic. His references are people from the past and since Merlyn lives from the future back, he could not possibly have known these figures. Somehow he knows they are impressive, admirable and respected people to get references from. Aristotle is Greek and lived in Greece during the years BC, Hecate is a Greek goddess who is immortal, and the Master of Trinity is the Dean of Trinity College in the University of Cambridge. Cambridge was established in 1546. These three references are all from different points of time and are not reliable, just as Merlyn is not a reliable tutor but he gets the job done because of his trickery, lies and conjuring. Sir Ector does not believe Merlyn's power and magic, criticizing them as illusions done by mirrors and hypnotism (White 34). But Merlyn still gets the job because there are no other candidates. Both the modern process of job application and the monumental names of the past are mentioned but not understood by Sir Ector or perhaps even the readers. The knowledge and fame of all humanity is emphasized as fleeting, important figures and influential people come and go in history like Arthur will become important and disappear into Avalon without even a body or trace left. White felt that modern conventions of job application, past conventions of name-dropping and appearance are not reliable methods of knowing someone's worth and cheaters like Merlyn can infiltrate and corrupt the system from the inside out.

In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, both the past and the future are mocked and laughable. Authority is always a convention and can be changed if people only knew the power is in masses of people, not the monarch. Monks march in a line and give the Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch to King Arthur, which is used to defeat the white rabbit beast. The grenade looks like the Sovereign's Orb of the United Kingdom, which is one of the British Crown Jewels. It

symbolizes the king's religious role as head of the Church of England and Defender of the Faith, and is used during coronation of a new monarch. The grenade is visual satire of this symbolic power into a physical power because it is now a weapon. It can be used for aggression and if in the wrong hands, the power can be misused, destructive and harmful. Antioch is a reference to the Holy Lance of Antioch, which pierced Christ on the crucifix and was found during the Siege of Antioch during the First Crusade. The grenade is a weapon like the lance, but it is on the side of religion instead of in nonbelievers. The monks announce the grenade is a sacred relic, but instead of worshiping and valuing this relic, it is used and destroyed. King Arthur and his knights are questing for the Holy Grail, but they would not use it as a regular cup. So when the relic of the Holy Grenade is being used, it is unexpected, disrespectful to religion and reflects the change in times. Sacred relics, symbols of power and authority can be used for the unintended purposes. The 21st century film laughs at the use of violence to solve problems, the out of place grenade in King Arthur's time and the willingness of modern depictions of Arthur to use the relic as a weapon. The humor is enhanced by the specific and repetitive instructions of the grenade, which is a parody of a bible verse. God blessed the grenade for the monks to use against enemies of Christianity, which is funny because of the violent killing and punishments God does inflict in the bible. An example is story of Noah's arch, when God wipes out all the corrupt and devout people with a great flood because God felt humanity needed to be cleansed of nonbelievers. Even the all mighty, good and powerful God misuses his power when he kills his creations because he no longer liked what they did. The monarch of Britain and the president of America were possible of these misuses of power as well, with the British repression of Irish and Welsh independence and America's unnecessary involvement in the Vietnam War.

Chivalry, combat and knighthood are satirized

Humor is used to mock the unrealistic standards of behavior in chivalry, combat and swordplay. When the knighthood, combat and chivalry are satirized, masculinity and culture are questioned and mocked. Masculinity and femininity will be discussed later. Honor and glory through combat and the whole social and political structure based on the best warrior is described as foolish and strange in TH White's novel and the Monty Python film. In *The Once and Future King*, militaristic societies and knights are mocked, and war is discouraged as unsuccessful. White shows the destruction and foolishness of knights, war and violence to prove it is an inappropriate way to rule. Andrew Lynch describes T.H. White's background,

White was a child of Empire, born to English parents in India, and a patriot for English heritage and countryside. He was also deeply pessimistic about the aggressive tendencies of the human race, its 'incorrigible irrationality and wickedness' (Archibald and Putter 181).

Lynch concludes,

White directs his satire not against an idea of the Middle Ages themselves, but against a modern educative tradition of competitive aggression, in which medievalist models were routinely used to ennoble the idea of war and empire (Archibald and Putter 181).

In order to make physical combat unattractive, White shows examples of ridiculous and silly chivalry. Malory first mentions the brother knights of Balan and Balin, and White transforms them into falcons to teach the prepubescent Arthur how to deal with militaristic, single-minded people. The great knights are reduced to predatory birds, and their ways of behavior are comically parodied and mocked as silly and useless. Merlyn describes the community of falcons, hawks and hunting birds as "a kind of Spartan military mess" (White 73). They are single-minded, focused on the hunt and physicality while other aspects of society is neglected, like the Spartan society. Merlyn reminds Arthur and the reader that the birds are only soldiers and even high status knights such as Balin and Balan are reduced to replaceable, mass infantry. He says,

It is military conversation really, like you might have in the mess of a crack cavalry regiment: tactics, small arms, maintenance, betting, famous hunts, wine, women and song (White 71).

They sing of their physical pleasures, short-term goals they look forward to but they are just birds and do not see beyond their narrow viewpoint. There are greater concerns and events than just daily activities and physical pleasures like food and sex. The initiation ritual they use on Arthur is common and can be applied to humans as well, and shows how these birds cling to outdated rituals that make no sense but offer order and structure to their lives. The birds initiate Arthur by a series of questions, an ordeal of bravery, sacrifice and a ritual chant, song and feast (White 75-81). Arthur succeeds in the trials and becomes accepted into the society, but the humor is Arthur is not even a bird and the trials are flawed. White purposefully links these falcons with knights because he named them two famous knights of the Round Table, Balin and Balan. Birds, knights and soldiers are grouped together by White as simple-minded, carnal and habitual beings. He believes their rituals and trials are outdated and flawed, and their way of life narrow-minded. Arthur is taught by this militaristic society as only one of his many lessons from varied societies. These many societies teach Arthur to become a well-rounded, fair and informed leader.

Falcons, knights and all humans should be humbled when they realize that they are not in charge of their own lives and there is always a higher authority, from law to nature and fate. The irony and tragedy of all these birds of prey are that they are all hooded, tied up and under the control of a human master Hob. There is a bird hierarchy and falcons consider themselves the top and highest social class in bird society. But these falcons are just servants of Hob, who is in turn a lowly servant of Sir Ector, who is just another knight of adequate wealth and land. All knights serve under a king, and even the most wealthiest and powerful king is at mercy to nature, fate

and death. Merlyn and Arthur talk about the state of these birds before Arthur enters the mews.

Merlyn says,

Another subject they have... is food. It is a depressing thought, but of course they are mainly trained by hunger. They are a hungry lot, poor chaps... Of course, they all come of noble blood (White 71).

When Arthur pities them, saying, "What a shame they should be kept prisoners and be hungry",

Merlyn explains,

they do not really understand that they are prisoners, any more than the cavalry officers do. They look on themselves as being dedicated to their profession, like an order of knighthood or something of that sort. You see, the membership of the mews is, after all, restricted to the raptors- and that does help a lot (White 71).

The dark humor is that hunger and lack keeps these falcons a reason to live. The falcons covet their positions and hunger for food so they continue to hunt, so are the knights taught to feel pride and honor from their positions and hunger for more fame, approval and challenges. So the knights continue to quest and joust to fill their need for identity and reputation. Their behavior is based on filling a psychological lack of self-esteem. Even Arthur himself is kept hungry, desiring for more justice and prosperity, and desiring improvement to be the greatest king of all time. No matter how highly the falcons, knights and kings think of themselves, they are one soldier, tool or human in an entire community. Arthur will be the king, but he is just a character that fits into a greater plan of the author T.H. White and the already existing Arthurian mythos. Under White's jokes, parody and irony, White reveals himself as a single author in many, just as Arthur is only a small part of his own kingdom and Balan one falcon, one knight in the entire story. All the comedy just underlines and reminds the reader of the flawed political and social system of these birds who believe they are more in control and important than they actually are. White comments on how humans in a militaristic society and ultimately King Arthur and his knights are in a

flawed kingdom that eventually falls because of its dependence on war and violence to dictate social status, power and wealth.

The nature of jousting, quests and duels are mocked by the examples of two characters in *The Once and Future King*, King Pellinore and Sir Grummore Grummursum. Merlyn voices T.H. White's message against war and violence to decide authority and power. Merlyn first discounts jousting when Arthur tells him he wants to become a knight, saying,

A lot of brainless unicorns swaggering about and calling themselves educated just because they can push each other off a horse with a bit of stick!...The trouble with Norman Aristocracy is that they are games-mad, that is what it is, games-mad (White 55).

Merlyn discredits jousting and physical training of knights, calling the knights brainless unicorns, which are mythical, not intelligent and not respectable. The unicorn is valued for and serves its horn and phallic symbol, and the sword and lance are the knights' phallic symbol. White linked unicorns with knights because the image of knights dueling is similar to rams and unicorns butting heads. White believes knights value and serve their phallic symbol to excess. Instead of valuing knowledge and mental education, the knights desire combat and games. The socio-political system also values victorious knights over other occupations, and Merlyn lowers jousting and swordplay to children's games to displace knighthood's value. King Pellinore is described as a ghost, a sheep and a "lost mariner searching for land" when he first meets Arthur (White 16). When Arthur approaches him for help, King Pellinore is revealed to be worse off than Arthur since he has "been lost for seventeen years" whereas Arthur was only lost for one night. Pellinore is even called "it" by White as if Pellinore was not even human but a lost soul worse than Arthur, trapped in the mind frame of a knight devoted to useless practices. Arthur pities Pellinore because he looks dejected and his visor droops that Arthur tries to cheer Pellinore up (White 17). Even Pellinore recognizes that his actions of chasing the Questing Beast were

pointless, silly and endless suffering. He calls it his burden and curse, complaining about all the wandering, the “horrid armour” and concludes his rant with,

A nice bed with a nice pillow and a nice sheet that you could lie in, and then I would put this beastly horse in a meadow and tell that beastly brachet to run away and play, and throw all this beastly armour out of the window, and let the beastly Beast go and chase himself- that I would (White 17-19).

But he still runs after the Questing Beast though Arthur had offered him a bed because King Pellinore has been too trained and brainwashed to do anything else in his life. Though Arthur yearns to be a knight and idealizes it, the actual knight and royalty King Pellinore is a clumsy, meek and lost fool who does not even have a bed to sleep in. Even the orphan child Arthur is better off than Pellinore because he does not waste his life in search of a beast he has never seen. This foreshadows Arthur’s future when his knights search for a Holy Grail no one has ever seen. Knighthood complicates and confuses Arthur’s life purpose; he was better off as a boy.

The joust and duel of King Pellinore and Sir Grummore is scripted, hilariously slow and clumsy, and end with both knights stunned and passed out. After they agree on a duel, they switch over to formalities literally. White describes it, “using the proper formula” (White 61) with King Pellinore as a defender and Sir Grummore as an intruder. Sir Grummore Grummursum’s name is ridiculously long and is just repeated sounds, just like his actions and all knights’ actions are repetitive and without purpose. White explains to the reader,

To be able to picture the terrible battle which now took place, there is one thing which out to be known. A knight in his full armour of those days, or at any rate during the heaviest days of armour, was generally carrying as much or more than his own weight in metal. He often weighted no less than twenty-two stone, and sometimes as much as twenty-five. This meant that his horse had to be a slow and enormous weight-carrier, like the farm horse of today, and that his own movements were so hampered by his burden of iron and padding that they were toned down into slow motion, as on the cinema (White 61).

The battle is terrible, terribly ridiculous, slow and silly. Both knights are equally silly as they joust in their clunky and thick armor that limits their mobility. This is a mockery of knights, their practices and modern readers who idealized and fantasized more action packed combat. For every danger, there is a clarification to cancel out the danger and remind the reader there was no real danger and these knights were just fools in padding acting out a fight, like children play fighting. The fight is called bloodthirsty, dangerous sport, splendid but in actuality, “they were so encased in metal that they could not do each other much damage. It took them so long to get up” (White 63). They play just like children and name call, accuse cheating and wander around blind from their helmets until they bash heads and pass out (White 65-67). Merlyn assures Arthur,

They are not dead, I know. In a minute or two they will come round and go home to dinner... Then Sir Grummore will invite him to stay the night. They will be the best of friends when they come to. They always are (White 68).

Though the knights follow the formality and scripted nature of the duel to humorous ends, the knights would wake up from fainting like children exhausted from playing and forget formalities to become friends. The joust was a mockery of real battle, there was never any real danger or skill involved, just kids games and teasing. Their duel really was just entertainment for Arthur and Merlyn, for a child and an old man. There was never any actual danger or pain or even death possible like in real battles and war. This fight was just a play, movie, a game and chivalry has been reduced to comical entertainment instead of a respected system. White has again revealed the absurdity of medieval traditions and authority of knights.

In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, the quest loses importance, there is no coherent plot and the artificiality of films are provoked because Monty Python wants to shock and remove the audience from their expectations. The audience is constantly surprised from what they expect of traditional film and Arthurian story, and what the film offers. The directors of the film want to

offer an alternative to the tired and traditional film structure so they made this anti-film. Quests are mocked since the quest for the grail was the device to gather Arthur and the knights together, but the grail is not the goal of every adventure and by the end of the film, it fades from importance. Rebecca and Samuel Umland write,

The “Holy Grail” in Gilliam and Jones’s directorial team effort functions rather like British director Alfred Hitchcock’s famed “MacGuffin,” an object the desire for which initiates the plot but finally is insignificant to it and was of no real consequence to begin with (Umland and Umland 64).

They also say,

both in its original, televised incarnation as *Monty Pythons’s Flying Circus* (1969-1974) and in its feature films- we see a similar use of the Middle Ages as a vehicle to generate humorous effects out of –absurdist? nonsensical? – incongruity (Umland and Umland 64).

The humor is from the clash of what is expected from knights and what actually happens in the film. From the first moment King Arthur is introduced in the film, he is not what the audience expects. Before anything can be seen on scene, audible are hoof beats like galloping. But instead of a knight on a horse, King Arthur appears with a squire who is banging two empty coconut shells together to imitate horse hooves. This is symbolic of the entire movie, where the same few actors in the troupe play most of the characters in the movie. The scenery, props and budget are sparse, and modernity is constantly interjects the film to remind the audience that this is a film and imitation of a legend. Day discusses this scene and about the knight,

He best represents our mixture of awe at the barbaric splendor of the Middle Ages and revulsion at its violence and hierarchy...as self mockery...And the scene virtually shouts out, ‘This is a movie, and what’s more, a very silly movie that will continually call attention to the fact that it’s a silly movie and nothing more. Deal with it’ (Harty, *Cinema* 131).

The scene's importance is to remind the audience that it is a scripted, crafted fiction. Day explains how people want to believe film is real because it is the closest to representation and reality as people have, however,

film is no less crafted than any other narrative mode...bad costumes, historical inaccuracies, or stilted, archaic dialogue...camera shots, lighting, and other technical aspects of the 'language' of film...this film calls attention to its fictive nature by continually juxtaposing the Arthurian illusion with the means necessary to produce it (Harty, *Cinema* 131).

Every shot, every sound, and every character is carefully positioned and monitored to convey exactly the right emotion, words and tone. The film is an illusion to the audience, to make the audience believe in the plot but when *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* has no plot, the focus is drawn on the falsity and artificiality of film posing to be truth, of scripts and of tradition.

Tradition only has authority when it is given authority like in traditional plots and films, but when Monty Python takes the authority away, anything can happen in the film.

Chivalry and combat are parodied and mocked by showing its excessive and ridiculous rules in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. The knights who say Ni are a classic example of a strange but ordinary obstacle to Arthur. The knights who say Ni guard a passageway and Arthur must defeat them to gain access, which is a common motif that heroes must prove their worthiness in order to gain success, but this encounter is not common. Knights are usually named from where they come from, but these knights are named after their main weapon; they say ni and that annoys and hurts their enemies. Instead of physical combat, the knights subdue and force Arthur and his group by saying ni repeatedly as if the loudness and repetition was hurtful, and language is a physical weapon. The knights who say Ni then give a seemingly odd and pointless task to Arthur by demanding a shrubbery. This task can be challenging because shrubberies are rare during times of famine, and though all Arthur does is buy the shrubbery, the

knights demand more. This is reflective of the repetitive nature of adventures, jousts and quests. This specific request reminds of shrubberies as modern decorative plants and the loss of purpose in modern quests for power and people bickering arbitrary boundaries such as country borders. Hoffman explains, "As this sort of story demands, the fulfillment of one quest merely motivates the initiation of another quest"(Harty, *Cinema* 144). There needs to be another quest to drive the knights forward because they need to prove they are always ready, willing and learning. They need quests no matter how silly, pointless and repetitive they can be or else they would no longer be knights. After the short absence, the knights of Ni have renamed themselves Ekke Ekke Ekke Ekke Ptangya Ziiinnngggggg Ni, a long, rhyming and gibberish name. This shows fickleness of people as the knights change their name rapidly and for no apparent reason. The knights who say Ni's bizarre weakness to the word "it" is hilarious because of its arbitrariness, simplicity, and profuse use in English language. Their demands and their defeats are silly, but Arthur has bested them and he has proven himself a victorious knight, even over foolish enemies. Donald Hoffman notes the scene with the Knights who say Ni is "enormously silly and to remind us yet again that in the world of Monty Python anything can happen"(Harty, *Cinema* 143). Challenges at passageways and bridges occur not only in the fantastical Monty Python world, but they are common practice as validations of honor, fame and power in chivalric times. Monty Python shows that these traditional challenges are pointless, ridiculous and silly.

The combat in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* is excessive, grotesque and revolting. Arthur encounters a black knight guarding a plank over a stream that represents a bridge. Though Arthur could easily step over that stream, and the bridge is small and useless like the guard, Arthur and the black knight adhere to the rules of chivalry. Arthur must defeat the black knight to cross. The black knight is skilled in fighting, so Arthur offers him a seat at the Round Table

but the black knight is rude and does not reply. The black knight is narrow-minded and only knows his one task; he can be described as a thickheaded brute. The black knight is overconfident, refuses to give up and is a blabbermouth who will not stop shouting insults and taunts at Arthur even after all his limbs are severed. Blood spurts from his amputated areas like water spraying from a fountain and Arthur asks if the knight plans to bleed on him to defeat Arthur with only one leg left. Rebecca and Samuel Umland suggest that some “old combinations” could be both disturbing and amusing, such as “Arthur’s dismembering the Black Knight reveals: Is it funny or horrible? Or both funny and horrible?” (Umland and Umland 67). The blood is comical like fake horror and fear because it is clearly unrealistic, but there is an underlying fascination with the grotesque, exaggerated and taking defeat, pain and death lightly. The audience is left disgusted by the Black Knight, but they know that Arthur would have fought to the death to guard his land as well, and the Black Knight is a parody of a stubborn but honorable fighting man. This persistence of combat and violence is the cause of the end of the film, as policemen arrest and take Arthur and Lancelot away for suspicion of killing a historian. A knight kills a stereotype famous historian who appears to explain Arthur’s strategy of storming a castle. The historian is out of place, unnecessary and in the wrong century narrating an ongoing sequence, but the knight harshly kills the man without reason in one swing. David Day explains the scene.

An elderly, tweed suited, spectacles man, referred to in subtitle only as “a famous historian”... This man is a cartoon example of the sort of academic the Monty Python troupe regularly satirize on television... The brutality of this scene is shocking but also funny (Harty, *Cinema* 132)

His death is not mourned by the audience but only by his family. Both the knight and the historian have failed, since the knight should have followed the rules of chivalry and challenged the historian, and the historian should have stayed out of the way of violent, oaf-ish and silly

knights. The unnecessary brutality of knights is what gets them arrested. Because knights are known for their rashness and violence, the police arrest Arthur and Lancelot without evidence. But Arthur and Lancelot have both killed countless innocent people, so they would not know how to defend themselves because they are guilty of many crimes and murders. The reputation of the knight precedes him, and the knight is known mostly for killing, sometimes abuse of power and murder. Monty Python places suspicion in the justice and trustworthiness of knights and authority of making decisions by combat.

Imbalance of femininity and masculinity are comedic

The absence of femininity and excess of masculinity is significant and noticeable in these particular works. Femininity, masculinity and the expectations of genders are challenged and mocked because of lack and excess. Humor is created through the extremities and their importance in society. David Day discusses how juxtaposing anachronistic unlikes causes humor and reveals problems in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* in his article “Monty Python and the Holy Grail: *Madness with a Definite Method*” (Harty, *Cinema* 127-135). He says,

I will focus here more precisely on one or two of the ways the Python troupe gets its laughs, and suggest how, even more strikingly than I originally thought, they anticipate, parallel, or mock academic concerns about how we recapture the past (Harty, *Cinema* 127).

Day's exploration is significant because the depiction of extremity, outrageousness and ridiculousness in both works of fiction are important and purposeful. Humor is achieved through juxtapositions of opposites in *The Once and Future King* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* with the lack and excess of femininity and masculinity. The male authoritative figures are not trustworthy and powerful as the females imagine, and even in their leadership, the females are unsatisfied and misled. White distrusts all authority figures and because his female characters

follow the male authority and are never independent, they do not find happiness or peace. The Monty Python film gives feminine traits to male characters, and both females and males are equally ridiculous and not respectable. The characters may think they have authority, but none of them do because to Monty Python, there is no definite authority in the film or in their contemporary time.

In *The Once and Future King*, there are sparse female characters and the main female characters are flawed, selfish and traitorous. These wicked and weak women show how uneven and tilted society is when females are useless and males are overly violent. The females are too focused on personal pain; they ignore the outside world, and live and die alone, miserable and pathetic. This is a dark humor and imbalanced representation of femininity. Morgause is a witch who births Mordred, Guenever is an adulterer, Elaine is a hopeless romantic and pushover and there are no positive female characters. Alan Lupack believes that although Morgause is “a mother who is more of a figurative than a literal witch but who nonetheless casts a spell over her children, most of the brothers become psychopaths” (Lupack 189). Lupack describes the unicorn hunt in *The Queen of Air and Darkness*,

a revolting slaughter of a beautiful animal, an offense against the nature that Wart learns to love and respect in the first book, and a double travesty because it is done to please an uncaring and unpleasable mother – is a sign of the deep dysfunctionality of the Lothian clan (Lupack 189).

Lupack criticizes the entire family of Gawain as dysfunctional because only a mentally ill mother would want the head of a creature as a present, and these children desire motherly love so become mentally ill when they learn to kill for pleasure at a young age. Elaine eventually commits suicide when she realizes Lancelot will never love her. White describes her suicide,

She was in it- the plump partridge who had always been helpless. Probably people commit suicide through weakness, not through strength...Her son had gone, and her

lover, and there was nothing left. Even the promise to return had failed her futile grasp (White 521).

Elaine is described as a partridge, a medium sized bird that leads a simple life on the ground eating seeds. She is weak for choosing death over life because she cannot move past heartbreak. Her hold on Lancelot was pointless and she is dependent on others like Lancelot and her son for the will to survive. Without them, she is helpless and dead. Morgause manipulates her sons and are dependent on them for pleasure, and Elaine depends on Lancelot and her son for pleasure. These females have not broken away from needing male authority for their own self-worth and satisfaction, and since male authorities are unreliable, they both end up unfulfilled.

Guenever allows her emotions to control her because she had no other goals in life, depends on males to fulfill her and she represents the worse in women. She is unbalanced, neglects her queen duties and is obsessed with controlling Lancelot. Guenever is madly jealous of Lancelot and Elaine, and even threatens to kill Elaine (White 402). Instead of seeing the truth clearly, she falls more into her sinful relationship with Lancelot, meanwhile lying to Arthur.

White writes,

In a minute they were kissing, feeling like the green earth refused by rain. They thought they had understood each other once more- but their doubt had been planted. Now, in their love, which was stronger, there were the seeds of hatred and fear and confusion growing at the same time: for love can exist with hatred, each preying on the other, and this is what gives it its greatest fury (White 403).

Guenever torments her self when she sees Elaine and Lancelot's baby, Galahad, in court. White writes,

Perhaps she was actually jealous, not of Elaine, but of the baby. Perhaps it was Lancelot's love for Arthur that she feared. Or it may have been a fear of the whole position, of its instability and the nemesis inherent in it. Women know, far better than men, that God's laws are not mocked. They have more cause to know it. Whatever the explanation of Guenever's attitude, the fruits of it were pain for her lover. She became as restless as he was, more unreasonable, and much more cruel (White 406).

Guenever is a petty person, deeply in love with Lancelot but also holding onto Arthur without realizing her selfishness. White even explains that women know more about retribution and God's punishments than men, perhaps because they have more experience breaking commandments and God's laws. She becomes sicker mentally and physically, and more outrageous in behavior as her unhealthy relationship with Lancelot develops. She acts in a rage to Lancelot about Elaine to hurt him, insults him as a sham and weak, acts hysterical but,

She began to look healthier, even beautiful again, as a result of these quarrels. But two lines came between her eyebrows, and she had a frightening eye sometimes, which glittered like a diamond (White 521).

She is a sadomasochist, she receives pleasure from causing pain and being in pain, and she wants to cause pain to her self and others. She has a controlling and abusive relationship with Lancelot, and manipulates and toys with him to pass her time. The female characters are flawed mentally; either sick, outright cruel or weak in White's novel. The humor is in the excessiveness these females are in mind and actions, from their obsessive thoughts to their cruel actions to themselves, loved ones and enemies. The women are tormented because they depend on male authority for satisfaction, but when male authorities are undependable, they are tormented and cannot move past their pain and lack of love, trust and stability.

In *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, female characters and feminine traits are only inserted for comic and relief purposes. No characters, male or female, act appropriately or can progress the quest but instead they are all lost in personal adventures and fantasies. In the scene of Lancelot rescuing the feminine prince from an arranged marriage, everyone is mocked from the prince, the princess, Lancelot and even the audience. Prince Herbert is feminine in appearance with his pasty pale skin, slight body build and high-pitched voice. He behaves feminine in his desire to escape marriage and sexuality, to sing frivolous musical songs and

dance in choreographed movements. Lancelot is full of energy and brute force, acting masculine by putting brawn over brain when he runs into a fight without investigation or strategy.

Lancelot's exuberance is highlighted when the scene where he runs towards the castle is repeated but he doesn't get any closer. Then the guard is surprise attacked and the rest of the guests are just as shocked at Lancelot's arrival. He charges to his victim who he assumes is female, butches wedding guests including the bride. When he is embarrassed by the truth, he runs away and pretends the scene never happened. Hoffman says,

It is hard to explain why bridesmaids splattered with the blood of decapitated relatives is funny. And perhaps it isn't. But one does react to the excess and the sheer outrageousness of the slaughter as if it were funny, and it may be so, perhaps, because it is so uncalled for, so unreal, and so over the top (Harty, *Cinema* 144).

The wedding guests are helpless like animals brought to slaughter, especially since they are prepared for celebration and instead are ambushed. Lancelot does not share his adventure with anyone, and when asked by his servant, tells him to not talk about it because he is ashamed of his inept masculinity to recognize a true damsel in distress and the feminine prince is revolting to Lancelot. Prince Herbert is trapped in his personal world of musicals and no obligations, and Lancelot is in his world of straight gender roles and valuable knights who serve justice. Lancelot does not want to imagine a world where gender roles are not fixed, where the feminine prince exists and Lancelot fails. So he pretends it never happened and his illusion of a structured reality still stands. Hoffman writes,

In this rough dismissal of the transgressive prince, the Pythons raise issues of cross-dressing and deviance, only to ruthlessly restore a brutal heteronormativity. On the other hand, the masculine norm may be undercut by its own excess... The butchery at the banquet, in a way, restores his reputation for heroism, for machismo, but at the same time destroys it. By being so much the macho hero, Lancelot drains the concept of both sense and sensibility (Harty, *Cinema* 143).

Lancelot acts like a traditional male hero would and kills many innocent people, causing the audience to doubt and question traditional chivalry, heroes and authority.

There continues to be confusion and lack of authority or sense in other knights' adventures as well. The masculinity and the logic, sense and calmness seem to clash and not exist together in any figure. When Galahad stumbles into Castle Anthrax that had the grail beacon, it turns out to be a vagina symbol and the castle is inhabited with beautiful, young and willing nuns desperate for male company. The women are naturally thought of as horny because as a medieval stereotype, medieval women are repressed, lusty and desperate. Hoffman says the humor is in the castle of horny, aggressive women and non-horny, fearful men, the reversed positions and roles since,

the chastity is not based so much on an ascetic ideal as it is on the men's squeamishness; Galahad seems less chaste than frightened (Harty, *Cinema* 142).

The males are the typical dominators, who have sexual experience and lust for women, while the females are typically shy, modest maidens. The humor is not only the reversal of gender roles, but also that these women live in a male sexual fantasy but Galahad lives in an adventurer's fantasy. When Galahad steps into these females' fantasy, he is confused and displaced. Castle Anthrax is a jest at woman, sexuality and unrestrained femininity, comparing females to an infectious disease. Because the women desire and aggressively pursue Galahad, they are overly feminine and too sexualized therefore dangerous and terrifying. The women have silly and suggestive names like Zoot, Midget, Creeper, Piglet, Dingo and they devise a scheme to strip Galahad and bed him, but end up fighting over and crowding him. The women request spanking as punishment for tricking the knights with their false grail beacon and oral sex for their own gratification and lust, but then Lancelot charges in. Galahad is just understanding the situation and accepting the women's dominance and authority over him when Lancelot comes in to restore

the balance of authority to males. Hoffman notes, “Alas, these knights are unable or unwilling to satisfy either desire: lust and justice as equally unfulfilled”(Harty, *Cinema* 142). He drags the reluctant Galahad away from temptation, distraction but also balance, femininity, new authority. The film remains primarily male, nonsexual and based on physical combat. Neither gender knows how to share authority and therefore is no balance or authority in the film.

Conclusion

Though humor is not the only element, humor is a vastly important device in *The Once and Future King* and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* to reveal controversial and overlooked ideas between the laughs. White reveals his anti-war feelings by mocking the chivalric system based on combat and depicted authority as foolish and untrustworthy. Monty Python gives their film no authority and freedom from restraints because of their desire to experiment outside of authority. Both fictions utilize text to convey their messages.

Oliver Padel suggests that in Welsh literature Arthur was ‘often an intrinsically comic character, and that Arthurian tales...occupied a humorous role, perhaps approximately comparable with comic-strip literature today’ (Archibald and Putter 139).

Elizabeth Archibald writes,

More remarkable is the way in which both medieval and modern writers of fiction celebrate Arthurian ideals but simultaneously challenge them by means of comedy, irony, parody, satire, and sometimes outright criticism (Archibald and Putter 139).

Comedy can sometimes be passed over as meaningless, frivolous and simple, but it is purposeful, intentional and complex just like all elements that authors and directors include in their work.

White’s work is largely concerned with education and war, and Norris Lacy writes,

The evolution of the published tetralogy, however, is remarkable, as an amusing tale for children evolves into a strong and sometimes bitter antiwar document, replete with anachronistic but powerful allusions (Archibald and Putter 124).

They also describe it as “enormously influential and popular”, misanthropy and antiwar manifesto (Archibald and Putter 124). Brewer and Taylor say,

The Once and Future King is dated, argumentative and sometimes silly, but it will probably remain the most readable and the best known of Arthurian fictions published in the second half of this century. It has a popular appeal...imaginative and symbolic power...It is more than a mere re-telling of the old stories, and its colloquial style and lively passages of dialogue make it readily accessible to the ordinary reader (Brewer and Taylor 291).

David Day thinks the Monty Python troupe in their TV series and *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*,

parallel (for lack of a better word) the concerns of historians and other academics...When the troupe satirizes the ways we know the past and our motives in doing so, they seem to be treading the same intellectual path or one very similar to that which the serious academics whom they satirize have since trodden...witty comics can brilliantly identify the same issues academics do – treating them with a humor and lightness of touch never found in professional criticism (Harty, *Cinema* 134).

Donald Hoffman say that *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* and their humor is more meaningful than others have believed it to be as well, writing,

It may be an accident that the meaning of Monty Python and the Holy Grail seems so accurately to reflect in a modern context that sense of the quest as an ongoing process, a becoming, but what is true is that this silly film is by no means a trivial one. It remains strangely true to its origins, and, as it touches both irreverently and poignantly on issues of justice, violence, and desire, it remains amazingly funny and pertinent nearly thirty years on. In its interpenetration of the medieval and the modern, the Pythons vitalize and question both (Harty, *Cinema* 147).

These fictions can be taken as similar and far apart. They both utilize humor to depict their creators' beliefs. They both have characters of Arthur and knights, but they depict vastly different worlds of Arthur, his rule and time. Humor can transcend boundaries of time, of paper and of a screen, and of controversial, overlooked or seemingly trivial issues.

Beauty and the Grotesque: Romance and Horror in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* and
Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* (1963)

The genre of romance usually brings to mind a pair of happy lovers, sentimental language and a scenic paradise where true love conquers all. But this is only one side of romance, the other side is jealousy, cynicism, and grotesque hell because when there is good, truth and beauty, there is evil, deception and repulsion. Horror shows the dark, sad and pitiful side of reality, and is the opposite of romance. Tennyson and Disney believe that both the romantic and the horror exist side by side in the world, and adapt their Arthurian work to reflect their contemporary world. These fictions use the opposites of romance and horror to reveal two extreme and distinct versions of Arthurian legend. Though Disney may desire the fantasy of Arthur's life story, his work has dark undertones revealing the destructive and threatening. Tennyson treats Arthur like Jesus Christ, and Arthur's life like the bible. This horrific story of Arthur's rise and fall is told in fantastical verse with lasting impressions in order to convert the audience to the fantastical and good. Disney imagines his Arthurian world to be a fantasy, and Tennyson imagines his Arthurian story to be a horror, but both tales have traces of the other because fantasy and horror are never separate. Jane Gilbert writes,

the Arthurian scene is never now. Arthurian chivalry always lies in a past discontinuous from the present or in some fantastical elsewhere, and is contemplated at a distance by a consciously 'modern' commentator... 'Arthurtime' exists in constant tension with the present, pressing upon it and on what it may imminently become: neither now nor never (Archibald and Putter 155).

Tennyson anticipates the reader will know the Arthurian legend well, so as the poem unfolds and Arthur lives, his fall and end are already being foreshadowed and being prepared. Characters that betray Arthur and elements that lead to Arthur's downfall are introduced from the beginning and

his close friends are the ones who hurt him most. In the animated Disney film *The Sword in the Stone*, adapted from the first part in TH White's novel *The Once and Future King*, the appearance is of an innocent cartoon for children but the underlying morals and lessons are dark, unforgiving and final. The young Arthur has no choice but is pushed into his role of king, and into his inevitable betrayal, fall and death. In Tennyson's 19th-century poems *Idylls of the King* and Disney's film *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), there are romantic and horrific elements side by side to reflect the tension and change in their contemporary times. Romance manifests in idealization, fantasy and biblical, and horror manifests in grim, bleak and stark. Romance and horror are used in these fictions to reveal the desires and fears of the characters and the authors about their contemporary society.

Background and Influences of Tennyson and Disney

Tennyson base his *Idylls of the King* on Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and Disney's film is adapted from part one of TH White's *The Once and Future King*. However, Tennyson and Disney shape their fictions according to their emotions, lives and time periods because they had influences beyond earlier fictional works. Arthur is elevated to Jesus Christ and God status in Tennyson where he is fated to save humanity and will return like Christ. In Disney, Arthur is just a common orphan boy who learns school lessons. Though he is fated to be king and glory, he feels not worthy, fear and doubt. Many literary critics such as Alan Lupack, Gossedge and Knight believe Tennyson used Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* as inspiration for his *Idylls of the King* (Lupack 146, Archibald and Putter 113). Lupack also writes,

Tennyson created a thematic and structural consistency that not only is compelling in its own right but also seems to be a perfect reflection of the Victorian age...his stated theme of soul at war with sense, Tennyson consistently balanced appearance and reality, and 'the true and the false'...(Lupack 146).

The themes, structure and romance in *Idylls of the King* are a representation of the Victorian period's concerns of opposing tensions, changes and balance. Lupack describes,

The Victorian age saw in the very scientific, technological, and intellectual advances that brought hope of bettering the human condition a darker side, an undermining of faith... and a possibility of exploitation that called into question the notion of progress... The Arthurian world, like the modern world, has great potential for improving the human condition; but it seems that such an ideal is always frustrated by the failings and imperfections that are inherent in the world and in those who inhabit it (Lupack 147).

There was a duality during the Victorian time because of past beliefs and traditions clashing with new technology and knowledge, such as the publication of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), railway systems and sanitation laws. With the development of industry came problems such as child labor, prostitution and poverty. As a reaction, Queen Victoria, socialites and the Church of England promoted return to grace and traditional values such as prudence, modesty and religion. Progress was suspicious and double edged, and Tennyson incorporates these tensions into *Idylls of the King* by telling the horrific life of Arthur using romance. By putting the ideal and the nightmare side by side, he encourages the audience to judge and experience the advantages and disadvantages of technology, progress and change. With innovation and convenience comes human suffering and Tennyson fears that there would be a loss of human love with the new desires for modernity. Arthur is too pure and good for his world as well in Tennyson's work, and like Jesus Christ, Arthur is killed by those closest to him and forced to leave the sinful earth and wait for a better, peaceful and apocalyptic time to return. Perhaps Tennyson also feels the road to modernity is also a road to destruction, end of Christian love and the end of the world.

Tennyson does not separate fiction from reality in his mind and in his writing, combining the Arthurs in his life into one perfect god. Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff write,

For much of his life, Tennyson was absorbed with two Arthurs. One was King Arthur; the other was Arthur Henry Hallam, the poet's closest friend, who died in 1833, at age twenty-two, and who was the subject of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. The two Arthurs were never entirely separate in Tennyson's mind or in his poetry. His grief for his friend surely contributed to the intensity of his Arthurian vision, while King Arthur remained to an extent a metaphor that helped to immortalize Hallam (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 159).

Because Hallam died young and was beloved by Tennyson, Tennyson then elevates Hallam to become a legend like King Arthur though they had little in common besides the same first name. To Tennyson, Hallam was admirable, beloved and died before his time like King Arthur, so the differences between Hallam and the character of King Arthur is blurred in Tennyson's mind and in his writing. Hallam is elevated to King Arthur, and King Arthur is elevated to be from heaven, an angel, and even Jesus Christ. Lupack also notices the importance and influence of Hallam to Tennyson. Lupack writes,

As John D. Rosenberg has so perceptively observed, it is no coincidence that a draft of Tennyson's 'Morte d'Arthur' 'appears in the same notebook that contains the earliest sections of *In Memoriam*. The first-composed but last-in-sequence of the *Idylls* is sandwiched between Section XXX of *In Memoriam*, which commemorates the Tennyson family's first desolate Christmas at Somersby without Hallam, and Section XXXI, which depicts Lazarus rising from the dead. The physical placement of the 'Morte' graphically expresses the poet's longing' (Lupack 147).

Tennyson writes *Idylls of the King* and his other Arthurian work in between his dedication to Hallam, and 'Morte' was a tribute to Hallam (Archibald and Putter 113), showing how intertwined the two Arthurs were to Tennyson. Tennyson longs for scenes from the bible to occur in reality, he longs for Hallam to come back to life, and he longs for Arthur to be Jesus Christ, to return and save all of England again.

Disney's troubled childhood and the troubling times of the 1960s influenced the film *The Sword in the Stone* and Disney made all his work into an idyllic haven for children. Steven Fjellman is a critic of Disney and Aronstein elaborates on Fjellman's term 'Distory',

Distory and its founding myth stand at the heart of all Disney's narratives, from his own life that, in spite of a troubled and itinerant childhood and a feckless and probably abusive father, he 'mythologize(d)...as...an American success story where good triumphed over evil and progress overcame adversity' (Aronstein 86).

Aronstein suggests that Disney's vision and his cartoons are a reaction to his unstable, neglected and abused childhood, so he builds this safe haven in his films, theme park and toys. When Disney was young, he had to believe in good defeating evil in order to survive. He was one of five children in an immigrant family. He had a difficult relationship with his father and served in WWI. His father was domineering and all his brothers including Walt each ran away from home, Walt at 16. Lupack says, "The triumph of a youth who has grown up in the shadow of other sis a perennial theme in children's literature" (Lupack 191) and Disney feels he is that success story of an underprivileged boy who grew up successful. Disney is the Cinderella fairy tale come true, of an unlikely and ordinary person who rises to greatness by their merits. Disney creates these ideal worlds in his films, and in *The Sword in the Stone* of an orphan rising to king, because Disney believes they are true. He feels he is Arthur and he encourages his audience to believe and live as Disney and Arthur lived.

The 1960s in America were a turbulent time and Disney incorporates this into *The Sword in the Stone* by the simplification of good and evil. The evil lies just beneath the surface and the good's grip on power is always unstable, especially in the hands of the young Arthur. Aronstein writes about the troubles in the 1960s, from the loss of the Korean War to communism, the success of Sputnik and failure of American NASA, and social rights movements. She says,

Given America's assumption that its military and technological edge was a sign of divine approval, the fear that it had lost that edge hit particularly hard...much to Americans' astonishment, not everyone liked America...The problem of poverty in the inner cities, compounded by 'white flight' to the suburbs, was growing, and the nation's race-relations, particularly in the deep south, festered (Aronstein 80-81).

Because of the low morale and piling problems in the 1960s, the new President John F. Kennedy encouraged optimism, strength and rebuilding. Disney encourages the same in *The Sword in the Stone*. In his inaugural speech, Kennedy promotes national unity through America's fight against communism and the spread of democracy worldwide.

This speech marked a high point in Kennedy's attempts to call Americans to a new national vision. Young himself, he appealed to the young; in his virile masculinity, he appealed to the older conservatives who felt that America had lost its edge (Aronstein 81).

Kennedy was what America needed in the 1960s, and Disney's idealism and romance are over the top because that's what America needed in the 1960s; encouragement, hope and order.

Aronstein writes,

In 1963, as the nation's uneasiness with the consensus of the center and its myths was starting to show, 'Uncle Walt' turned to the Medieval past to reaffirm the nation's central vision. Providentially released as the post-Kennedy associates between America and Camelot proliferated, *The Sword in the Stone* – loosely based on T.H. White's novel – could not have been more timely; Americans were ready to be entertained and reassured – two things that Disney excelled at (Aronstein 85).

After John F. Kennedy's assassination, he and his short presidency have been compared to King Arthur and Camelot. Michael N. Salda, author of " 'What's Up, Duke?' A Brief history of Arthurian Animation", writes, "the Camelot- Kennedy connection was forged in the years following the president's assassination" (Harty, *King Arthur* 217). The time of Camelot represents idealism and happiness, and is associated with Kennedy's presidency because Kennedy's time was of optimism, potential and hope. Kennedy united the American nation when he became president just as King Arthur's rise to the throne united England, and both have their lives cut short by treachery. *The Sword in the Stone* is an attempt by Disney to encourage America with a legend of success and triumph, but under its ideal surface is the darkness and troubles hiding beneath like in 1960s America.

Romance in structure, language and tone

In Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, the perfection and the flaws of individuals and humankind are shown in poetic form. Though Tennyson uses Malory's text as a guide, Tennyson's text reads completely different than Malory. Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* are 10 idylls; poems which focus on specific characters and reveal the emotional, personal and intensity that Malory's numerous adventure prose does not show. Whereas Malory just mentions the character and the sequence of events, Tennyson allows the characters to speak and profess their inner thoughts, doubts and concerns. The reader could only infer these inner struggles from Malory's text and Tennyson instead allows his audience to become more invested in his characters by revealing their internal lives. The audience's stronger sympathetic connection with the characters of the idylls make the audience more emotionally involved with the characters' wellbeing. Their fantasies and desires are heightened, and their pain and horror are more shocking and intense for the audience. Tennyson encourages the audience to experience the pain and joy of these characters, and be wary of the world the audience lives in. The poetic structure of the idylls allows for constant juxtaposition of form and content, of success and failure, of beauty and destruction. Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff describe Tennyson's text,

we may nonetheless be justified in wondering whether the haunting, often lovely verse that envelops the text in a misty glow is the most appropriate form for the depiction of an apocalypse, of a Camelot fated to fall. Tennyson's romanticizing and overuse of certain poetic devices are at times distracting. On the other hand, we could argue that the very beauty of the poetry powerfully and effectively underlines the bitterly ironic futility of Arthur's life (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 162).

Like all legends, Arthur rises beautifully to the throne and ruled grandly, but falls in betrayal and total defeat with loss of Guinevere, trusted knights and his territory. Lupack writes,

Tennyson's is not a happy or optimistic epic. Melancholy and a sense of foreboding are only rarely relieved by a lighter tone, and even then, as when 'Gareth and Lynette' depicts Camelot as Arthur would have had it, the reader has been so conditioned by the

surrounding text that gaiety and idealism appear laced with irony and an expectation of failure. Reality and truth are uncertain, and in any event reality pales besides legend and story (Lupack 160).

Tennyson wants the audience to be aware that idylls is a fiction, a commemoration of a legend and that Camelot has beauty and horror. The destruction and loss of Camelot is all the more evil and painful because Camelot was so beautiful, happy and hopeful. The passages of light tone and excitement are not satirical, but are representations of the grand, impressive and idyllic time Camelot was. The idylls span from violent fratricide in “Balin and Balan” to self-loathing in “Guinevere” and the perfect marriage in “Geraint and Enid”. The excessive, grotesque and painful are interspersed with the hopeful, balanced and idealistic. The greater the people and society, the higher and worse are their fall and destruction.

From the first idyll *The Coming of Arthur*, Arthur is fated to fall and this is revealed from the craving on Excalibur. Though Arthur knows he would experience great joy as king, he knows he would also suffer greatly as well because good and evil always come together. Arthur knows the responsibility of his role, to rule and fall, when he is given Excalibur. The supernatural sword bewilders, blinds and prophesizes,

...on one side,
Graven in the oldest tongue of all this world,
“Take me,” but turn the blade and ye shall see,
And written in the speech ye speak yourself
“Cast me away!” And sad was Arthur’s face
Taking it, but old Merlin counsell’d him,
“Take thou and strike! the time to cast away
Is yet far-off.” So this great brand the king
Took, and by his will beat his foemen down
(Tennyson 29, “The Coming of Arthur” 300-308).

Arthur understands his loaded duty, but he serves still. The inscription in the oldest language mean that throughout all time, past and future, those who gain power must give it up because that is the order of the sword, of the Lady of the Lake, of natural order. The sword is described as a

brand that rules and marks Arthur's foemen, but it also rules Arthur and the sword itself serves an unknown master. The responsibility and burden of being the chosen one and having power is represented in Excalibur. In appearance it is magnificent, but the holder is a pawn and tool for a larger purpose. Arthur is likened to the over-glorified Excalibur; it may be encrusted with jewels, the blade shines and even properly named, but Excalibur is still only a sword and Arthur is still only a man serving a role. Once Arthur finished his job, he would be tossed back to where he came from, the water, just like the sword. The verse is ornate, repetitive and rhythmic just like the prophecy, it has design and pattern but the problem in the content was the pain and suffering Excalibur, kingship and beauty would bring Arthur. Arthur accepts the good and bad together, and Tennyson wants the audience to accept both romance and horror together.

In Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*, the format of animated children's film is already indicative of its romance, fantasy and idealism and Disney's desires to coddle children. The frame of a child learning, the light tone of schoolbook lessons, animal transformations, lively songs and bright colors that follow in the film all reflect the caricatured, simplified and positive outlook of cartoons intended for children. Disney wants to create a fairy tale, so there must be good and evil in these tales. Alice Grellner is the author of "*Two Films that Sparkle: The Sword in the Stone and Camelot*". She writes, "One of the charms of the film is the way it plays off of fairy-tale allusions" (Harty, *Cinema* 119). Disney uses recognizable fairy tales such as Hansel and Gretel lost in the woods, Cinderella doing dishes and Alice in Wonderland shape shifting to make young Arthur a fairytale to his children audience. This film is adapted from TH White's *The Once and Future King*, but only the first part of four is adapted because *The Sword in the Stone* was the hopeful, nurturing and educational beginning of White's novel. The children

audience is not exposed to the grim details of Arthur's end, but is encouraged to celebrate what Arthur symbolizes and his benefits for Britain. Susan Aronstein writes,

The Sword in the Stone (1963), reinforced America's central myths as it translated Walt Disney's vision of America as a land destined to greatness because of the 'wit and imagination' of local boys to the Middle Ages, telling the tale of Wart, the local boy who, with the aid of a Merlin versed in science and technology, becomes king (Aronstein 5-6).

Steven Fjellman coins the word "Distory" and Aronstein elaborates,

'Distory': History 'not as it was, but as it should have been...vacuum-cleaned.' Distory removes nasty facts, such as racism, poverty, and exploitations- ...and replaces them with the country's central myth of democratic possibility in which character not birth determines economic destiny. Distory and its founding myth stand at the heart of all Disney's narratives (Aronstein 85-6).

Like all Disney films, *The Sword in the Stone* is a cleaned up version of a popular and famous fairy tale or legend, intended to protect children in Disney's safe, fair and simplified environment. Aronstein suggests that Disney's vision and his cartoons are a reaction to his unstable, neglected and abused childhood, so he builds this safe haven in his films, theme park and toys. Children are invited to empathize and relate with Arthur since in the film, he is a child of 11. He has a youthful nickname "The Wart", he has chores such as washing the dishes and he has lessons from a tutor. Arthur is an orphan, an underdog squire but he is destined for greatness in the future, and kids are invited to relate with Arthur and believe that hard work, education and goodness will be rewarded. Even the lowest kid like Arthur will grow up to be king, so the disgruntled and powerless child will have a chance of success, power and influence in the future. Through adventures, the young Arthur learns to rule well, the audience is entertained, but Disney could still not escape his past and there are dark undertones that foreshadow the Round Table and Arthur's doom.

Merlin teaches physics to Arthur by turning him into a fish, teaches gravity by being a squirrel and Archimedes teaches Arthur aerodynamics by being a bird. These structured and

repetitive lessons expose Arthur to danger, but his father figures, Merlin or Archimedes, always rescue him. Disney must depict evil since it accompanies good but only in a safe environment. His goal is to emphasize good will always triumph therefore Arthur is always safe and protected. A predatory fish, a stronger hawk, a wolf and a female squirrel attack and end Arthur's animal lives. Arthur is a wide-eyed, scrawny child so when he is transformed into animals, they reflect his self. He is transformed into a goldfish, a cartoonish bluebird and a charming squirrel but these animals are all helpless, small and powerless. Arthur manages to adapt to swim, fly and jump treetops, but he cannot survive in nature. Predators such as a fish, hawk and wolf, and social obligations and emotions from the female squirrel ambush, frighten and eventually defeat Arthur in animal form. The role of the female squirrel and femininity in the film will be discussed later. The strict rule of nature of survival of the fittest is in play here, and the darkness behind cannibalism in fish and birds, in rule by force, and the constant fear of being hunted are glossed over. These grim and hopeless elements are part of many stories intended for children such as fairy tales, but in reality, the evil is not as distinct and avoidable as in fantasylands. Disney has put in the elements of danger, fear and pain in the film, but Arthur manages to escape these elements narrowly. Though the chase of Arthur by predators is thrilling and Arthur is eventually captured. He only escapes when Archimedes or Merlin rescues him. Merlin is his foster father, and Archimedes is an extension of Merlin. They serve their roles as teachers, protectors and guiding figures that both help Arthur throughout his journey to becoming king in the film. Even by the end of the film, Arthur is not ready to be king. The throne, crown and robe are too big for Arthur, and they slip off him. Arthur is overwhelmed and scared of the outside commotion and calls out for Merlin, and Merlin comforts Arthur by telling Arthur of his future greatness in the Round Table, literature and motion pictures. Only the positive and brightness of

the future are mentioned, whereas Arthur's betrayal and end as told in White's complete novel are not told of. The concerns, doubts and fears that Arthur has as a child are never solved. Even when Arthur is a great ruler, he will still be defeated and all his worse fears do come true. No one, including Arthur, could have been prepared for his future. He still must suffer, worry and fear because that comes with greatness, kingship and love. The structure of *The Sword in the Stone* from the child Arthur, to Merlin's school lessons, and Arthur's graduation to a king represents the child succession in school and the bright future ahead in the real world of politics, society and economy.

The wolf in *The Sword in the Stone* represents darkness, evil and death that stalks but never touches Arthur just like Disney wants childhood to be. The wolf is introduced gnawing on a bone, and he wants to eat the wart immediately after he sees him. The wolf is thin and scraggy; he may represent the peasant people living in the wilderness and evil. He wants to harm the Wart immediately and has malicious intentions. Wolves are traditionally known as pests, dangerous and harmful creatures to livestock and humans. But when he chases Arthur, Arthur unknowingly harms and avoids the wolf. Disney has purposely characterized death as comic, clumsy and unsuccessful to create a safe environment for good. Since Arthur is good, he does not fear harm, cannot be tempted or hurt physically. Instead of harming Arthur, the wolf gets hurt by Arthur swings the tree branch in the beginning of the film and later when Archimedes rescues Arthur from being a fish. Alice Grellner, write, "quite unaware that a wolf is dogging his heels, and in a scene reminiscent of a Jacques Tati film innocently thwarts this symbol of evil" (Harty, *Cinema* 119). Jacques Tati is a French filmmaker whose protagonists are inept, child-like and simple people who deal with real problems in a comical way. Arthur luckily and effortlessly avoids and harms the wolf because he continues to do good things and listen to Merlin, a lesson to children

to listen to their parents or the threat of harm is present. Though the scene physical comedy is funny like when a tree branch hits the wolf in the stomach, and when water is poured on the wolf, adult audiences know there is a danger lurking behind the humor. The wolf does not give up and stalks any prey he can find, attacking Arthur in all his animal forms. But when he chases Arthur as a squirrel, he only eats tree branches and is carried away trapped in a tree bark on a river. Death is conquered and tamed temporarily, but death's appearance in the film shows the danger lurking nearby and foreshadows Arthur's tragic, painful and violent death. Darkness, pain and death are real dangers haunting Arthur in his youth, and they will reappear to reclaim Arthur in his end. Disney is haunted by his past and tries to create an idyllic childhood for others when he never had one.

Arthur is destined to be King by higher forces

Arthur is destined to be king and has supernatural elements such as a mystical birth, Christian visions and Merlin to help him gain the throne. But it is also fated that the Round Table and Arthur's rule will fall. There is a greater and higher force than humans, kings and nature, one that can give and take power from Arthur. These fictions romanticize reality by putting order and control in the world to an external power, so that when the characters succeed and fail, they are serving a higher purpose. The fictions also exaggerate the inevitability of failure, sinning and death because humanity, nature and reality are innately corrupt, destructive and chaotic.

There is a Christian God who has specifically chosen Arthur to be king and facilitates Arthur's life in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. There is more Christian imagery of Arthur as Jesus Christ in Tennyson's work, which will be discussed later, but this concerns Arthur's fate decided by God long before he was born. In *The Coming of Arthur*, King Leodogran has a dream

similar to a Christian vision that confirms Arthur's legitimacy. In his dream, he sees a desolate burning land, a phantom king and then a crowned king in heaven. Tennyson writes,

while the phantom king
Sent out at times a voice; and here or there
Stood one who pointed toward the voice, the rest
Slew on and burnt, crying, 'No king of ours,
No son of Uther, and no king of ours;'
Till with a wink his dream was changed, the haze
Descended, and the solid earth became
As nothing, but the King stood out in heaven
Crown'd (Tennyson 33, "The Coming of Arthur" 435-443).

The phantom king represents the missing king of Britain and the burning land is the confused, conflicted and kingless Britain. There is a mysterious "one" who points at the phantom king and a "wink" that changes the course of the dream, of King Leodogran's faith in Arthur and of Arthur's kingdom by securing it. There is a king sent from heaven down to Britain, and the one that sent Arthur down is God. God creates Arthur with king traits, then handpicks Arthur to be the perfect King of Britain during strife because Arthur could unite others. In the dream, the phantom king

...on the slope
The Sword rose, the hind fell, the herd was driven,
Fire glimpsed...
Stream'd to the peak, and mingled with the haze
And made it thicker (Tennyson 32, "The Coming of Arthur" 430-435).

The phantom king is ineffectual at creating peace and unifying Britain, but the "King" chosen by God makes "the solid earth became/ As nothing"(Tennyson 32, "The Coming of Arthur" 441-2). Arthur even helps elevate Britain to higher status and creates heaven on earth. Rob Gossedge and Stephen Knight, authors of the chapter "The Arthur of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries" of *The Cambridge Companion To the Arthurian Legend*, write,

In 'The Coming of Arthur' he saw him both as a leader who civilised a savage people and also a monarch with divine blessing. King Leodogran's doubts about Arthur's identity and royalty are resolved in a Christian visionary dream (Archibald and Putter 114).

Arthur is more than just a king, he is a king gifted from God and he advances humans and the country Britain to a new status. Andrew Lynch recognizes that Arthur has greater and larger role than just being a king, saying, "He is not simply fighting other monarchs and nations but is on a God-given mission to 'cleanse the world', bringing 'law' and 'light' and drawing 'all/The realms together' ('Guinevere', lines 458-9)" (Archibald and Putter 178). Arthur is predestined to become king by God, and in his birth, Arthur is being set up to serve and fulfill his duties. Tennyson strongly desires for a king and savior to come solve the modern world's problems because Tennyson is lost on how to handle all the new changes and innovations of the modern world.

In Tennyson's idyll *The Coming of Arthur*, Arthur has two conception stories, one is violent and mortal, and the other is mysterious and mystical. Arthur's moral conception starts with Uther's lust for the already married Ygerne. Bedivere describes the scene,

But she, a stainless wife to Gorlois,
So loathed the bright dishonor of his love,
That Gorlois and King Uther went to war:
And overthrown was Gorlois and slain.
Then Uther in his wrath and heat besieged
Ygerne... (Tennyson 26, "The Coming of Arthur" 193-198).

Uther goes to war, kills the king Gorlois and takes over his castle in order to have Ygerne.

Ygerne is disgusted and intensely dislikes Uther, but is forced to marry him in tears, perhaps even raped. Tennyson writes, Ygerne's guards abandon her and "Uther enter'd in," (Tennyson 26, "The Coming of Arthur" 200). Uther is like a common criminal and rapist, acting irrationally and violently in order to satisfy his carnal desires. Arthur's parents are a rape victim and a criminal.

King Uther is punished by nature, "And with a shameful swiftness: afterward,/Not many moons,

King Uther died himself,”(Tennyson 26, “The Coming of Arthur” 204-5). Ygerne keeps Arthur’s birth a secret and gives Arthur to Merlin partly for Arthur’s safety, but partly because Ygerne is ashamed to have and raise her rapist’s child. The scene is described,

By reason of the bitterness and grief
That vexed his mother, all before his time
Was Arthur born, and all as soon as born
Deliver’d at a secret postern-gate
To Merlin, to be holden far apart
(Tennyson 26, “The Coming of Arthur” 209-213).

Arthur’s conception causes Ygerne bitterness and grief, and brings shame to Uther because it is an illegitimate and improper conception, though it proves Arthur is the legitimate king because he was Uther’s son. Uther is driven by uncontrollable reasons to conceive a son from Ygerne. Uther, Ygerne and even Arthur are not in control of their destinies because occasionally uncontrollable forces cause them to act. That son made from uncontrolled lust is destined to be raised by foster parents, “Until his hour should come”, and rise to the throne “for his hour had come” (Tennyson 26-7, “The Coming of Arthur” 214,227). Merlin facilitates Arthur’s journey, Merlin announces that Arthur is king and crowns him (Tennyson 27, “The Coming of Arthur” 229,235). Merlin follows the orders of fate as well; Merlin’s destiny and fate is even greater than Tennyson can change. Tennyson can only alter details of the story, but Arthur’s parents stay the same because the legend was written with horror and romance together. Ygerne, Merlin and Arthur were at the mercy of their fate and they could only serve their roles as wife, wizard and king. Tennyson feels these characters are trapped in their roles as all humans can feel trapped in the pleasures and sins of earth, in the temptation and beauty of fantasy but he reminds the audience of the horror and death beyond in the future, the modern and in the human soul.

The supernatural birth of Arthur confirms that he was destined to become king because Arthur is more than human just from his birth. Tennyson wants a savior in the desolate world, so

he let Arthur save Britain, but Tennyson also understands the natural order of creation and destruction. Nature first chooses Arthur to be ruler, then nature decides when Arthur must die and Camelot must lay in ruin waiting for another savior. Merlin and his master Bleys actively go find an heir for Uther after he dies. They encounter,

the dismal night - a night
In which the bounds of heaven and earth were lost-
Beheld, so high upon the dreary deeps
It seem'd in heaven, a ship, the shape thereof
A dragon wing'd, and all from stem to stern
Bright with a shining people on the decks,
And gone as soon as seen
(Tennyson 31, "The Coming of Arthur" 370-76).

The night is gloomy, mankind and the human world is described as low, dull and bleak. Then from the heavens appears a grand dragon ship and mysterious people who come from and disappear in the water. These people are similar to pre-Christian Norse gods since sailing was important to these pagan gods and in the north near the British Isles. Water is a paranormal and transitional element that separates the mortal world from the magical world. The Lady of the Lake appears from the water with Excalibur for Arthur (Tennyson 28, "The Coming of Arthur" 282-286). Only a supernatural king can wield a supernatural sword. After the sighting of these pagan gods,

Till last, a ninth one, gathering half the deep
And full of voices slowly rose and plunged
Roaring, and all the wave was in a flame:
And down the waves and in the flame was borne
A naked babe, and road to Merlin's feet,
Who stoopt and caught the babe, and cried 'The King!
Here is an heir for Uther!'
(Tennyson 31, "The Coming of Arthur" 379-385).

These higher forces of Merlin, pagan gods and even nature arrange for Arthur to come into power; they create and facilitate Arthur's destiny to become King. The found child Arthur is then

“clothed in fire” to further show that Arthur is supernatural, superhuman and the chosen king to unite Britain (Tennyson 31, “The Coming of Arthur” 389). Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff write,

Reality and truth are uncertain, and in any even reality pales beside legend and story, as witness the account of Arthur’s birth...there was a popular version of the story of Arthur’s birth, and that version, as legend and poetry, as the more appealing (Lacy, Ashe, and Mancoff 160).

Tennyson put the two conception stories side by side to emphasize the difference between mortal and supernatural, between reality and romance, between narrative and poetry. His poetic and romanticized story of Arthur in *Idylls of the King* is his popular, bittersweet and troubling interpretation of the legends. The tale is bittersweet because as grand an entrance and special that Arthur is, Tennyson and the audience knows the familiar legend, and they know that Arthur will exit just as miserable and painful as his great rise. The greater the rise to power, the worse the fall from power. Tennyson still wants to memorialize Arthur though Arthur must fall, so he softens Arthur’s horrific life story with romantic scenes and hope.

Higher forces such as Merlin and Christian God guide and assist Arthur to achieve the throne in *The Sword in the Stone*. Disney wishes the real world could have clear guidance, order and meaning, so he creates these good higher forces in the film to help the good developing hero Arthur. The film starts with a locked book titled *The Sword in the Stone*, and as the pages flip, a narrator sings, “A legend is sung of when England was young and knights were brave and bold” (*The Sword*). Arthur is already a legend and written down in a book in the start of the film. This film draws attention to the fact it was made by admirers of Arthur to commemorate and celebrate Arthur. The tone is also nostalgic, reflective and admiring. Because of the fond memory of good knights in the past, there is the foreshadowing of the lack of successful knights and perhaps lack of good, honest men in the future as well. The locked book is opened with a golden key that lies

beside the book, as if this tale in the film was secret and private, and it was a privilege to hear this tale. The opening continues,

The good king had died and no one could decide who was rightful heir to the throne. It seemed that the land would be torn by war or saved by a miracle alone. And that miracle appeared in London town, the sword in the stone (*The Sword*).

The “miracle” appears through the dark clouds in a beam of sparkly light and in a churchyard on an anvil on a stone. This is a reference of Christian miracles, usually by men who have been given powers by God such as Moses splitting the sea and Jesus coming back to life. The Godly powers have been given to the sword since it will decide the “rightwise king born of England” (*The Sword*). The king is right wise because he is God chosen and must be also of royal birth because royalty is also God chosen people. When Arthur pulls the sword, choral music, light and sparkles beam down on the sword to further reinforce that God has sanctioned and blessed Arthur to be King. The narrator also announces, “It’s a miracle, ordained by heaven. This boy is our king” (*The Sword*). The power of God will be transferred from the sword to the rightful king, which is Arthur. The sword in the churchyard additionally shows the work of God, and the anvil is symbolic of God against since he is the creator of the all things and the anvil is a tool used to create metalwork. Disney has created order, peace and good in the film and put those powers into God, the sword and a narrator who guides the audience and guides the people in the film. These are external powers which the people trust wholehearted for some reason, assuming that the people have never been betrayed, tricked or lied to by these powers. In this film, Disney does not allow any deceit and therefore order, God and the narrator are never doubted or questioned. Disney wanted the children audience to have complete faith and trust in the order of the world, the good and in their own self-worth. The children all have potential to be heroes if they only do good deeds.

Merlin, the paradigm of modern and old, has prior knowledge of Arthur's kingship and puts Arthur on the rightful path to carry out his destiny in Disney's *The Sword in the Stone*.

Merlin is all knowing, all-powerful and ageless, and animators in the Disney studio suggested that Disney saw himself as Merlin guiding all the animators and children audience as well. He called himself Uncle Walt (Aronstein 85) because he wanted to be a father figure, the guidance and loving older man to his audience. Bill Peet, the chief animator of the film,

reveals that he patterned the figure of Merlin after Walt Disney – 'Walt the wizard' – admitting that in his drawings of Merlin, he 'even borrowed Walt's nose'...the film as a model of the entire Disney experience...He was a living legend, a larger-than-life figure (Umland and Umland 122).

By 1956, Disney was already famous for his work and vision for children, and to Bill Peet, he was this greater than human being like Merlin. Merlin is supernatural, time and nature; he has powers to control nature, he can navigate time and he can perform physically impossible tasks out of nothing but incantations, his wand and his hands. In White's novel, Merlin lives backwards through time, but in Disney's film, Merlin can also travel freely throughout time. Merlin blasts off to vacation in Bermuda, and returns near the end of the film wearing a baseball cap, sunglasses, striped t-shirt, tropical print shorts and sneakers. These items are modern inventions that would not have existed during Arthur's time, and Merlin acknowledges that is "back from the 20th century" to Arthur's time (*The Sword*). His magic is unrestricted and although rusty, can perform amazing tasks. He can even control nature, as shown when he makes it snow inside the castle to show Sir Ector his power. Merlin reassures Arthur that Arthur was meant to be king, saying, "You'll be a great legend. They'll be writing books about you for centuries to come. Why they might even make a motion picture about you" (*The Sword*). What Merlin does not predict is that he Merlin will also be a living legend, famous equal or more than

Arthur even. The Disney ideals and fantasy lives on in his works, like Merlin's lessons continues to live on in Arthur and in the audience.

Though Arthur is not explicitly said to be King Uther's biological heir, Arthur is the legitimate, god-chosen and rightful heir to the throne of England in *The Sword in the Stone*. Power no longer comes from birthright according to Disney, but through hard work and merit. The sword in the stone is carved with, "Whoso Pulleth Out This Sword of this Stone and Anvil, is Rightwise King Born of England" (*The Sword*). Instead of Merlin proclaiming Arthur to be King as in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, in White's novel, White writes that Sir Ector and people of England announce that Arthur is the rightful king. The people of England accept Arthur, not that he was forced upon by Merlin or God. In the film, after Arthur pulls the sword, the narrator explains, "It's a miracle, ordained by heaven. This boy is our king" and knights and nobles from the tournament say together, "Hail King Arthur. Long live the king" (*The Sword*). The higher force of the narrator and legend dictates that Arthur is the heir to the throne. Even Sir Ector, Arthur's foster father, apologizes and bows to Arthur. Susan Aronstein writes,

The Sword in the Stone revisits the familiar Disney territory of the local boy who makes good. Its Arthur is not the son of the king, and the rightful heir (even from the wrong side of the blanket) to Uther's empty throne; he is an orphan that Merlin champions because 'he has spark, spirit; throws himself into everything he does.' This Arthur reminds Disney's audience of the essential American character- optimistic, imaginative, practical, resilient... Disney provides the reeling nation with a vision of future possibilities (Aronstein 85).

To Aronstein, Disney is promoting American optimism and greatness with use of advancing technology, but Disney is also retelling a legend. Disney emphasizes that Arthur excels to the throne not only because he is the biological heir to Uther, but also because he earned his greatness through trials. This is in model of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, a pattern many narrative stories follow, and Campbell describes in his book *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*.

In order to be a hero, gain the throne rightfully and deserve respect, Arthur must succeed his superiors. These are Kay and other capable knights, and Arthur succeeds over them because of his ingenuity; his lack of physical strength is replaced by his wit, perseverance and enthusiasm. The fact that Arthur was just a lowly orphan and squire, without anything and anyone before he was king makes his success all the more impressive and praiseworthy. Arthur is what Merlin encourages, “brain over brawn” (*The Sword*), and Arthur is the rightful heir because he earned the throne in addition to being god chosen. Disney strongly supports individualism, hard work and merit to earn respect because Disney started at the bottom and worked his way into fame as well.

Arthur is elevated to Jesus Christ and humanized to a Young Boy

Tennyson offers a nostalgic look at the past and alternative lifestyle of a better time, love and life. The answer is Christianity and the love of God. Tennyson wants a savior for Camelot like he wants a savior for his time, so he creates King Arthur, who is a combination of his beloved friend, the legendary king and Jesus. Arthur is liken to Jesus and he is sacrificed for sins of people around him such as Guinevere, Lancelot and all flawed humans. Devotion to Arthur and his laws, and being a good citizen is like being a good Christian and being devout to God. A good citizen and Christian both live a higher love and better life, and will gain entrance into heaven and higher state of being after mortal death. Arthur is Jesus because he is too bright, too perfect and great for this world that he cannot continue living on earth, he must transcend to a higher state of being. Guinevere describes Arthur, “Ah great and gentle lord, /Who wast, as in the conscience of a saint /Among his warring senses” and her self as,

Would not look up, or half-despised the height
To which I would not or I could not climb-

I thought I could not breathe in that fine air
That pure severity of perfect light
(Tennyson 285-6, "Guinevere" 633-41).

Arthur is like a saint, a God and Guinevere cannot reach the high place Arthur already is. Arthur is bright, pure, severe and perfect similar to God, and in his presence, she cannot breathe, cannot see and cannot reach his height of goodness and purity. When God appears to Abraham in the Book of Exodus, God appears as a burning bush. God is the flame and fire around the bush; he does not burn up the bush into ashes but merely surrounds the bush. Arthur is symbolically God in this passage as he surrounds and demands from Guinevere. But he is the powerful and natural element of fire whereas she is only human, and he loves her infinitely but she cannot do that for him. She could never reach Arthur when he is God. She did not serve him well as a mortal wife, and she can only meet Arthur again in heaven if she can reach heaven. She recognizes she has failed her duties as a wife and Christian,

It was my duty to love the highest:
It surely was my profit had I known:
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it
Not Lancelot, nor another
(Tennyson 286, "Guinevere" 652-6).

The highest could be seen as Arthur or God since her duty as a wife was to love Arthur, and her duty as a Christian was to love God. Guinevere could not last under Arthur's high and strict standards, no one could. Even Arthur must find a new place to exist because this world was too corrupt for him. Alan Lupack writes,

Tennyson's Arthur is idealized almost to the point of unreality... Tennyson's Arthur is the 'stainless King' and the 'blameless King'. So perfect is he that Tennyson defies his source... by creating an alternative story of a mystical coming of Arthur... he has progress-or evolved-beyond most men so that he approaches the level of the angels (Lupack 147-8).

He is too pure to prepare for distrust, betrayal and traitors like Mordred and Sir Bedivere.

Arthur is Jesus because he is pure, generous and still loves Guinevere; he generously allows her a chance for salvation like Jesus because he loves all humans and believes everyone deserves to be saved. Jesus gave every human a chance to redeem his or her sins through repentance and life on earth to gain entry into heaven. Arthur accuses Guinevere of having sinned flesh, saying, "I cannot take thy hand; that too is flesh,/And in the flesh thou hast sinn'd; and mine own flesh./Here looking down at thine polluted" (Tennyson 283, "Guinevere" 550-53). Guinevere has physically sinned in adultery, and she is dirty, low and physical to Arthur because he is above physicality, humanity and sin. Arthur is Godly because of his lack of sins, his controlled sexuality and his distance from humanity. Sin is innate to all descendants of Adam and Eve because of original sin in Christian beliefs, and when newborns are baptized, they request to be forgiven for their innate sinful nature. Guinevere's failure and susception to sin are to blame; she is innately weak and sinful as a human. Lupack recognizes,

Arthur is too far above average women and men for them to live up to his standards. Even the vows to which he makes his knights swear are such 'as is a shame/ A man should not be bound by, yet the which/No man can keep' (33). But it is precisely his impossible idealism that gives Arthur his symbolic power in the *Idylls* (Lupack 152).

The quest for the Holy Grail is a spiritual, internal and individual journey to reach God, but when the knights head out in a group, on physical journey to find a physical grail, they have already failed the quest. Arthur is harsh and demands perfection from his knights and his wife because he wants them to reach his level of perfection and reach God, heaven and purity. Arthur motivates his knights and his wife to change and improve just as Christ preaches the gospel and encourages humanity to aim for the higher, spiritual and lasting life than the baser, temporary, physical life. Guinevere's fault is only being human, and Arthur realizes this. Because he is God, he is detached from the human world of emotions and looks to the longer timeline of the end of the world, when only the believers shall rise to heaven. So Arthur can quickly forgive Guinevere for

her adultery, a task that a cuckolded human husband would find challenging. After his grand speech to Guinevere, he says, “And all is past, the sin is sinn’d, and I, Lo! I forgive thee, as Eternal God/ Forgives: do thou for thine own soul the rest” (Tennyson 283, “Guinevere” 540-2). Arthur compares his forgiveness to Guinevere as God forgives all sinners, and urges Guinevere to repent her sins to God. She will be able to return to Arthur at the end of the world because Arthur as Christ will return to save England and the human world. Brewer and Taylor write,

Having shown throughout the *Idylls* ‘the temporary triumph of evil, the confusion of moral order, closing in the great “Battle of the west”’, Tennyson concludes with a somber but highly hopeful message quite different from Mallory’s closing concern with individual religious salvation: An ideal, Christ-like Arthur brought his message to the world (Brewer and Taylor 127).

Arthur delivers the message of repentance, salvation and Christianity because he is Christ and God. Christ’s flaw is that he loves too much and loves all people, especially the lost souls of criminals, sinners and murderers. Guinevere realizes that her love of Lancelot was baser and human while her love of Arthur and God is higher and eternal. She speaks about Arthur, saying,

I yearn’d for warmth and colour which I found
In Lancelot – now I see thee what thou art,
thou art the highest and most human too...
Ah my God,
What might I not have made of thy fair world,
Had I but loved thy highest creature here?...
We needs must love the highest when we see it
(Tennyson 286, “Guinevere” 642-655).

Arthur is compared to Jesus Christ and God himself, who is the highest love one can aspire to. Arthur is generous and loves Guinevere still like God believes all souls deserve to be saved and gives them a chance at salvation through their human life. She devotes her self to God as Arthur told her to, dies an Abbess and never meets Lancelot in life again (Tennyson 287, “Guinevere” 690-2).

Arthur is brought down to a sympathetic and even pitiful character as a young orphan boy “the Wart” in *The Sword in the Stone* and the audience is invited to appreciate and reflect nostalgically on the lessons, growth and challenges Arthur faces. Disney relates to Arthur and all Cinderella fairy tales because he feels he has beat his odds and triumphed. He wants his audience to feel he or she is Arthur too, and to be encouraged by Arthur to succeed in life. There is a grand legend value of King Arthur being read from a book to the audience, and there is the human story of the Wart’s problems and emotions as he grows and changes. Kevin J. Harty is a literary critic of Arthurian material who has published many articles on the subject like the one discussed below, “Lights! Camelot! Action! – King Arthur on Film”, and he is editor of the books *Cinema Arthuriana* and *King Arthur on Film: New Essays on Arthurian Cinema*. He notices, “*The Sword in the Stone* is unique among films in its portrayal of Arthur’s childhood, a topic often murky in medieval versions of the legend” (Harty, *King Arthur* 20). A film has a particular format: a set up, development, climax and resolution. There is a limited amount of time to tell a complete story, and the traditional legend of King Arthur has many components, events and characters. In Disney’s *The Sword in the Stone*, the characters are minimized and the characters are developed thoroughly, the climax is anticlimactic and the ending is inconclusive. The film is only part one of TH White’s four part novel. Part one is meant only as an opening and beginning, and the film audience is left wanting more when the film ends. The climax in the film is Arthur pulling the sword from the stone. He then gains the kingship and the next scene is the boy Arthur sitting in a throne, in a robe with a crown. But Arthur has still not grown up from a boy of 11; he has more to grow and learn, and his skills as a king and leader have not yet been proven. He has pulled the sword from a higher power gifted to him, but the real work still lies ahead and the film’s climax has not been earned and there is no sense of achievement. Inside the castle, Arthur

panics and tries to escape but all the doors have crowds screaming his name. He is flustered and confused, perhaps at the high expectations of him to be influential, great and live forever in legend. Perhaps it is a more human problem; the big change, isolated from everyone he knew and trusted, and nervous from all the attention. The resolution and end of the film shows Merlin placing Arthur back in his throne with his crown, and Merlin still teaches Arthur as the camera pans out and fades black. The film is like a child; it has only begun and it ends with optimism, hope and safety. Disney wants to leave the audience with enthusiasm and hope for the future, and his film is like childhood. It builds confidence and prepares children for life.

Arthur starts out with nothing in the beginning, but ends up with everything in England by the end of the film. Disney is recreating the well-known Cinderella fairytale, where a youth raises from the ashes a success because of the youth's adherence to morals, good nature and hard work. Arthur lacks physical strength, being described as by Merlin as "scrawny little fellow about 12, a regular little grasshopper" (*The Sword*). He lives in Sir Ector's care though he is an orphan, is a squire and his biggest dream is to become a knight. Rebecca Umland and Samuel Umland describe the film as integrative form of propaganda meant to settle the masses in their mediocrity (Umland and Umland 116). But this film is a fairy tale and is not meant to have a political appeasement agenda, to discourage technology or progress, and encourage wishful thinking without any work to gain progress. Disney is using positive reinforcement to dream large and reach high. Though the method of supernatural help, fatherly advice and encouragement and technological advancement is not the realistic method to rise in status like Arthur did, Disney is not eliminating other forms of progress. He encourages technology, but he does not discourage other methods. The lesson of education to improvement, brain over brawn and technology is also questioned when Merlin criticizes both the past and the future. In the

beginning of the film, Merlin complains about the past, which is his present the audience is watching, “A dark age indeed. An age without conveniences. No electricity. No plumbing. No nothing. Everything complicated. A big medieval mess” (*The Sword*). But at the end of the film, Merlin complains about the future where he just visited Bermuda, “Bermuda, yes. Back from Bermuda and the 20th century. And believe me, you can have it. One big modern mess” (*The Sword*) and he transforms back into his old clothes of robe and pointed hat. Perhaps Merlin is too old fashioned and mature for progress and the modern age, he gives that to “you” pointing at Arthur or to the audience. Aronstein notices,

Merlin’s magic (apart from his ability to educate Arthur by transforming him into animals) consist in modernizing the ‘medieval muddle’...all of the modern American gadgets that Disney...extols in the Carousel of Progress. What is needed to modernize this dark ages, the film argues, is not a good war, but the imagination to dream up gadgets (Aronstein 87).

Disney shows both the past and the modern as a mess to Merlin, and allows the audience to decide what is the better alternative. Merlin himself is content in traveling between times, and not living but watching and guiding the humans. He keeps his distance for his personal safety, for his personal protection from pain and joy. Disney believes that all times have their good and evil, and Arthur, children and all people must learn to live as good people while resisting evil. Technology, innovation and progress, are not inherently good or evil, but people must learn to use it for good purposes like Merlin used magic to get Arthur out of chores, but that backfired. Arthur needs chores to build his strong work ethic.

Beauty and the Grotesque found in femininity

Women are the embodiments of the beautiful and the grotesque. They are capable of greatness and loyalty, but are able to destroy and hurt. Like Eve, Guinevere is the temptress in

Tennyson and she commits the original sin, though in the end she repents. Guinevere is blamed for the fall of Camelot, the root of evil and the only traitor to Arthur in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Tennyson chose to manifest all evil in Guinevere, and all good in Arthur because he worshiped his Arthur as his beloved friend, legendary king and God. To make the evil easier to spot and to avoid in a romance, Tennyson put it in one character. He puts order and beauty into a horrific and ruined Camelot, like he used poetry to tell the tragic story of Arthur. Guinevere exists in a realm greater than common people because of her incomparable beauty and no one will suffer her pain and grief. Her decisions affect an entire kingdom, and her adultery caused war and destruction. Her mistakes are never forgotten. Arthur expects and demands Guinevere to be like him and godlike, but she is more flawed because she is female. Arthur insults Guinevere savagely, calling her,

She like a new disease, unknown to men,
Creeps, no precautions used, among the crowd,
Makes wicked lightnings of her eyes, and saps
The fealty of our friends, and stirs the pulse
With devil's leaps, and poisons half the young
(Tennyson 282, "Guinevere" 515-519).

Femininity is mysterious and unknown, and therefore dangerous and malicious. Guinevere is described as nature and elements not well understood by Arthur and people of that time, such as germs and viruses, lightning and weather, and poison and death. These elements worry, harm and kill, and so does Guinevere. She is like darkness, evil and death, creeping along quietly, earning trust, waiting until most vulnerable and then striking randomly. Arthur also says,

Well is it that no child is born of thee.
The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws,
The craft of kindred and the Godless hosts
Of heathen swarming o'er the Northern Sea
(Tennyson 280, 282, "Guinevere" 421-425, 515-519).

Women are destructive, passionate and chaotic, but Tennyson notes that Guinevere has not fulfilled her duties as a woman and there is hope of dutiful women as shown in the good Enid and faithful Elaine. Guinevere is barren and adulterous because she is not a good wife and human; all her flaws lead back to her femininity, lack of control and wrong living. This simple pure good and pure evil separation in romance and fantasy allow Tennyson to easily fix the problems in Camelot and chastise Guinevere, but that is not true of his contemporary time where he is lost. So he puts the simplicity, order and religion back in his fantastical Camelot to reassure himself and control a fictional world. When the real world was progress and changing, Tennyson could put the tension and juxtaposition of beauty and grotesque in his idylls.

Though all of Tennyson's women are deeply flawed and caricatured, they are separated into bad and good categories. Tennyson wants to include the true and the false, the beautiful and the horrific because this is an accurate reflection of his time and his view of the world. Gossedge and Knight further discuss the topic of femininity in Tennyson's work,

The first two Idylls written were 'Nimue' (later 'Merlin and Vivien') and 'Enid' (later divided into 'Geraint and Enid' and 'The Marriage of Geraint'), and they appeared in a trial edition under the title *The True and the False*. Here in both title and text woman is stereotyped for ill and good. Vivien's overt and manipulative sexuality overcomes the gifted but ultimately morally weak Merlin, while Enid's purity and endurance save the rash and honour-obsessed Geraint... 'Elaine', closely retelling Malory's story of 'The Fair Maid of Astolat' - the same figure as 'The Lady of Shalott' but with her passions under closer English control - and 'Guinevere', an almost entirely imagined and highly censorious account of the adulterous but repentant queen (Archibald and Putter 113-4).

Vivien uses her sexuality to trap Merlin, Guinevere uses her sexuality to gain Lancelot's love and though there are no explicit sexual relations described between Guinevere and Lancelot, both women are reprehensible for using their sexuality at all. Even Elaine, who dies living in a foolish fantasy that Lancelot loves her, is praised for being innocent and faithful to Lancelot. Lupack calls Elaine, "lost because of her love for Lancelot" and "innocent but unrealistic love" (Lupack

149-50). Tennyson's view of Guinevere may be one-sided and putting all the pressure of perfection onto her because the figure of Arthur was too perfect for the world. Kennedy writes,

Tennyson's harsh treatment of the figure of the queen called forth, even from his contemporaries, cries of criticism", Gerhard Joseph believes "the figure of the queen as a woman unable to maintain her status as the ideal woman" and Samuel Burchell "views Guinevere's sin as only one sin among many in Camelot and certainly a symbol, not the cause, of Camelot's downfall (Gordon-Wise 52, 53).

Tennyson writes that Arthur demands too much from Guinevere that she could not possibly fulfill, and Arthur then chastises Guinevere for setting her up for failure because no one could be perfect but Arthur himself. Literary critic Samuel Burchell believes Guinevere is not the only one person and her adultery not the only sin that contributed to the fall of the kingdom because only many weaknesses can bring down a kingdom. Tennyson gave women attractive and repulsive traits because he believes romance and horror always come together.

Woman are the source of evil in Greek myth, and Tennyson compares Guinevere to these myths to emphasize that though humans are sinful and flawed, females are especially troubled and lost. The nature of femininity causes females to be beautiful and attractive on the outside, but dangerous and deceitful inside. Arthur talks of how he ruled with Roman laws in mind, he taught his knights "to love one maiden only, cleave to her, and worship her by years of noble deeds" (Tennyson 281, "Guinevere" 472-3). He wants to worship his wife and expects his wife to be devoted to him like a religion as well. This is an impossible task; Arthur expects too much from his wife and he knows she would fail from the beginning because humans are not angels. They are not perfect and Arthur knows she would make a mistake. Arthur accuses her of lacking a pure heart, of being a disease and bane, and her lips belonging to Lancelot but he never accuses her of being unchaste or adulterous with Lancelot (Tennyson 282-3, "Guinevere" 499,515,523,548-9). Her sin was being born female, since the Greeks believed Pandora, the first

woman, to be a curse on mankind. Arthur speaks to Guinevere, saying, “O imperial-moulded form,/And beauty such as never woman wore,/Until it came a kingdom’s curse with thee-“ (Tennyson 283, “Guinevere” 545-7). Guinevere is beautiful with no comparison because she is “imperial-moulded”, made by gods. In Greek myth, the gods make Pandora out of clay and gift her with beauty, seduction and deceitful nature. Guinevere is described as “fairest of all flesh on earth” (Tennyson 21, “The Coming of Arthur” 3) and she starts the idylls since Arthur longs and wars for her, and she ends the idylls when Arthur loses her. Guinevere’s gift and curse is her beauty, her femininity and her allure. Many want her and wars waged for her; in Tennyson Arthur and Lancelot fight for her, in other traditions she was kidnapped three times and Lancelot rescued her, and Mordred desired Guinevere as well. Helen of Troy was also another deadly beauty in Greek myth that was abducted multiple times, caused the war between Troy and the Greeks, and blamed for the fall of Troy. Likewise, Guinevere was blamed for the fall of Camelot. The little maid calls the queen wicked, false traitor, sinful, and says,

‘This is all woman’s grief,
That she is woman, whose disloyal life
Hath wrought confusion in the Table Round
Which good King Arthur founded, years ago,
With signs and miracles and wonders, there
At Camelot, ere the coming of the Queen
(Tennyson 274-5, “Guinevere” 207, 268, 216-21).

There seems to be no trouble at Camelot before Guinevere and femininity entered Camelot, and even the little maid knows the burden of womankind is her inherent disloyal nature. Being female and human has its faults and flaws, and the female flaw is their trickery and shameful nature. The evil in the Bible is from a snake and Eve, who trick Adam to committing original sin. Tennyson updates the bible and has Guinevere balance out Arthur, she is Eve, sin and evil to Arthur’s Adam, pure and holy.

The females and femininity in Disney's *The Sword in the Stone* are minimalized, simplified and separated from males because they are irrational, mysterious and overwhelming. Sexuality is repressed and pushed to the side in Disney movies except for pure, true love because Disney does not know how to handle the range of femininity. He sees good and bad, and he put women into good and bad groups where the good follows rules of civilization and the bad are wild. Mim is out-of-control and dangerous, and the female squirrels are put into good and bad categories as well. In T.H. White's novel, there is a duel between Madame Mim and Merlin but Madame Mim was removed and replaced with Morgan Le Fay. Maureen Fries, specialist of women in Arthurian material and author of "How to Handle a Woman, or Morgan at the Movies", writes about TH White's removed sequence,

There she operates like a fairy-tale witch, enticing the Wart (White's name for the young Arthur) and his foster-brother Kay into her woodland cottage, where she intends to eat them. Turning the Wart into a veritable Hansel, she disrobes him, assesses his fat potential, and shoves him into a cage. Summoned by a kindly goat, Merlin engages her in a wizard's duel as- in multiple and responsive shapeshiftings- they vie for mastery, until the seer becomes various germs from the afflictions of which his opponent 'immediately expire[s]' (Harty, *King Arthur* 73).

Madame Mim is the villain in White's fairy tale. She represents the bad mother, who neglects the children and even wants to devolve the children by taking them back into her womb by eating them. Merlin eventually proves his superiority in magic, in authority, and in masculinity over femininity. Morgan Le Fay is characterized as a "fat, dowdy, middle aged" slug, who lives in a castle made of fat in White's novel (Harty, *King Arthur* 73). White describes both Madame Mim and Morgan Le Fay as undesirable and villainous, and Fries calls them, "misogynistic and specifically antimaternal bias... a bias only intensified by the choices the Disney organization made in their film" (Harty, *King Arthur* 73).

In the Disney film, Madame Mim is introduced as living in an isolated cabin the woods and playing tea party alone. Mim is the antithesis of a male, and therefore she must be evil because a civilized male is good. She wears a short, pink dress, skips around and her face has excessive makeup with blush and crazy eyes. Mim is hyper-feminine, she looks like and acts like a bratty, spoiled and young girl. She must live separated from the male-ruled society because as a female, she lives in fantasy, in the emotional and in her mind. Madam Mim only knows how to become larger animals, and it peaks in her becoming a dragon. She breathes fire, is huge and clumsy, and symbolizes how the female kind is seen to males, a hot tempered and bossy monster. Merlin takes the intellectual approach in order to defeat Mim. Merlin and Mim behave with ease and freeness together because they are very old friends; they have been the two opposing forces since the beginning of time, masculine and feminine. Merlin turns into a virus, a disease, and he infects Mim. He has become technically the smallest living creature there is, a one-cell organism. The lesson is that no matter how small and seemingly insignificant one appears to be, one still has great powers and strengths within. Merlin beats Mim at her own game even when she cheats, proving Merlin the better moralistic person and wizard. Umland and Umland write, “Merlin vanquishes Madam Mim even though she breaks all the rules that she herself had insisted upon before they began” (Umland and Umland 125). This is a good lesson to the Wart, but it also has underlying antifeminist meanings as well. Mim is an out-of-control maniac, shallow and obsessed with only size and bigger is better. In the end of the duel, Mim lays in her bed sneezing and complaining. She is ultimately confined to her home, to her frail body and defeated by Merlin. Fries calls Mim delusional, stereotyped and

she suffers both ‘hot and cold flashes’ (surely both an ageist and sexist slur)...magic is only justifiable as ‘useful for something good’ are designed to validate Merlin’s (that is, the male’s) superiority to his fate, vain, and menopausal opponent (Harty, *King Arthur* 74).

Even when Merlin has turned back into a person and technically the virus has left Mim, she is still infected because it is a symbolic battle between masculinity and femininity, and masculinity triumphs. Merlin has overcome her; he has physically bested her and by mounting her, he has successfully penetrated her and ejaculated his seed in her causing her temporary sickness of pregnancy. Fries notices that Merlin is also caricatured like Mim, but he is “an affectionate portrait...As so often in fiction as well as in life, white-haired old men are seen as socially beneficially, whereas white-haired old women appear as witch-like” (Harty, *King Arthur* 74). Alternative versions of femininity are presented in the film, but they are also mysterious, dangerous and ultimately avoided by Arthur in *The Sword in the Stone*. Disney wants to avoid sexuality and femininity in general because he wanted to keep subjects simple, clean and pleasant for children. Disney provides a sheltered childhood for children that he never has, but he still includes Madame Mim as a vague warning of danger and troubles for children.

The female squirrels in the Disney film represent two types of femininity, the virginal, desirable and beneficial, and the emasculating, aggressive and repulsive. In the end, bad or good, femininity is shunned in *The Sword in the Stone* because it interferes, complicates and corrupts the pure child’s tale Disney envisioned. Disney still shows both good and bad femininity in the film because he wants the threat of femininity in the background. Arthur is turned into a young squirrel and Merlin into an old squirrel with a long white beard and glasses. The predator in this situation is no longer a physical flesh eating one, but a different kind of disease and death, love. Love is shown here as a disease and there are two female squirrels that stalk Arthur and Merlin. Both males avoid the females because they know they cannot commit, the females would only hold the males back in the male’s real, human lives. These are the two types of woman that exist: the young squirrel who is at first shy and coy, physically cute and likable and the fat, older

female squirrel who has buckteeth, is too aggressive and smothers Merlin. The young squirrel is inexperienced, acts slowly and represents the virginal female whereas the other squirrel is experienced, aggressive and pounces on Merlin. The young squirrel saves Arthur from the wolf representing death so she is beneficial as a mate, but she misunderstands Arthur's kindness and politeness for love. Arthur is not ready for commitment and they are not even the same species; he is human and she is a squirrel. This is Disney's representation of Guinevere, and perhaps to Disney, Arthur was a higher form of being than Guinevere and ultimately, they could not coexist. The older female squirrel jumps on and chokes Merlin. He screams in horror and tries to escape her clutches but cannot. In the end, the young female squirrel rejected by Arthur still gets sympathy as he looks back at her and she cries quietly, chatters in high pitch chattering of confusion, pain and heartbreak. Merlin outright rejects the older female squirrel who is grotesquely unattractive and repulsive and brushes her off his body. The other female squirrel emasculates Merlin because she aggressively hunts Merlin, and when he leaves her, she quickly moves on and comforts the young squirrel. The innocent, virginal female is desirable but just lusting after the wrong being, Arthur, and the experienced, forward female is never desirable and will never win a man because she has too much strength, behaves too male, does not fit into the world of Merlin, Arthur and Disney. Love, sexuality and femininity are too compared for Disney to translate for children. In some films, he attempts to with the perfect prince and princess pair, but since Arthur is just a boy, Disney omits true love and all these female characters are all failed attempts of a good woman. These females threaten, scare and stalk the young Arthur, but do not hurt Arthur long-term because Disney wants to show evil must exist alongside good, but good still triumphs.

Conclusion

In reality, there is beauty and repulsion, good and evil. Tennyson and Disney take inspiration from their lives, from previous fictions and from legend to create their works. *Idylls of the King* use the abstract and symbolic form of poetry, emotional language and a perfect King Arthur to retell the tragic and doomed reign of King Arthur. The idylls appear romantic since they describe an idyllic time, but Tennyson foreshadows the inevitable fall, suffering of the characters and horror behind the legend of Arthur in the content. An entire world of characters and situations are revealed in the different idylls, showing both romance and horror during King Arthur's rule. The surface of *The Sword in the Stone* appears light and simple as well since it is an animated film for children dealing with the education of the young Arthur. However, behind the school lessons are revealing morals, describing a violent, dark and survival of the fittest world. The tragic life of the orphan Arthur and his future fate being war leader, hunted and betrayed by his most loved are sugar coated as adventures he has as animals. Alice Grellner calls the film, "flawed, anachronistic, anarchic, sentimental, and idealized...but oh, how they do sparkle" (Harty, *Cinema* 126). Brewer and Taylor describe Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*,

it achieves a meaningful mythical dimension. It creates the history of a society that is at once psychologically realistic and mythic, simultaneously old, timeless, and distinctly modern...Tennyson redefined the King and the meaning of his story, giving the western world a new myth artfully forged from the old (Brewer and Taylor 128).

Tennyson has created a poetic Arthur who is too perfect for his flawed world and Disney has created a fairy tale Arthur who is blissfully unaware of his dangerous world. Tennyson's Arthur succeeds by changing others and spreading his gospel, and Disney's Arthur succeeds by being imaginative and flexible during change. Both fictions portray the influence of the authors and their contemporary society, from Tennyson's Victorian England to Disney's 1960's America, on the Arthurian legend.

Mortal Behind the Legend: Epic in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *Excalibur* (1981)

An epic traditionally concerns an oral tradition poem about a legendary or historical hero, and in the modern context, it describes a fictional genre that follows heroic figures in grand scale plots. The Greek epic poetry of Homer follows the lives of several key heroes and their allies, such as King of Troy Priam and his sons Paris and Hector, and King of Mycenae Agamemnon and his army such as Achilles and Odysseus. The poem follows their struggle in balancing battle honor, family duty and personal peace. Malory's work and *Excalibur* have many similarities with these Greek epics and are called epic in this chapter because of the epic elements in these fictions. In both Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *Excalibur* (1981), the tone is solemn, and the exaggerated, over the top and extreme characters and situations make the fictions both epic like Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The importance of every action and adventure is heightened and reduced at the same time, life is a struggle of balance and the grand heroes are given human, sympathetic qualities despite their grandeur and legendary status.

Malory's text weaves together a variety of sources creating a collection of Arthurian tales and a contradicting, repetitive and dense world. Epic elements such as grand scale, exaggerated emotions and heightened importance of all characters gives all of the characters and their actions meaning in Malory, and makes a sense of purpose and meaning to a complex and muddled time of King Arthur. Malory has created a world with culture and background, rules and supernatural that shows his viewpoint of reality as a spectacle, a beautiful disaster, and meaningful existence. His text is like the Christian Gospel and Malory wants to emphasize the importance of individuals. Even if the individual does not know their importance, they are all important because they connect and affect King Arthur, who in turn changes Britain. *Excalibur* is based on

Malory's text and the film is an epic, heroic adventure telling of main characters lives and their importance in one another and to Britain. There is a clear plot and hero's journey of King Arthur, and his success and death is symbolic of the rise and fall of Britain from power. The solemn tone and heightened meaning indicative of epic elements used in Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *Excalibur* show the interconnection and significance of characters to each other and to Arthur, and the importance of the fall of Camelot to all societies. Individuals and their struggles in life are emphasized in both fictions because Malory and Boorman valued the people behind the legend, and believed human struggles are integral to all legends.

Background and influences of Malory and Boorman

Le Morte d'Arthur reflects Malory's turbulent life and the turmoil of The War of the Roses in Britain. Malory wants to write an epic mirroring the disunited people of Britain, and give meaning and importance to each character's life. These characters have a larger influence than they know to Arthur, Britain and all societies since all societies depend on the unity of people. *Le Morte d'Arthur* starts and ends in war and without a king, much like the state of Britain during Malory's life. Malory was a soldier and knight notorious for his accused crimes of theft, extortion, rape, and attempted murder (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 128). He called himself the "knight-prisoner" and lived during The Wars of The Roses, the civil war in Britain. The 100 Year War and the Black Plague had just passed by Europe (Malory v). The Wars of the Roses was between the house of Lancaster and the house of York fighting for the English throne, and the war ended with the marriage of the two houses in 1485. This was the same year Caxton printed the first textual copy of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. During a time of civil war in his country, the

disunity is reflected in his work, and Elizabeth J. Bryan notices the influence in the preface to the text. She writes,

Le Morte d'Arthur certainly responds to the most obvious cultural issues of the Wars of the Roses: the problem of kin fighting kin when the realm is at stake; the problem of how one assesses loyalties, even identities, of one's supposed political allies...knights who derive identity both from their family affiliations and from their membership in Arthur's Round Table (Malory x-xi).

Blood brothers and relatives have to fight one another because of their obligations to their state, such as Balin and Balan, and Lancelot and Gawain. The disunity of Malory's text reflects the time period it was written, but it was also what Malory intends because his life was troubled with the law as well. He wants to write an encompassing collection of tales dealing with Arthur and his knights, showing the variety of struggles from the average person to the king are the same. Everyone must overcome life obstacles, and all societies can become chaotic without a leader.

Malory's sources are multiple from 13th century French romance to Middle English poems, and the Caxton version further interprets the text into an epic piece. Malory included many sources because he wants to show variety, to emphasize meaning in characters' actions and even give rationale for characters' sins and crimes. But in the end, disunity is what causes Camelot to fall and what could threaten future societies. Caxton changes the text when he printed the text for the first time in 1485 and scholars believe the Winchester manuscript discovered in the 20th century is a more accurate version of Malory's original text. Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff write about Malory's sources, "Those sources are multiple: they include principally the French Vulgate and the Prose *Tristan*...and the Alliterative and Stanzaic *Mortes*" (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 130). Malory translated from French sources but he also he adapts and changes the stories. There is new meaning in Malory's novel separate from the sources because of his

reordering and manipulation of the tales. The manuscript has eight self-contained sections, whereas Caxton divides the work into

twenty-one books and five hundred seven chapters”, and he titled the book *Le Morte Darthur* when the manuscript’s title was *The Hoole Book of Kyng Arthur and of His Noble Knyghtes of the Rounde Table* (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 128).

The many chapters and their titles summarizing the action in the chapter allow each chapter to be the main focus for at least one chapter. Their existence has value and their action has meaning to the whole because they are mentioned by name with a chapter title, instead of being integrated and forgotten in bigger, only eight sections. Eugene Vinaver, the editor of the Winchester manuscript, argues that Caxton changed the nature of Malory’s text by this reorganization. He says,

by deleting colophons and dividing the material of the romance into twenty-one books, which were in turn divided into chapters, Caxton had taken what were essentially eight separate romances on Arthurian themes and made of them one book (Lupack 133-4).

Though the themes are the same about Arthur and his knights, the works are meant to be together as a whole and the divisions into chapters did not take away from Malory’s intention. Only the last section was called *Le Morte Darthur*, and the whole tone of the book has been changed to somber because the death of Arthur is anticipated by the title. Britain is thrown into chaos and disunity without an able leader like Arthur, but it is also inevitable that no one man can live forever and times will change from war and peace constantly. To Malory, the individuals like the knights and damsels are the importance and focus in his work.

Malory has transformed the Arthurian legend from one king Arthur’s life story to a whole community of knights and the fall of an entire civilization of Camelot. He has done this by keeping all the multiple stories and compiling them to encyclopedic purposes, giving meaning and importance to every story and every character. Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff note,

Some have criticized him for accentuating knighthood and military action while deemphasizing or misunderstanding courtly love or the courtly refinement of the authors he drew from (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 131).

They explain this negative criticism of Malory's work may be the difference in "narrative techniques" and "literary tastes" in the 13th century French sources and Malory's 15th century English audience. Malory and Caxton handling French sources transformed the work into the dense, dynamic and meaningful *Le Morte d'Arthur* discussed presently. Malory does not exclude any tales, therefore there was repetitive, inconsistent and had no clear plot. He wants to collect all the known Arthurian tales and he succeeded in doing so. The artistic style of the text is limited but Malory wants an encyclopedia, not a novel. Umland and Umland suggest,

Arguably, there was no received legend until Malory created it by unifying diverse sources and by virtue of his own creativity and narrative ability...Malory's Arthurian version of the legend was so powerful in its effect on Arthurian revivalists from the nineteenth century to the present (Umland and Umland 2).

Malory's work is similar to earlier works such as Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* because there are many elements and motifs that other authors have used as inspiration for their works. *Le Morte d'Arthur* does not have one coherent message, plot or hero, but it has multiple lessons, plots and heroes. Its grand scale allows a large span of time to be told, many characters and their importance to Arthur explained.

Though Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* is cited as the source for *Excalibur* in the ending credits, but the director John Boorman draws from a variety of sources and is not limited to Malory's text. Boorman takes from romance, postmodern and poetic sources, but his work is epic similar in scale, variety and meaning to Malory's work. His influences are the John Cowper Powys' *A Glastonbury Romance*, Carl Jung's philosophy, T.S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Boorman became interested in Arthurian legend after reading Eliot's poem "The Wasteland" about beautiful, meaningful but ruined modern world and

redemption in the past. It is full of cultural references, highly symbolic and stylistic. Rebecca and Samuel Umland see the influence from Eliot in *Excalibur* in the quest of the grail, which are “a survival of earlier pagan rites” and a pagan quest (Umland and Umland 141). Though they do not see the grail quest as postmodern, the story of *Excalibur* is mythical and in a time that could be interpreted as past or future. Boorman says, “I think of the story, the history, as a myth. The film has to do with mythical truth, not historical truth; it has to do with man taking over the world on his own terms for the first time” (Umland and Umland 129). Boorman wants to focus on the humanity in the Arthurian legend, in the man in Arthur and his struggles with life and power. Arthur has lost control of his wife, his family and his kingdom, so he seeks a revitalization and strength to help him continue. This is an ageless and common motif because the hero always must adventure to gain, there is always more knowledge to obtain. It started with Adam and the apple from the tree of knowledge, continues with Arthur and his grail quest and will continue into postmodern quests to help man seek more meaning and purpose to life.

Boorman talks about Powys' *A Glastonbury Romance* and its large influence on him when he first read it at 18, “*Glastonbury Romance* is about the conjunction of the Arthurian legend and the Christian legend. That set the pattern for me” (Umland and Umland 130). Boorman excludes Christianity for most of the film, with a priest praying to god to save them from Morgana and Mordred and a return to the Garden of Eden with Lancelot and Guinevere's love. God does not meddle in the men's affairs and men control their fate, but god does set the laws of nature, laws of justice by jousting and laws of marriage. Arthur says,

For by the law of God, no knight who is false can win in combat with one who is true...My laws must bind everyone, high or low, or they're not laws at all...I must be king first...if need be (*Excalibur*).

The king is an enforcer of natural laws made by God, and he must subject to these laws as all men do. No one can escape the laws of God and God. Boorman gives the order of law to the film, but the characters struggle with following the strict rules of law because humanity is multi-faceted and law is unyielding.

Excalibur follows Malory's text from the birth and rise of Arthur to power, but differs in the treatment of Guinevere, Lancelot and the grail quest. Umland and Umland say,

Excalibur cannot really be described as an "adaptation" of Malory at all, but rather, as a criticism of it – a text that acts as a "corrective" to it...Boorman invokes Malory because he wishes to indicate that his film is epic in scope and dimension (Umland and Umland 137).

Excalibur adds to Malory's text by making new focuses and messages to already existing legend. The film is still epic like Malory's text, and both have epic elements but are conveyed in different ways. Most knights are eliminated and Perceval is the only knight that obtains a physical grail to bring back to Arthur whereas in Malory, it is a Christian quest for a holy grail and there is a last supper reenactment the Galahad, Perceval and Bors participate in (Umland and Umland 140). *Excalibur* is a deviation from Malory's text because it is a return to pagan beliefs and not Christianity, with the quest of the grail with no Christian connotations. Justice, the law of man and nature are what ruled the film instead of God, and Arthur and his men were practical, down to earth people who cared for their wives and farms. Therefore Arthur and his knights struggled to adhere to the laws and duties of the land, and balance with the human obligations and emotions of love and charity.

Boorman quotes from Tennyson, but Boorman is a departure from Tennyson because he depicts an earthly existence whereas Tennyson described a holy Christian existence devoted to God. In the end, men like Arthur must take care of their life and kingdom, not Merlin or God. Boorman says, "it has to do with man taking over the world on his own terms for the first time"

(Umland and Umland 129). *Excalibur* is a myth to Boorman about man becoming independent from nature, the supernatural and God for the first time. Boorman shows that though these characters believed in God, they have closer problems like false accusation, pride and duty. Boorman uses the scene from Tennyson where Arthur meets Guinevere before he goes to battle Mordred and Guinevere says, "One cannot gaze too long at the sun" (*Excalibur*), but in Boorman, Arthur asks Guinevere for forgiveness. Arthur realizes that he had to put kingship in front of his husband duties, and when he does not fight for Guinevere's innocence, she is hurt and thrown into Lancelot's devotion. She is thankful for Lancelot defending her honor, but also because he loves her with his entire being, whereas Arthur could not give himself entirely to Guinevere. He tells her he owes the future, but in his dreams he is only a man and he hopes he can be a better husband to her there. This personal and intimate last scene between them reconfirms their love and loyalty to one another, defining Lancelot relationship with Guinevere as mostly unrequited love and mutual admiration and respect. Lupack writes,

instead of spoiling the purpose of his life, which Tennyson's Arthur says Guinevere did, she helps him to fulfill it by returning to him the sword" that helps in the final battle kill Mordred in *Excalibur* (Lupack 188).

Boorman's Guinevere is supportive and assists Arthur in his purpose, whereas Tennyson's Guinevere is a burden and obstacle in Arthur's life. In *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Lancelot and Guinevere share this last intimate scene and he asks for her love but she refuses, and then Guinevere is buried next to Arthur so they meet in heaven. In *Excalibur*, Arthur and Guinevere remain in love and Lancelot dies in battle devoted to Arthur. Guinevere and Lancelot never stray from good and Arthur except for one passionate, magically contrived night. But they merely act out a pure, biblical love that no one could stop. It is fated before Guinevere is married that Lancelot would love her, and it is a spell cast by Merlin and encouraged by Arthur so that

Lancelot may live. They strive their best for perfection, but there is no perfect man, even Arthur and Merlin is flawed. Morgana traps Merlin, Arthur is raped and also forgets the secret of the grail so forsakes his land and people. In Boorman's film, there is no perfect man, everyone fails, but in Tennyson, Arthur was perfect and godlike.

Excalibur deals with the subconscious of people because Boorman was influenced by Carl Jung's philosophy. The characters' subconscious affects their actions, and individuals actions affect Arthur and Britain. Rebecca and Samuel Umland discuss the influence of Jung's philosophy in *Excalibur* in the dragon imagery, mirrors and dreams. Nietzsche writes,

He who fights too long against dragons, becomes himself a dragon" and Jung calls this 'dissimulation', "projective identification, a psychic process of association (rather than dissociation), or mimetic fusion, whereby Self identifies with Other, magically 'absorbing' it to keep it from disappearing and abandoning the helpless Self to its own resources (Umland and Umland 146).

The dragon representing man, nature and the world is capable of great good and evil, and good and evil must coexist because they are meaningless without one another. Merlin's cave is called "the coils of the dragon" and "here all things are possible and all things meet their opposites" (*Excalibur*). Rebecca and Samuel Umland compare the cave to the image of a dragon swallowing its tail because of the circularity of life (Umland and Umland 147). Jung, like Freud, believed in the Oedipus complex and the unconscious desire of incest to create replicas of the self. In *Excalibur*, there are many doubles and also false mirror reflections where the appearance does not match the person. Uther looks like Goloris to have Igyrane, Morgana looks like Guinevere to have Arthur. Uther raped Arthur's mother, so his son Arthur is raped by the daughter of the couple Uther victimized. The couples Arthur and Guinevere, Merlin and Morgana are counterparts of each other. Morgana thinks that Arthur and her lineage will create a godchild, with Uther's courage, Igyrane's beauty, Goloris's power, Arthur's kingship and

Morgana's knowledge. She is right because Mordred does have all these great qualities, but it does not mean he would be a good king. He is too arrogant and disconnected from the world to be a good king. Jung believed, "We are all strangers here. Our dreams are a register of our desires, ambitions, fears, and of our lost- or perhaps forgotten- collective heritage" (Umland and Umland 149) and in *Excalibur*, Merlin lives on in dreams but he is still powerful and can affect the world. Arthur dreams that there will be a time when he could be a better husband to Guinevere, and his dreams do come true because when he wanted Merlin, he dreamt of him and Merlin helped prolong his final battle. Rebecca and Samuel Umland write, "To Boorman, dreams are a vital part of our existence, not simply our mental life" (Umland and Umland 149) and in *Excalibur*, this is true because dreams change their world. Merlin appears in Arthur's, Kay's and Morgana's dreams and he affects their emotions, encourages them to action and advises them. Because of Merlin, Kay is glad to know he will do well in battle, Arthur is reminded that it is man and his time and Morgana is tricked to use up all her powers. *Excalibur* is an intricate film of many influences and sources, from myth to poetry and philosophy. The film is grounded and down to earth because it deals with Arthur and his knight's emotional status, their lives as men and husbands. Their family duty and their duty as king and knight is a constant struggle for the men because every individual matters to Boorman. The film is an epic, but the individuals make up the epic and Boorman focuses on humanity in the epic.

The director of *Excalibur*, John Boorman, uses the film to critique the contemporary American Reagan administration and to warn of the dangers of a society with a large social gap. Boorman planned *Excalibur* for 10 years, and it was released in 1981. During that time, Ronald Reagan was the president and America was in the middle of the Cold War. Reagan fought

against communism, Soviet Union and the threat of nuclear war. Susan Jeffords describes this time, saying,

the Reagan America (would) be a strong one, capable of confronting enemies rather than submitting to them, of battling 'evil empires' rather than allowing them to flourish, of using its hardened body...to impose its will on others (Aronstein 152).

Reagan presented himself as a strong leader and warrior able to lead America to victory in the Cold War. Ray Wakefield says that audiences and critics saw the film as "pro-American, pro-Reagan, pro-military" (Aronstein 152) because of its strong leader Arthur and depiction of masculinity. However, Boorman's vision of *Excalibur* has similarities in theme and message to his earlier films of postmodern apocalypse. His vision is mythical and not historical or political. Aronstein writes Boorman's argument is "to return to the Middle Ages is to return to our cultural unconscious...both the discovery of a lost golden age and the rediscovery of identity" (Aronstein 153). Boorman believes that the themes and lessons in the film are universal, long forgotten and natural ways of life. When the modern society develops too far from nature, people suffer as well as the land suffers like when Arthur is sick, the land is barren. Aronstein discusses how Boorman's earlier films before *Excalibur* add to the vision of the film. She says, "Central to this critique is Boorman's vision of a sterile, isolated materialistic culture, a wasteland built on violence and exploitation and run by poisoned patriarchy" (Aronstein 154). Camelot's golden age is not desirable and natural, and

these societies suffers...from the primal wound that will not heal, a wound that Boorman always locates at a moment of withdrawal, isolation, and exploitation (Aronstein 154).

Man wants pleasure, but to gain pleasure, he steps onto others and in pleasure he grows ignorant and blind of the hurt he has caused. Camelot and America were Boorman's mythical, unnatural and doomed utopia,

smug in their own prosperity and convinced of their own worthiness, failing to see the connections between Reagan America and the blindness that led Arthur to forget the truth of the Grail (Aronstein 160).

These societies have an elite few who rule with “narcissistic individualism” and cause the “downward spiral into a Wasteland of hunger and homelessness for many of the working poor” (Aronstein 160). Boorman hopes that his film can warn the audience and discourage from the large social gap that ruins Camelot to ruin his society.

Epic in Structure, language and tone

Malory gathered the different stories from different sources into one novel so the structure is carried by the tales, characters, and plots which are inconsistent and multiple. Malory’s purpose is to share the variety of Arthurian legends, and allow the audience to learn from its multitude like youth can learn from the experience of old, wise men. Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff note the disunity of the work,

there are internal contradictions that cannot be easily be explained away. For example, Tristram’s birth and youth are related in a tale that follows the account of his adult adventures. Elsewhere, a character may die only to reappear later (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 129).

Sometimes there are characters with the same names, and the characters are referred to by nicknames as well so that only adds more confusion. They describe the prose as,

series of extended narrative sequences, sometimes overlapping, but less often interlaced than linked together end to end; within the series, it is possible to see a general arrangement of subject matter (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 130).

There is a vague structure with eight chapters made by Malory, and Caxton’s 21 books. The stories follow the rise, glory and fall of Arthur, but there are tales about other knights and their adventures in between that can cause distraction, seem scattered and unfocused. The structure is loose, the tales numerous and vastly different to show the variety of plots and characters in the

myth. Robert Merrill, author of *Sir Thomas Malory and the Cultural Crisis of the Late Middle Ages*, writes,

The principles by which *Le Morte Darthur* is arranged are usually called entrelacement, polycentric, polyphonic or retrospective narrative. Malory has presented a complex chronology of events in order that the parts of the narrative that are thematically related would fall together...being comprehensive, in presenting the whole history from the beginning to the end in the simplest and clearest form (Merrill 271).

Malory creates an extended world of characters, problems and events that the reader could relate to, like and dislike. The multiplicity, variety and extreme situations explore different aspects of life, and this collection of Arthurian tales would reflect psychological fears, joys and denials of the human heart. This is an epic tale of kings and a great kingdom Camelot, and Malory creates all these characters to show the wide range of emotions, experiences and situations possible in human life.

Malory creates a religion, a gospel of Arthurian material in *Le Morte d'Arthur* to teach humanity about the failings and strengths of mortal men. The bible is the most epic tale written of Jesus and humanity, and *Le Morte d'Arthur* is similar to the bible because both Arthur and Jesus are leaders who unify people in a chaotic time. Malory's simple language, continuous actions, nonjudgmental tone and long span of time are similar to the Christian bible. Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff write,

Malory tells his story directly and often powerfully, in a vigorous and appealing style and with a strong sense of dramatic cause and effect. He is frequently praised for having brought clarity and coherence to a diffuse mass of material borrowed from the French (Lacy, Ashe and Mancoff 131).

The tone of the text suggests the audience to filter the text as a Christian reads the bible, with a stern and admiring attitude. Elizabeth Bryan writes,

Malory's grand Arthurian complication bears the discontinuities inevitable in transmitting 350 years of Arthurian narratives. At least two different codes of Christianity collide in this text: providential historiography (which assumes God intervenes in history,

for example, to enable victory to knights who joust for Right) and the workings of Christian penance (a dynamic of personal struggle responsible for giving the character of Lancelot much of his interiority)...Caxton's claim that readers should look to this text for moral example (Malory xi-xii).

The knights do good deeds, seek good and avoid evil in their adventures and therefore they are rewarded with fame and respect, and people are suggested to follow the gospel of Arthur as well. The text is also interwoven with Christian values and morals such as the quest for the Holy Grail. As Bryan mentions, the logic of God allows the good to win so those who win must be good and the penance all the characters must find for their peaceful death. P.J.C. Field, author of "The Malory Life-Records" in *A Companion to Malory* and specialist of Malory, writes Malory's prose has the strengths of "verisimilitude, directness and pathos" (Archibald and Edwards 101). The prose attempts to be truth, it appeals to human emotions and it is direct and simple, to convert the masses into followers of King Arthur. Jeremy Smith, author of "Language and Style in Malory" in *A Companion to Malory*, writes, "Malory is interested in the functions of conversation beyond the simple communication of overt meaning" (Archibald and Edwards 111). Though the conversation may be brief, simple, plain vocabulary, the meaning and depth is in the way in which the people communicate. There is meaning when the characters speak "collectively and performatively, and their lamenting words enact ceremonially the dissolution of the Round Table" (Archibald and Edwards 111). The way dialogue is spoken and the action is more important than the dialogue itself, and the meanings of the actions put together is more important to Malory than his language or vocabulary so he uses straightforward language to tell of an epic world. Malory follows the characters lives from birth to death to show the short span of human life, the far-reaching importance and effect it has, and put individuals in perspective because their group and family effect is immense. He chronicles Arthurian myths as history and a golden age to learn from like Jesus' life in the Christian bible. The people and their lives are

important in Malory's text, the life lessons they learned and the audience was to learn from their mistakes like Christians study the bible for a way to live properly.

Excalibur is a balanced and structured film, which follows the clear plot of the lifetime of Arthur. Boorman follows a clear film structure and sends the clear message of the fall of Camelot in order to warn other societies from this path of destruction. Arthur's life is filled with turmoil and epic troubles, not all of which he is responsible for, and the film proportionally allocates time for his birth, his coming to kingship, his betrayal by Lancelot and Guinevere, the search for the Holy Grail and his fall from the throne. Umland and Umland discuss the elements that make *Excalibur* a Hollywood epic, comparing it with "DeMille's biblical epic *The Ten Commandments* (1956)" (Umland and Umland 131). Some elements Umland and Umland discuss about Hollywood epic are: 1) "time lapses" to span entire cosmology of hero 2) "importance of law and supernatural force" symbolizing law to liberate people 3) "one religion displaces another" 4) "'oracular voices' that emanate from inanimate objects" (Umland and Umland 132-5). *Excalibur* and *Le Morte d'Arthur* both share such epic structure as they span large amounts of time, emphasize laws of civilization and the need for society, and value emotions and the individual man. Though *Excalibur* is based off Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the film is more organized, filled with human emotions and heightened with music for sympathy from the audience. Though Arthur is a greater than life king, he is also a man with human problems and that causes his downfall. As the film progresses, Arthur grows and learns to be knight, husband and king. The film is 137 minutes excluding the ending credits, and the first 20 minutes of the film is devoted to Arthur's conception. Arthur is just a helpless infant taken away by Merlin in his first appearance in the film. He is a boy when he pulls the sword from the stone, and follows Merlin around asking questions and directions, which he follows to the word. Arthur

asks, “How can I...? What shall I...? Must I...?” and Merlin tells him, “Do nothing. Be still. Sleep” (*Excalibur*). Arthur acts frightened and overwhelmed by nature and his great task ahead of him, to be king. He cringes at every creature in the forest and must fall back into Merlin, who coaxes him and guides him every step of the way. Merlin directs him in battle, and when the war for the throne is finally over, Merlin intervenes and announces aloud,

Stand back! Be silent. Be still. That’s it. And look upon this moment. Savor it. Rejoice with great gladness. Great gladness. Remember it, always...for you are joined by it. You are one, under the stars. Remember it well then, this night...this great victory...so that in the years ahead you can say: ‘I was there that night, with Arthur, the King’. For it is the doom of men that they forget (*Excalibur*).

This is the middle of the film, the height of King Arthur and his Round Table. Merlin prophesizes this was the beginning of the end for Arthur because Arthur and men start to forget about values, duty and unity. When Lancelot and Guinevere have their affair, Merlin tells Arthur that he cannot tell Arthur what to do anymore. Merlin says, “My days are ended. The gods of once are gone forever. It’s a time of men. It’s your time Arthur...This is the moment that you must face at last...to be king alone” (*Excalibur*). All this time Merlin has been by Arthur’s side, at first telling him step by step how to act, then slowly Merlin was in Arthur’s court and only answered when asked. At this time, Arthur has to act alone. Merlin is like a foster father, a wise old man, representing nature, the supernatural and the old ways of ruling. Arthur must learn to rule by himself; it is now man’s time and they should mindfully shape their world. Boorman wants his audience to realize that humans rule society and only humans can prevent destruction by avoiding the mistakes of Camelot. People are the most important to Boorman in the Arthurian legend, not the supernatural, God or nature.

In the grail quest of *Excalibur*, Boorman encourages a return to pagan tradition and integration of society. Camelot returns to tradition too late and still falls, but future societies can

still avoid the mistakes of Camelot. Arthur wilts without Merlin, Lancelot and Guinevere, and sends his knights out for a desperate quest for the grail, which they all die for except one. The quest is actually a desire to return to tradition, to pagan fertility rituals and the essential lesson of life Merlin thought Arthur long ago: the land and the king are one. The king must take care of and cherish his body, and the land will flourish as a result of the king's simple but effective living and rule. Boorman encourages a return to the traditional ways of life and community, because isolation and elitism is what causes the fall of Camelot. Perceval finds the grail and gives Arthur new life, and he realizes he forgot the secret of the Grail and of success as a king, "You and the land are one". Because of Arthur's heartbreak over Guinevere and Lancelot, he wilts, and the land becomes infertile as a consequence. Also Arthur and his knights need war and quests to maintain their ways, their nature, and the peace changed them and made them incapable knights. The last 25 minutes of the film is for Arthur's fall from the throne. Arthur and the land recover temporarily as Arthur suits up in armor and prepares for his final battle with Mordred. Merlin returns to Arthur only as a dream and helps him by fog, which delays his death and allows him to wipe out Mordred's army. But Mordred kills his Morgana, Arthur kills Mordred, and Arthur floats away. The final actions that make history in this film are human actions, not Merlin's. Arthur has finally grown up and rules alone, solves his problem by finding new hope in the grail, and restores the land before he left. The entire life of Arthur has been told in the 137 minutes of the film, pain and joy. He grows up and independent of Merlin, nature, and his past, but at the end he learns to return to it in a complete circle of life. He forgets he must take care of himself, keep true to his nature of a warrior, and continue to battle in order to be a good king. The life of Arthur, of a man and king, is cyclical and it is grand. Boorman advocates a return to pagan traditions and human life compatible with nature to avoid falling like Camelot.

The music and sounds of *Excalibur* set a grand, emotional and epic mood to the film that compliment the action and give humanity to the people in this legendary tale. Boorman emphasizes the importance of all people in Camelot and their influence on Arthur and the land as a whole. Because of one knight Perceval, Arthur and the land are temporarily prolonged and saved. Boorman recognizes the importance of music to his films and compares a good film like a harmonizing chorus or well-organized orchestra, and Umland and Umland write,

Boorman seeks a tune or song that expresses what he is trying to convey in a film: ‘Once you get it and all the actors can hear it, they respond and you’re all singing the same song. With a film like *Excalibur*, it’s heightened, isn’t it? It’s a mythic register’ (Umland and Umland 137).

Excalibur is a heightened and mythic hymn, with swelling, grand, orchestra music to accompany action and human sounds of moaning and crying to encourage the audience’s sympathy. The film starts out with a black screen and introductory words, and the music sets the mood immediately. The music is deep horn instruments, foreboding and gradually swells when the words come on, “rose a legend of the sorcerer Merlin, of the coming of a king, of the sword of power” (*Excalibur*). The height of the music is the title of *Excalibur* on the screen, emphasizing the importance of the sword to the story and the people. The word is shimmering and sharp like a metal sword. During scenes of sorcery, suspense and mystery, there is eerie high pitch choral singing. When Uther rides to Igrayne in the fog using magic, when Arthur draws the sword and runs in the forest panicked, and when the lady of the lake appears, this music is used to remind the audience of the mystery of sorcery, the power and danger behind it. There is grand, escalating and powerful music and singing when Arthur rides off to his first battle defending Leondegrance’s castle. This music is similar to Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries*, an opera song accompanying the scene of 8 Norse goddesses as they prepare to transport fallen warriors to Valhalla. This is the beginning for Arthur, his first ride and there is much excitement, potential,

courage and strength in the film and in Arthur. During scenes of jousting and battle, it is mostly quiet except for the clinking of armor and sword, screams and horses like in Arthur's final battle against Mordred. When Lancelot duels Gawain for Guenevere's innocence, the most prominent sounds are Lancelot's labored breathing, grunting and the weapons hitting armor. The sweat on his face when he removes his helmet and the bleed running down his armor, in addition with the human sounds of breathing and pain, remind the audience that Lancelot is a confused man in physical pain from love and tired from fighting. He is pushing his body to the limit to prove Guenevere's innocence, and after his victory, he collapses with no more will to live. Cries from people are important as well, like when Igrayne screams for her baby boy, when the townspeople cry over their dead from famine, and when Guenevere weeps for her sins after her affair with Lancelot. There is pain even in legendary times; ordinary people who suffer and cry behind these great names and legends. An interesting scene is when Perceval cries in front of Morgana. His comrades are dead, he is weary and there is no hope of finding the grail anywhere. He feels hopeless, powerless and weak. The sound of his sigh and weep emphasize these emotions vocally to the audience. The music and sounds of this film complement and add another layer of emotion, humanity and empathy to the characters and scenes. Boorman stresses the importance of individual and communities that make a change in history, not just Arthur alone. Arthur fights to be king, but the knights accept him as their king and give him a chance to unite them as well. The people are important in the legend and epic of Camelot and King Arthur to Boorman.

Excalibur is adapted from Malory's text, but it has more focus, humanity and emotions than the text because Boorman values the individual, emotional and human journey of each character in the legend. Men are recognized for their human traits and flaws instead, and symbols of power and leadership are represented in the sword Excalibur. Humans are resilient, flexible

and changing whereas the sword is eternal, stable and dead. Swords and other symbolic objects like castles are important in Malory's text, and the film has utilized this symbolism to add another depth to the film. Before the sword is introduced, Merlin describes it as a sword "to heal, not to hack" and it does heal the land by uniting the people under one king Arthur. The sword is not made by man since it comes from the lady in the lake, cannot be broken and can wound Mordred's enchanted armor. It has the power to decide king, since only a king can wield it. Though Arthur pulled the sword from the stone, Excalibur actually chose Arthur to be king instead of Arthur choosing this fate himself. When Arthur gives the sword to Uryens to hold, the sword vibrates in Uryens hands and Uryens realizes that he cannot handle the sword. Uryens is not meant to hold that much power and acknowledges Arthur as the king. Excalibur has a name and reputation like a person, and is a character in this film like Lancelot is. It is called the sword of power, and is the best sword in the world and the most powerful. When Arthur is full of pride and rage to duel Lancelot, Excalibur breaks and Merlin says, "You have broken what could not be broken. Hope is broken" (*Excalibur*). Arthur calls upon Excalibur's power and it glows green like it hears Arthur and responds by allowing Arthur to defeat Lancelot, but it breaks because it changed the outcome of the duel and altered history. The sword also has an obligation to fate and nature, and because it went against its nature by changing an outcome, it also went against its own nature by breaking. When Arthur puts the sword in the ground between Lancelot and Guinevere, he starts to wilt and perhaps this is because he is without his power. He gains leadership and fighting abilities when he finally gets the sword back from Guinevere, and is able to kill Mordred because he has the special weapon not made by man. By the end of the film and Arthur knows he is dying, he instructs Perceval to throw the sword in a pool of calm water, because "One day a king will come, and the sword will rise again" (*Excalibur*). The sword

returns from where it came just like Arthur returns to fog, mystery and magic he was born from. The sword still has power and will rise on earth to a rightful king. Malory's text has king Arthur's final words that he will be taken to Avalon to heal and will return again. The director places these final words and promise on Excalibur instead of Arthur because Excalibur, not Arthur, will return. People are valued for their constant change and progress, but the sword is valued for its irreplaceable and eternal traits. Boorman wants Arthur to be remembered as a great man, and Excalibur to be remembered as the marvelous symbol of power. Man is important for their emotions and virtues of bravery, loyalty and faith to Boorman.

Boorman believes that Camelot falls because it loses touch with nature, humanity and community. He encourages a return to basic values for a successful society. The secret and truth of the grail in *Excalibur* was "You are my lord and King, you are Arthur...you and the land are one" (*Excalibur*) and this can be taken that all mankind is connected to the earth. The earth and mankind serve one another, because their wellbeing is intricately connected. When Arthur and his knights indulge in peace and prosperity, Lancelot says, "We have lost our way, Arthur; it is not easy for them without the hard teachings of war and quest" (*Excalibur*). It is in the knights' nature to have adventures and fight, it is in the king's nature to lead and plan for the future. But by neglecting their duties and ignoring their nature, they cause chaos and destruction to the court and the land. Morgana schemes evil when Arthur and his knights are not on guard, then the land grows barren and the people starve. Rebecca and Samuel Umland call the grail scene as "pagan vegetation rituals, not of Christian doctrine" (Umland and Umland 141). Arthur hurts nature when he stuck his sword into a stone between Lancelot and Guinevere. Merlin says it was right in the dragon's backbone and the dragon symbolized everything and nature. Nature retaliates by striking Arthur with lightning, and in order to heal both Arthur and the land, the grail of pagan

tradition gives Arthur its water. Arthur tells the knights on their grail quest they need to “find what was lost...search...to the edge of within” (*Excalibur*). Arthur wants to restore the symbolic connection and respect shared between man and earth to heal his self and the land. Nature renews and restores itself through the cycle of seasons, and humans go through cycles of moods and emotions as well. But because of Arthur’s heartbreak and constant depressed mood, the land suffers 10 years with him. When nature intervenes to heal Arthur, nature actually heals itself. When Arthur drinks from the grail, he says, “I am wasting away. I cannot die and I cannot live...Perceval, I didn’t know how empty was my soul was until it was filled.”(*Excalibur*). When Arthur forgets about the truths of man interconnected with nature, he suffers in a frozen state. This is detrimental for human and nature because both need to change, grow and die. Arthur cannot live a privileged and luxurious life, it is in his nature to ride with his knights and be on the battlefield. Only when Arthur moved past heartbreak, remembered his true nature and rejoined his knights on the battlefield does he heal. To become healthy, Arthur must change moods, return to the battlefield and reintegrate back into society. Boorman encourages a return to nature, to the communal good and constant change of life instead of egotism, a privileged few and unnatural immortality stuck in between life and death. To Boorman, human life and societies fall because of a large class gap and loss of core values that made them powerful.

Strange and different femininity disrupt epic society

Malory promotes the man, unity and rules of civilization in *Le Morte d’Arthur* to encourage his audience to live in a structured and stable society. Malory uses his female characters as plot devices disrupting civilization, unity and laws because the female is already intrinsically different than man in appearance, values and desires. He shows a variety of females

and their deviations from wild maidens, masculine women and tricky married women, but essentially Malory promotes a stable society of like-minded individuals serving a common good. The women are categorized into archetypes of the mother or the virgin, and both are capable of a trickery appearance hiding a malicious nature. The civilized, controlled, predictable woman is good and the others are wild. These wild maidens drive the plot and cause turmoil, confusion and trouble in Malory's text. Elizabeth Edwards, author of "The Place of Women in the *Morte Darthur*" in *A Companion to Malory*, links the wandering damsel and the forest, saying,

The wilderness, the magical and the unexplained thus fall in line with the mystery that is woman, from the male perspective...male projection of otherness as female...ambivalence of the errancy/error pun is amply evident, especially in the early books, in the malevolence and deceptiveness of many women (Archibald and Edwards 39).

These women are dangerous because they come from the unknown and lead adventurous and masculine lives. Edwards discusses errancy, which means both wandering and erring. The people who wander will sin and these women therefore lead to sin and are not to be trusted. The "damosel girt with a noble sword" of book 2 is a typical example of a deceptive female, with a virginal reputation, but a hidden agenda of deceit and bringer of death. She is unnamed and only described as damosel of the noble sword. Her title of damosel signifies her unmarried, young and virginal status, however her heart is full of secrets. Her sword is enchanted, and she tempts knights to pull it in order to find an assassin to kill her brother. She challenges and lures knights by saying,

"for I may not be delivered of this sword but by a knight, but he must be a passing good man of his hands and of his deeds, without villainy or treachery, and without treason. And if I may find such a knight that hath all these virtues, he may draw this sword out of the sheath" (Malory 50, 2.1).

To the men, this is a noble competition for the most pure and virtuous man, but the maiden has ulterior motives. She seeks a good man who will carry out her revenge and fratricide. The

damoasel also fails to mention the puller of the sword cannot keep the sword unless he wants to be cursed until after Balin pulls the sword. Merlin describes this damoasel, “she was the falsest damoasel that liveth” (Malory 55, 2.4). Although Malory describes her as false, her only fault was being a lover to a knight. She was the knight’s “paramour”, and her brother killed this knight to save his sister’s virginal reputation. This damoasel’s actions stems from her flaw of being a sexual, independent woman having relations before marriage. She breaks from the social system and therefore Malory characterizes her as a vengeful girl who would want to kill her brother. She only loves one knight and he is her only physical lover, but to her brother, Merlin and Malory, she betrays her reputation, her family and her future by her premarital sex. Because of her sexuality, she is dangerous with thoughts of killing her brother, and is cursed. She is cursed with being lover-less, brother-less, and obsessed with revenge. She can never have peace because she does not follow the rules of civilization. The only order that Malory believes in is the law of civilization. People who break those laws cause trouble for society, but Malory still wants to depict the variety of females and trouble they cause for future societies to show Camelot’s successes and failures.

Malory believes that masculine women are disruptive to civilization as well, and discourage their behavior by punishing them in his plots. Women obsessed with power, revenge and male traits do not belong in their feminine role. Masculine females are unpredictable, untrustworthy and disrupt the social order. To her, the sword was “great sorrow and cumbrance” and to others like King Arthur, the sword was noble and marvelous (Malory 49, 2.1). She wants revenge but with the sword, she must wander without direction seeking a puller; her revenge overtakes her life. Even if she does not want revenge anymore, she cannot rest until the sword is off her back literally. To a male, the sword represents sexuality and constantly wandering for

adventures. When warned of the sword's curse, Balin says, "I shall take the adventure, said Balin, that God will ordain me" (Malory 52, 2.2). Therefore the sword and its associated actions are the epitome of a great life and noble knighthood and Balin must have the sword after he pulls it, even when warned of its danger. The sword also represents power and though it is dangerous, Balin wants to hold onto power for as long as he can. Malory labels and links the masculine thoughts of sex and violence together, and gives them to this damosel. This is unnatural to the social order of Arthurian life, and this damosel is too masculine in thoughts because of her sexuality and violence. Therefore she is punished to an unhappy life by having a masculine life of wandering and adventure. Women are not made for masculine lives, and therefore she is burdened and sad because of her sword, her symbolic phallus and her masculine thoughts. She still wants to keep the sword after it is pulled from its girt, warning Balin of its curse, "for ye will not believe the sword shall be your destruction, and that is great pity. With that the damosel departed, making great sorrow" (Malory 52, 2.2). She is marked with a physical symbol of masculinity but she could not properly use the sword, her symbolic phallus, and exercise her masculine independence and power like males do. Even when the sword is passed on, she is still distressed. She fears all masculinity and power in the future, because all power is dangerous and destructive, especially in the hands of a deceitful, masculine female. Malory maintains the social system by restricting destructive, masculine females to flawed moral natures and unhappy lives.

Malory's married women are deceitful when they pretend to be faithful wives but have extramarital affairs, and they disrupt the social system and power hierarchy, causing death, destruction and war. Malory's Morgause, King Lot's wife and mother of Mordred, is a married woman and mother who appears good and faithful, but actually commits adultery and causes her own death, Arthur's wounding and the end of Arthur's reign. She is a good woman at first

glance, married properly and raising her four legitimately conceived boys. Her sons are all knights of the Round Table, most famously Gawain. However, she has continuous adulterous affairs with many men. Her adultery with Arthur (Malory 63-4, 2.10) is shameful and reproved by the God-given laws of marriage. She breaks the laws of social decency because Arthur is her half-brother and the affair is incestuous. With one action, she breaks up her family, breaks up Camelot and ruins Arthur. Her husband King Lot is tortured by her affair and battles with Arthur, where 12 kings were slain in an unnecessary war. Malory describes him,

Alas he might not endure, the which was great pity, that so worthy a knight as he was one should be overmatched, that of late time afore had been a knight of King Arthur's, and wedding the sister of King Arthur; and for King Arthur lay by King Lot's wife, the which was Arthur's sister, and gat on her Mordred, therefore King Lot held against Arthur (Malory 63-64, 2.10).

Her son Mordred usurps Arthur's throne and gives Arthur the mortal wound which causes Arthur to leave, and Camelot to fall. Her indiscretion has unintended, far fetching consequences and though Malory does not discourage it, he shows the pain, harm and death adultery caused. Morgause then sleeps with Sir Lamorak. Though her husband his dead, Lamorak's father King Pellinore killed her husband King Lot. Her own sexuality and extramarital affairs causes her own death by her own son Gaheris. Malory writes, "Sir Gaheris, saw his time, he came to their bedside all armed, with his sword naked, and suddenly gat his mother by the hair and struck off her head..." (Malory 477, 10.24) and Gaheris explains to Lamorak the reason why he kills his mother. He says,

The offence hast thou done, said Gaheris, notwithstanding a man is born to offer his service; but yet shouldst thou beware with whom thou meddles, for thou has put me and my brethren to a shame, and thy father slew our father; and thou to lie by our mother is too much shame for us to suffer (Malory 478, 10.24).

Gaheris believes that his mother deserves to die disgracefully because she behaves disgracefully. As a knight, he would be the one to bring justice and order to the world by beheading her. Even

if she is his mother, she will be punished like all adulterous women. Morgause's repeated adultery and lack of adherence to social standards causes her violent, cruel and unnatural death, beheaded by her own son. Malory believes that since Morgause disrupts the system, Gaheris is allowed to disrupt the system and forsake familial ties. To Malory, all women are dangerous because their indiscretions can create wide-ranging breaks in the civilization system and law. Malory blames sexually charged women for weakening Camelot and ensures a successful society by eliminating them.

In Malory's text, Guinevere's infamous adultery is a major distraction that weakens Arthur and allows Mordred to take over as well. Women in Arthur's family betray him, first is his sister Morgan le Fay then his wife. Arthur trusts Morgan without second thought because she is his half-sister. He wrongly assumes her loyalty and devotion to him as a half-brother and as king. She breaks laws of marriage, society and family when "she loved another knight better than her husband King Uriens or King Arthur" her brother (Malory 65, 2.11). Morgan loves the Knight Accolon because she chose him; he was not an arranged marriage for political reasons and her brother given to her by fate. Her selfish intentions cause her to use deceitful enchantment to replace King Arthur's magic protective scabbard with another, and gives the protection to her lover. Merlin says to Arthur,

Sir, said Merlin, look ye keep well the scabbard of Excalibur, for ye shall lose no blood while ye have the scabbard upon you, though ye have as many wounds upon you as ye may have (Malory 65, 2.11).

Morgan knows the protective qualities of the scabbard. Though her intentions and methods are sneaky and selfish, she does not intend her actions to harm Arthur directly. Malory writes,

she would have had Arthur her brother slain...and gave the scabbard Excalibur to her love; and the knight's name was called Accolon, that after had near slain King Arthur (Malory 65, 2.11).

Morgan could not have known in the future that her lover Accolon would almost kill Arthur, or that by taking away the scabbard, Arthur is sure to fail in battle to Mordred and lose everything. It is even a compliment and faith in Arthur's fighting skills that Morgan thinks Arthur does not need the scabbard. She believes in his undefeated, grandeur reputation and does not think Arthur could fail in a fight or need extra protection. Morgan is one of the three queens who take him in the barge to Avilion when he is mortally wounded. She weeps, shrieks and mourns for him, saying, "Ah, dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me?" (Malory 923-4, 21.5). She loves Arthur still, and never intended to hurt him with her actions. She merely made a mistake like all humans are entitled to, and is cursed with essential mortal flaws. Morgan also fits into the masculine female group because she loved her sexual lover more than her brother and king, and failure is in her sexualized, independent and masculine mind. Elizabeth Edwards writes, "Women are divided into an aspect of malevolence and ill-will characterized by a threatening sexual voracity most associated with Morgan"(Archibald and Edwards 43). A sexually eager and desiring female is a dangerous, deceitful and harmful female. The consequence of women in Malory's text, especially deceitful women, is death, destruction and war. The deceptive female is merely flawed with masculine desires of power, sex and greed. The female is flawed with the same problems as the males. Malory believes females have great destructive potential that have unintended consequences challenging civilization and society's laws. The untamed woman is one of the problems that cause Camelot's fall, and Malory wants to warn his audience of the dangers of wild single damsels, masculine-minded women and deceptive married women. Women's actions as well as men's have wide ranging consequences affecting King Arthur, Camelot and all societies though they may not know it.

In *Excalibur*, evil is placed in two central characters, Morgana and Mordred, whereas other characters are capable of good and bad. Boorman believes the threats to Camelot and all societies are selfish, elitist individuals only serving their personal desires and forsaking the common good. Morgana and Mordred are evil because they are defined as unnatural, strange and unaccepted by society. Since they cannot be good because they are rejected, they turn to the strange and evil to achieve their desires. Merlin foreshadows that evil still hides in Arthur's court where it is least expected, and reminds Arthur, "Good and evil, there is never one without the other" (*Excalibur*). Morgana is the opposite of Arthur in many ways; she is female, blond and legitimately conceived. If she were born male, she would be heir to the throne since she is the firstborn. Her need for justice, thirst for power and knowledge is masculine and she is ostracized in the film. She desires justice for her mother from Merlin since Merlin cast the spell to trick her mother to sleep with Uther. Her father also died that same night, and Arthur is the son of the man who stole Igraine and the castle from her father. Morgana's father, the duke of Cornwall, was just and good. Uther uses deceptive magic, breaks oaths with the duke and takes the duke's castle successfully in order to have power and Igraine. Morgana did not want to be like her father and a good loser. She wanted to win for once and have power, so she uses magic and deceptions to take what was rightfully hers. Rebecca and Samuel Umland notice that Morgana in *Excalibur* serves the role of three female characters in Malory and does triple the evil and damage on Arthur. Morgana is Morgause because she conceives Mordred with Arthur, Nenyve because she traps Merlin and Morgan le Fay the half sister of Arthur who plots against him (Umland and Umland 138-9). She stalks Merlin so she can learn his magic, his knowledge of the world and gain power. She accepts being burned and blinded for great knowledge. Even Merlin is surprised at how far Morgana is willing to suffer for knowledge. That is strange because Merlin accepted all that as

well when he became a sorcerer, but he doubts Morgana can take all that knowledge and power. She uses the power to meddle with human affairs just like Merlin did, and Merlin even acknowledges, “You must be greater than ever I was... That’s better than I ever was” (*Excalibur*). Her weakness of vanity destroys her because her vain son kills her when he sees she is old and wrinkled. Maybe he does recognize her, but he is vain as well, and does not want to accept his mother as horrifying inside and outside; he could accept an evil but attractive mother, but not unattractive. She wants to birth a god, and uses magic and incest to conceive Mordred. Her desires of power are too strong since she wants to be king. This is unnatural in a female, so Malory isolates her to a cave past the wasteland, then she dies unnaturally killed by her own son. She wants people to serve her but she is unwilling to be part of the community and serve the people as a leader or queen. Boorman eliminates Morgana because she is masculine and disrupts society with her masculine struggle for power against Arthur using Mordred as a puppet. She does not care about her brother Arthur or her son Mordred and definitely does not care about the needs of the common people. She wants to rule Camelot only for personal power and glory, and to Boorman, Morgana is a disconnected elitist that contributes to the fall of Camelot.

Boorman’s Mordred is also a removed elitist because of his upbringing, and elitists cause Camelot’s fall so makes Mordred’s character as strange, unlikeable and disgusting as possible. Mordred is a strange and undeveloped child lacking fatherly love and society in *Excalibur*. His lack of society cripples him and he cannot be integrated back because he cares for no one but himself. He even kills his only family when she was no longer useful. He is conceived by magic and incest, rose in seclusion with only his mother’s love, and taught to desire the throne. But he is never taught to be a knight, leader or even a balanced, independent human. When he is introduced in the film, Morgana pulls him newly born, covered in blood and raises him up above

her head. The night is a dark and thundering one, Mordred cries loudly and Morgana is gasping in pain and then joy. The pain and pleasure of Mordred's existence is murky from his birth, because he is an heir Arthur wants but he is incestuous, illegitimate and shun by society. The priest tells Arthur as he shutters to the thunder, "God save us from Morgana. And save us from her unholy child" (*Excalibur*). Merlin describes thunder as dragon's tongue, and the thunder hits Arthur when Mordred is born. Afterwards Arthur is ill for a long time. Mordred is like the dragon's tongue because he is born from powerful parents, and Arthur fears his son succeeding him. Arthur shutters at thunder the way he shutters at Mordred, at the power, the cruelty and the inevitability of them both. As a child, Mordred laughs and rides through corpses of knights hung from trees like he is acquainted and comfortable with death, pain and killing. He has a close relationship with his mother since he is raised by her away from other influences, and Morgana bathes him everyday with praises, dreams of kingship and magic. She even washes him with a washcloth from head to toe because she considers him to be her god and her puppet. This close kinship gives him a reputation of effeminacy, along with his lack of fighting skills and vanity as he wears golden armor with sculpted muscles and iron curly locked hair. In appearance, Mordred has blond hair and a youthful beauty just like his mother, and in his armor he looks like a god because he shines. He may be a god, so he is arrogant, depends on foresight and spells to protect him instead of his fighting skills. When Arthur offers his love to Mordred, Mordred says, "That's the only thing of yours I don't want". All Mordred knows from a young age is death, killing and scheming for usurpation. He does not understand love because his mother never loved him; she only uses him as a means to gain her power. In his last scene, he tells Arthur, "Come father. Let us embrace at last" (*Excalibur*). He dies as he was born, in blood. Anger and rage are the only feelings he knows. Blood pours from his mouth as he tries to cry and he falls down on the other

dead bodies. Mordred is stunted in growth and development when he was coddled and mind-controlled by his mother. He turns out effeminate and does not earn the right to be king because he has no knight or leadership skills. He has desires for power but could not reach it, just like Morgana. He does not know how to live in society, and could never be king because he does not care about other people. Mordred dies easily because he is not a complete man; he is just a man-child with soldiers at his command. Mordred is an elitist that causes Camelot's fall, and Boorman discourages against elitists so made Mordred as unattractive and unruly as possible.

Natural and Unnatural Gender Relationships disrupt epic society

There are numerous blood sacrifices of virgins in Malory's text, and these women are the praised virgins because of their loyal and passionate nature. Malory praises civilization, tradition and the status quo in *Le Morte d'Arthur* so he encourages proper blood sacrifices and heterosexual relationships, and condemns inappropriate blood sacrifices and homosexual relationships. The deceptive virgin may disrupt and cause chaos, sometimes being beheaded. The sacrificial virgin reaffirms the traditional purpose and value of women, in the home childrearing. The virgin is sacrificed by being wrongfully killed by a knight, suicide in grief and necessary bloodletting to save another. The blood represents new life, fertility and youth, and the sacrifice of blood allows the female to serve her most important duty, reproduction. Though these cases may seem strange and unusual, the logic ultimately returns to the necessary loss of virginity demanded of all proper females to become a mother and serve the feminine role of motherhood. The damosel commits suicide because of the death of her beloved knight Lancelot receives extra attention in morning, noticed by many characters and her body taken care of. Her love is only emotional, so therefore her body is pure, and everyone regrets her suicide. She says, "O Balin,

two bodies thou hast slain and one heart, and two hearts in one body, and two souls thou has lost” (Malory 57, 2.6). They love with their hearts and souls, and not with their bodies so therefore their love is valued and celebrated. Balin immediately feels bad for the damosel’s death,

When Balin espied her deeds, he was passing heavy in his heart, and ashamed that so fair a damosel had destroyed herself for the love of his death. Alas, said Balin, me repenteth sore the death of this knight, for the love of this damosel, for there was much true love betwixt them both (Malory 57, 2.6).

Balin continues to feel guilt and sorrow for these lovers when he tells his brother Balan, saying “the death of this damosel so grieveth me sore” and again with a dwarf, “this damosel slew herself for his love, which repenteth me, and for her sake I shall owe all women the better love” (Malory 58, 2.6). Other people regret and honor these lovers too. Balan agrees with his brother’s grief, the dwarf “made great dole, and pulled out his hair for sorrow” (Malory 58, 2.6) and King Mark grieves as well,

then made the king great sorrow for the true love that was betwixt them, and said, I will not depart till I have on this earth made a tomb” with an inscription about their deaths (Malory 59, 2.7).

Lanceor and his damosel are the perfect example of a good knight and lady. Lanceor serves King Arthur well, dies while fulfilling his duty, and his damosel loves him purely, and dies from overwhelming, eternal love. The couple receives respect, pity and love from many characters including their killer, a passerby dwarf and a king who insists on their proper burial. Their relationship is elevated and promoted by Malory. Malory promotes proper blood sacrifices and relationships like Lanceor and his damosel because a stable society needs these structures, and though humans struggle, there are some who uphold the rules of civilization.

Another rule of civilization in Malory’s text is even when the person deserves to be killed in a bloody sacrifice, the powerful connections they hold can protect them. The Lady of the Lake

deserves to be beheaded because she breaks many rules, but when Balin kills her, Arthur chastises him because Arthur's laws protect the Lady of the Lake. In Malory's text, the Lady of the Lake is beheaded by the straightforward and honest Balin, who reasons that, "ye would have my head, and therefore ye shall lose yours" (Malory 53, 2.3). This is the simple logic of equality, but Balin misses out on the social aspect and importance of The Lady of the Lake. She is a powerful and independent woman. She is even more powerful than Arthur because she gave Arthur Excalibur, the best weapon in existence and Arthur's symbolic power. Arthur tells Balin,

Alas, for shame! said Arthur, why have ye done so? ye have shamed me and all my court, for this was a lady that I was beholden to, and hither she came under my safe-conduct; I shall never forgive you that trespass (Malory 53-54, 2.3).

According to the laws of the court, power hierarchy and social customs, Arthur is indebted to the lady and she deserves his respect. Balin breaks these constructed human laws because he only sees the simple and flat definition of a masculine and therefore bad woman in front of him. Balin says,

me forthinketh of your displeasure, for this same lady was the untruest lady living, by enchantment and sorcery she hath been the destroyer of many good knights, and she was causer that my mother was burnt, through her falsehood and treachery (Malory 54, 2.3).

Arthur does not disagree that the lady was untrue, with tricks up her sleeve and deceits, but

Arthur respects social and political rules because he is the king and his duty is to uphold rules.

The Lady in the Lake has masculine qualities since she makes business deals, travels freely and wants justice by violence. She says,

Well, said the lady, I ask the head of the knight that hath won the sword, or else the damosel's head that bought it; I take no force though I have both their heads, for he slew my brother, a good knight and a true, and that gentlewoman was causer of my father's death (Malory 53, 2.3).

She rides in her own horse and asks for Arthur to fulfill his part of their bargain, and wants blood revenge. Instead she is unrightfully beheaded by Balin. This bloodletting was not intentional and

she did not need to die by Balin's hands. But in the end, it is successful because it is still a heterosexual blood sacrifice and relationship between Balin taking the Lady of the Lake's blood as sacrifice. Malory made this bloodletting necessary and important because he supports heterosexual relationships, stability and rules of civilization.

Malory discusses but discourages inappropriate bloodletting and same-sex relationships because Malory fears non-reproductive relationships as the fall of society. Bloodletting is required of a female and of a male to heal and give new life in Malory's text. These situations are unusual, rare and inappropriate because a virginal female gives blood to a married female, and a father's enemy gives blood to a youth. These could symbolize illicit, non-reproductive relationships chastised by society such as homosexual relations. The old custom of one castle was to drain blood of all passing females,

their lady was sick, and had lain many years, and she might not be whole but if she had a dish of silver full of blood of a clean maid and a king's daughter (Malory 68, 2.13).

The lady could be a widowed and lonely queen wanting to have relations with maidens hoping to find a new love to fill her empty life with. The lady could be menopausal and symbolically hoping to reclaim her youth, menstruation and fertility back by taking life from these younger women. The passing damosel "bleed by her good will, but her blood helped not the lady... Sir Percivale's sister helped that lady with her blood, where of she was dead" (Malory 68, 2.13). Not just any blood would heal this lady. The lady wanted specifically a clean maiden and princess, perhaps only virginal, and only pure and royal blood could give new life to the lady of this castle. The last phrase is cryptic; the lady was dead before she got new life from Percivale's sister. This could mean her life had no purpose until she found love in this specific girl, and the lady was close to death and found a new vigor of life in Percivale's sister. The transfer of blood is vague, symbolic and not medical because the lady was not drinking the blood or applying it to her

wounds. Her sickness was not physical but spiritual, and therefore needed a spiritual cure from a special girl. The lady and her entire kingdom have been searching for this special girl for a long time because the custom is old. These non-reproductive relationships are dangerous and threaten social standards because heterosexual couples are necessary to continue humankind. Therefore Malory hides the lady's love sickness and intentions of finding new life and love behind the guise of being physically sick and needing a specific medicine, blood. Malory hides the heterosexual relationship because he disapproved of it as a threat to a healthy society.

The dynamic is similar when the son of a "gentleman that was a rich man and well at ease" has a wound "that cannot be whole until I have of that knight's blood" (Malory 68, 2.14). The relationship between a young boy and his father's enemy would be condemned. Therefore Malory disguises the boy's pain as a physical wound during a jousting to insert masculine buffers in. The boy's wound, pain or lack could be heartache, loss of his virginity and his social adhering mind. His wound cannot heal, and because this knight Garlon has angered others as well, he is killed for his blood. Malory says, "And then Balin called unto him his host saying, Now may ye fetch blood enough to heal our son withal" (Malory 70, 2.14). Malory does not mention the wellbeing of the boy afterwards because the boy cannot be cured of his homosexual love. His father dealt with the problem by killing his son's lover, but the boy will still be gay and unusual to the father and to society. Malory veils these homosexual relations in strange bloodletting situations because he discourages them as threats to society, but he acknowledges their existence by including them in his text. Malory believes in order to keep civilization stable and alive, there needs to be heterosexual couples.

Boorman acknowledges the immense power of love capable of greatness and destruction, but he is cautious of love because it cannot be controlled even when it is mutual and can destroy

societies. In *Excalibur*, the love that occurs naturally between man and woman is dangerous and condemned by Merlin, but lust and sex concocted by the Charm of Making is even worse and has painful, destructive consequences. Boorman maintains the structure of film and society, and intense emotions like love are dangerous, destructive and unpredictable like females. Merlin describes love,

this lunacy called love, this mad distemper that strikes down both beggar and king...Love is deaf as well as blind...hair pulling and jumping about...too late (*Excalibur*).

Merlin does not distinguish from natural love and magical lust, because to him both are equally destructive and unnecessary. He calls love a disease that can infect anyone, makes one foolish and it is irreversible. There is natural chemistry between two people that draws them together and gets them married, such as between the duke of Cornwall and Igrayne, Arthur and Guinevere, and even Merlin and Morgana have an attraction. But this chemistry can get out of control and turn into jealousy, anger and resentment. Morgana is attracted to power and knowledge that Merlin has, and Merlin stares at Morgana, saying, "Can't I acknowledge beauty?" and calls her beautiful and magnificent. Merlin refuses to love though he is very attracted to her because he knows love is blind, Morgana is evil and does not truly love him back. But still the draw of love is so tempting that Merlin stares at Morgana, teaches her spells and eventually is trapped by Morgana. This natural love happens slowly and in time so it does not disrupt and destroy as much as its counterpart. Marriage is necessary but love is dangerous because it can cause struggle between love and duty, wife and state, desire and logic. Arthur tells Guinevere he has to be a king first even before their love, which could have triggered her one night stand with Lancelot, which triggered Arthur's jealousy and rage losing Excalibur. The consequences of love are far reaching and it is dangerous even if it is mutual love because love is powerful, uncontrollable and disruptive to society.

In *Excalibur*, love created by magic and lust is temporary, usually only one night, and has destructive outcomes so Boorman strongly discourages against magical love because he wants to protect society. The Charm of Making could be the most powerful spell in existence and Morgana begs Merlin for it. Merlin uses it three times and Morgana uses it twice. The last time used, Merlin is trapped in glass and Morgana ages and is killed. The unnatural sex between Igrayne and Uther results in Arthur the king, but since he is an offering in a deal, Merlin takes the child. Igrayne is heartbroken and cries for her child, Morgana holds a grudge against Merlin for tricking her mother, and in pursuit of Merlin for Arthur, Uther is killed. Morgana and Arthur's coupling creates Mordred. Arthur is struck by thunder the day Mordred is born and is ill for years after, Mordred battles Arthur, Morgana is killed by him and he wounds Arthur badly. Mordred is pure destruction, violence and anger. Lancelot loved Guinevere from the first moment he saw her, and he admits to her that she inspires him, saying,

I will love you always. I will love you as my queen, and as the wife of my best friend, and while you live I will love no other (*Excalibur*).

Lancelot and Guinevere share some doting looks when he returns to Camelot but leaves in a rush, and Guinevere looks at Lancelot's empty seat and unused cup sadly. But their love, if Guinevere does love him, is purely emotional and not physical yet until the spell is cast. Merlin casts the spell reluctantly because he knows its destructive consequences, but Arthur begs him to save Lancelot no matter what. After their passionate night, Lancelot flees to live as a ragged old peasant and Guinevere goes to a convent. Both want Arthur's forgiveness and repentance. Merlin is stabbed, then weakened and trapped because of Lancelot and Guinevere's passionate night. Arthur also gets ill and used by Morgana. Though their love may be pure and natural, their night of passion was not, and it ruined the most. Love is too intense and potentially ruinous to society

that Boorman warned the audience of its dangers in *Excalibur*. Especially unnatural love made by spells and concoctions cause pain, death and destruction.

Conclusion

Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* is highly influential and popular, praised as "the pinnacle of Arthurian literature, the masterly culmination of the medieval legend and the greatest single source of inspiration or future writers" (Lacy, Ashe, Mancoff 131). *Excalibur* opened to commercial success (Aronstein 151), is controversial and "has earned a place in the Arthurian canon" (Umland and Umland 129). Malory allows the rich world of characters and culture to tell the story, whereas *Excalibur* focuses on the sword and Arthur. The individual, their sacrifices and suffering are emphasized in both epics. Malory and Boorman reimagine the Arthurian story as myths focusing on the frail, emotional and complex characters. These grand, famous figures have been given sympathetic human weaknesses and emotions such as suffering and their lives are given meaning and wide influence to Britain. Malory showcases the range of emotions, variety of evil and problems in the world through his text, and Boorman warns modern society of overindulgence, loss of values and fall like the great Camelot. The device used to convey these messages is the epic framework, which means exaggerated emotions, grand scale time and far reaching consequences.

Conclusion: The King lives on

Authors and directors utilize humor, romance, horror and epic to retell Arthurian legends from their unique and stylized vision. They adapt the legend according to influence of their contemporary society, mostly Britain and America, with a message of critique, knowledge and warning to the audience. T.H. White's 20th-century novel *The Once and Future King* and the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) use humor to critique and mock medieval and contemporary society of dependence on military, violence and brutality for justice and power. In Tennyson's 19th-century poems *Idylls of the King* and Disney's film *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), romance and horror are used to show the tensions and balance of desire and fear in Arthurian legend and contemporary society. Malory's 15th-century *Le Morte d'Arthur* and *Excalibur* (1981) use epic traits to show the interconnection and significance of man in Arthurian legends and in contemporary society, and warn modern societies from a fall like Camelot.

The Arthurian legend started out in early sources as mere lists, history and folklore praising an extraordinary warrior Arthur. Later literature and media has transformed the legend into so much more with depth, emotions and new messages from personal experiences and influences. The artists incorporate their values, desires and fears into the Arthurian legend. The legends are recognizable and popular even when adapted from genre to genre, media to media, generation to generation. Even if the themes, values and messages are lost on the audience, the audience can still enjoy the simple story of a man coming to the British throne, ruling a utopian kingdom and losing everything. The message is universal; there is always a struggle between good and evil. The laughs, the tears and the nerves are all part of the literature, the myth and the performance reflecting life. The myth is easier to understand and relate with when the characters

are realistic and the situations believable, so creators evoked emotions with their works to involve, enthrall and capture the audience. The interest and intrigue of Arthurian legends, their adaptations, their reworks are undeniable and still prevalent.

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