‘The Old Order Changeth’:
Arthurian literary production from
Tennyson to White

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PhD Thesis
Cardiff University
September, 2007
Summary of Thesis:

This is a study of modern retellings of the Arthurian story, from Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1842-1891) to T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* (1938-1958). It has three main aims. First, while primarily a literary history, it attempts to form an integrated narrative of the modern Arthurian legend through the study of creative literature, scholarship, historiography, visual art, journalism and popular culture. Second, unlike earlier Anglo-American accounts of modern Arthuriana, this thesis concentrates exclusively on British literature, including previously-ignored retellings of the legend by Scottish, Irish, Welsh and Cornish writers and emphasises the influence of Celtic writing on contemporary English literature.

Third, this thesis attempts to demonstrate how post-Tennysonian English literature is fundamentally different from earlier manifestations of the legend. The medieval and Victorian traditions, this study argues, were characterised by a series of literary revolutions, beginning with the creation of a paradigmatic text (Geoffrey's *Historia*, Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Tennyson's *Idylls*), which served the ideological needs of elite social groups. After the creation of such texts there followed lengthy periods of stable literary production which essentially reproduced and expanded the ideological franchise of the paradigm. Yet at certain points, due to major social and economic transition, the Arthurian paradigm no longer functioned effectively in its paradigmatic mould and underwent a period of crisis – only to emerge in a new paradigmatic formation.

Yet the modern, post-Tennysonian tradition has not conformed to this hegemonic structure. In the absence of a paradigm, Arthurian literature since the 1920s has been characterised by a series of diverse and contradictory trends. Some of these have been nationalist in orientation, while others have developed directly out of scholarly approaches. Politically, they have been informed by a range of ideologies, from conservatism to feminism and from anarchism to clerical fascism.

This thesis examines the causes of the breakdown of the paradigmatic structure in twentieth-century Arthurian literature, while chronicling the significance of the trends that developed in its place – shaping the Arthurian story into a much more British political narrative. Yet with the current breakdown in the conception of Britain as a political unit, the Arthurian story seems ready for another major shift in form and significance.
Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank Stephen Knight for tireless supervision and constant critical engagement over the three years in which this thesis was written. His comments and suggestions over various stages of the project have greatly benefited this work. For financial support I am grateful for a scholarship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, as well as for several small grants from the School of English, Communication and Philosophy at Cardiff University. Also to be thanked is Martin Coyle for his considerable assistance when preparing the initial research proposal. I am also grateful to many others who have been generous in providing information and assistance: Nicola Bassett, Anna Birt, Roger Dalrymple, Faye Hammill, Dawn Harrington, Haley Miles, Carl Phelpstead, Helen Phillips and Heather Worthington. Special thanks ought to be made to Katie Gramich who kindly provided me with several translations from the Cymraeg and was of great help in the preparation of chapter four. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my debt to Nicola Lloyd for patience and proofreading.
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This thesis uses a double note system. Endnotes are used for bibliographic information, while footnotes are used to elucidate meaning, or to expand on a point raised in the text. Chapter titles are all taken from Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King*, saving the first, which is taken from 'The Epic', an 82-line poem which framed the original 'Morte d'Arthur' of 1842.
Introduction

Like Tennyson's Leodogran, unsure whether to give his daughter, Guinevere, as wife to the young king, the early Victorian age was sceptical of Arthur. Many writers doubted whether the stories of a medieval age far removed from their own in taste, culture and religion could be made relevant to them. And yet they acquiesced: the 'doubtful throne' became assured and the Victorian age — in poetry, prose, art, music, drama and scholarship — became 'of one mind with him.'¹ The single work which affected this change — which forced this inheritance — was the *Idylls of the King*, a work which spanned the age and turned its bourgeois ideology into epic.² Even where it was not the primary inspiration for artists' and poets' turning to Arthur, it quickly became the greatest influence upon them. Through the legend, Tennyson raised England's 'crown'd Republic' to the level of myth; and the medieval Matter of Britain became Anglicised, domesticated and middle-class.² For fifty years writers choosing to rewrite the legend did little other than repeat, in various forms, this Victorian poem. Yet after the Great War, an event which shattered so many nineteenth-century monuments, British culture largely rejected the *Idylls* as an imitable cultural icon.

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¹ Tennyson published the 'Morte d'Arthur' in 1842, though it was written nearly ten years earlier; the poet made his final changes to the poem in 1891.
In its place a multiplicity of Arthurs sprang up – he was a sun god, a vestige of some ancient pagan ritual, a historical personage, a British hero of resistance. No longer an English gentleman of 'stateliest port', Arthur became a champion of Cornish and Welsh independence. If his story symbolised Britain's multi-ethnic identity, it could also focalise a mono-racial society. It could be made to represent the destruction of spiritual values; it could be rewritten as right-wing propaganda, socialist aspiration or liberal nostalgia. The legends could be retold in simple ballads, or through a system of complex, modernist allusion; it could even be retold as a novel. The variety of these Arthurs underlines the fact that there was no dominant retelling in the twentieth century – that the twentieth-century Arthur was in many ways a contradictory figure. Certainly no Arthurian writer of the last century achieved anything like Tennyson's success and influence – not T. Gwynn Jones or John Masefield; nor David Jones or even T.H. White, whose *Once and Future King* (1958) is perhaps the best-known version of the last hundred years.

This is a study of these modern retellings, stretching from Tennyson to White. It is also about cultural inheritance – the ways in which twentieth-century authors struggled with their Victorian predecessor, while trying to shape new Arthurs for a new age. While predominantly a literary history, this thesis incorporates a critical narrative of Arthurian scholarship from John Rhys's *Arthurian Studies* (1892), which marked the first major break with the English-French axis which had hitherto dominated Arthurian criticism, to R.S. Loomis's *Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages* (1959), which reintegrated the diverse critical approaches which had developed in the first half of the twentieth century. In terms of Malory studies it ranges from the various editions of the *Morte Darthur* produced in the nineteenth century, with their emphasis on celebrating an English epic, to the publication of Eugène Vinaver's
Works in 1947, which presented a very different Morte Darthur – one that was barely English and hardly an epic. This study tries to not only to demonstrate creative literature’s indebtedness to scholars like Rhŷs, Loomis, Vinaver, Jessie Weston, Alfred Nutt and W.P. Ker; it also attempts to present them as authors of the modern Matter of Britain in their own right. Moreover, their scholarship is understood as a cultural product formed out of the same ideological forces which are apparent in fictional retellings: notably nationalism, chauvinism and misogyny, as well as the politics of a declining liberalism, an assertive, reactionary conservatism and a tentative socialism.

There already exist many studies of the modern Arthur. In 2006 there even appeared A History of Arthurian Scholarship which surveyed much of the critical material this present study examines. The most common accounts of modern fictional retellings of the legend are found in the historical surveys which chronicle the myth from its medieval beginnings down to the contemporary, such as those by Richard Barber (1961, 1986), Stephen Knight (1983), Jennifer R. Goodman (1987) and Alan Lupack (2006), as well as a host of popular works. There are also several articles dealing with modern Arthuriana which have appeared as part of multi-authored histories of the legend, including those by Geoffrey Ashe (1968), Elisabeth Brewer (1996), Muriel Whitaker (1996), Raymond Thompson (1996), Chris Brooks and Inga Bryden (1999) and Gossedge and Knight (2008).

Bibliographies of modern retellings by Clark S. Northup and John J. Parry (1944), Stephen R. Reimer (1981), Mary Wildman (1982) and William D. Reynolds (1983) should also be mentioned. Norris J. Lacy’s Arthuriān Encyclopediā (1986, 1991, 1996; supplemented in 2001), which remains the most inclusive guide to Arthurian literature from the Celtic sources to the modern adaptations, is the
culmination of this bibliographic approach. There are also several works that have
dealt with specific areas of Arthuriana, the most important of which have been those
on the Grail by Juliette Wood (2000), Dhira B. Mahoney (2000), Barber (2004) and
John B. Marino (2004) by and on visual representations of the legend by Whitaker
(1990), Debra N. Mancoff (1990) and Christine Poulson (1999). Kevin J. Harty,
meanwhile, has largely defined the study of 'cinema Arthuriana', a term of his own
devising. In addition there have been a few studies of individual Arthurian writers,
and David Llewellyn Dodds (1991, 1994). Shorter pieces, including articles and
book reviews, have been cited, where relevant, in the text.

The first large-scale work which surveyed post-medieval Arthurian literature
was M.W. MacCallum’s *Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the King’ and Arthurian Story from the
XVIth Century* (1894), which pioneered a narrative of literary production from
Spenser to the Victorian period. His work concluded with several chapters on
Tennyson’s *Idylls*, which it understood to be the glorious culmination of a tradition,
not just another retelling of a medieval story – a sentiment repeated in later studies by
W.P. Ker (1896) and W. Lewis Jones (1911). MacCallum’s account of post-
medieval literature was expanded by many critics, though none, until Margaret J.C.
Reid in 1938, took the story past Tennyson. Reid’s *Arthurian Legend*, a survey of
medieval and modern literature, included discussion of a number of twentieth-century
writers, including Laurence Binyon, T.S. Eliot, Thomas Hardy, John Masefield, John
Cowper Powys and Edwin Arlington Robinson, as well as discussing otherwise-
neglected nineteenth-century figures including Mark Twain and Richard Wagner.
However, her treatment of modern authors was brief and often negative.
It was not until the publication of Nathan Comfort Starr’s *King Arthur Today* (1954), an analysis of the legend from 1901 to 1953, that the study of modern Arthuriana began to acquire scholarly rigour. Starr structured his book thematically, with chapters on Merlin, Tristram and Isoult, the Grail and so forth. While providing a wide survey of the field, Starr privileged certain writers – Edwin Arlington Robinson, John Masefield, Charles Williams and T.H. White – believing them to be artistically superior to their contemporaries. Starr also noted the influence of scholarship on creative writers (often neglected by later critics of modern Arthuriana) and the importance of the Victorian poets in shaping early twentieth-century responses to Arthur, while noting that ‘the outstanding twentieth-century versions break almost completely’ with their forbears. So comprehensive was his book that it was not until Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer published their *Return of King Arthur* in 1983 that Starr’s work was superseded. Consisting of synopses and commentary, Taylor and Brewer’s study charted the early nineteenth-century revival, Tennyson and the Victorians, twentieth-century dramatic and poetic treatments, as well as the later developments in a variety of novel subgenres. Their work also gave a substantial amount of space to American retellings of the legend, as Starr had earlier done.

including chapters on Tintagel, King Arthur and Vietnam, adaptations for television and comic-books.\textsuperscript{21}

This study is indebted to many of these works, as my notes demonstrate. But it also differs from them in a number of ways. First, unlike the literary studies above, this thesis attempts to integrate the exceptional scholarship the period produced into a coherent narrative of the Arthurian legend at this time. Second, unlike earlier accounts of modern Arthuriana, which are all transatlantic studies (with the exception of \textit{King Arthur in America}), this thesis concentrates exclusively on literature produced within the British Isles. The transatlantic bias of earlier studies resulted in the neglect of many writers whose work tended to exist outside of the Anglo-American parallels most critics pursue.\footnote{The trend for transatlantic studies may be something of a historical accident, owing to the fact that many of the scholars who have written on the modern Arthur have been Americans: Maynadier, Reid, Starr, Mancoff, Thompson, Mahoney, Lupack, Tepa Lupack, Hoffman, Sklar and Marino. The very first chronicler of post-medieval Arthuriana, Mungo MacCallum, was an Australian professor at Sydney University.} This was especially true in the case of non-English British authors, such as T. Gwynn Jones, Glyn Jones, David Jones and Robert Morton Nance. Indeed, reflecting the actual corpus of literature, much consideration is given to the Cornish and Welsh ideological uses of the Arthurian story in the twentieth century, while I have also attempted to postulate on why Ireland and Scotland produced relatively few works on the legend.

Apart from providing a counterbalance to the Anglocentricity of previous works, this study’s emphasis on the importance of the Celtic contribution to British literary production also results in a change in the ways in which English writers, such as John Masefield and T.H. White (both standard figures in studies of modern Arthuriana), can be viewed. Indeed, it is a central contention of this thesis that from the late 1920s to the mid 1940s Arthurian literary production in England steadily lost the Anglocentricity of its Victorian forbears and increasingly came to be written as an
Anglo-Celtic product – a development that has continued into the modern day with the growth of the historical novel.

Third, this thesis also attempts to show how post-Tennysonian Arthurian writing is fundamentally different from earlier traditions – at least in England, where Arthurian literary production had always possessed a structure which separated it from its Celtic and continental equivalents. This structure, this thesis contends, has essentially been paradigmatic. Since the beginning of the ‘English’ Arthur, the tradition has been characterised by the production of culturally iconic texts which have operated as archetypal versions of the myth: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae* (c. 1138), Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte Darthur* (c. 1469) and, in the nineteenth century, Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King*. Not only did these texts prove to be influential on subsequent literary productions of the legend, they also proved to be models of the legend which completely dominated their contemporaries’ understanding of the stories of Arthur. In their respective periods, the *Historia*, the *Morte* and the *Idylls* were not only the most widely-consumed version of the legend in England, they also constituted almost the entire myth for their readers and audiences. Thus, the *Historia* was not only the most popular version of the myth in the twelfth century, it simply was the myth for most English readers until the fifteenth century. Likewise, when Malory translated and redacted the French romances of the thirteenth century into English prose of the 1400s, his humanist retelling provided generations of readers with the most authoritative version of the myth then existing. And in the nineteenth century, such was the dominance of the *Idylls* that when authors and critics read the *Morte Darthur* their resulting poems, plays and scholarship were far more in line with what Tennyson had written than that produced by Malory in the fifteenth century.
To these three paradigmatic accounts of the legend subsequent literary and artistic interpretations have obediently deferred, tending to reproduce, with gradual modification, the paradigmatic text's narrative, cultural and ideological themes in a variety of forms and genres – thus extending the cultural potency of the paradigm over a longer period than if the authoritative text had existed in isolation. Under such a system, Arthurian cultural production was a dogmatic enterprise, enforced by the ideological machinations of elite social groups keen to regulate a political myth that functioned as an effective means of disseminating the ideals on which those societies were based. Thus, for example, the largely historiographical Arthurian tradition of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries is best known under the rubric 'Galfridian', and the large body of poetic and lyrical manifestations of the legend produced in the nineteenth century are most accurately termed 'Tennysonian'.

In the period since the First World War, however, this hegemonic pattern of English literary production has greatly diminished and no paradigmatic text has existed to enforce prescribed cultural signification of subsequent Arthurian literature. This greater freedom from ideological regulation has been due to a range of considerations, including the influence of medieval Welsh literature and the prominence of a number of Anglo-Welsh writers who sought to locate their contradictory national identities within the Arthurian story. Political factors were also important, the most vital of which was the collapse of liberalism in the interwar period and the altered demands made of literature as ideological vehicle in the post-war age. Instead, since the 1920s, Arthurian literary production – far from operating in a normative paradigm structure – has been characterised by a series of diverse and sometimes contradictory trends. Some of these have been nationalist in orientation: English, Welsh and Cornish, or Celtic and Anglo-Celtic. Other trends have developed
directly out of scholarly approaches, for example: Christian, Pagan, Ritualist and historical. Politically they have been informed by a range of ideologies, from conservatism to feminism and from anarchism to clerical fascism.

The following section expands on the paradigmatic form of the Arthurian legend in the medieval period; but before discussing this model in more detail it is necessary to say something regarding the applicability the theory of paradigms to the legends of Arthur. My discussion of the paradigmatic account of Arthurian literary production is grounded in the philosophy of Thomas Kuhn, especially his seminal study of the practice of science, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962). The terms used throughout this study – ‘paradigm’, ‘paradigmatic shift’, ‘normal literary production’ and ‘crisis’ – are all taken from Kuhn’s analysis of the history of scientific production. The advantage, I believe, of presenting Arthurian literature through such a structuralist model is that it presents an alternative to the organic lexicon which has resulted in scholars discussing the legend as a ‘seed-bed’ of culture, from which certain texts or sub-genres have ‘blossomed’ or ‘flowered’. As the American critic Gordon Hall Gerould wrote of the French romances in 1927:

> Scholars have too often treated this sudden florescence of romance as if it were a true and not a metaphorical flowering: something botanical, uncontrolled by human actions, which is to lose sight of the plain fact that neither spurious history nor acknowledged fiction comes into being of itself.\(^2\)

By applying Kuhn’s model to the production of English Arthuriana, as elucidated in the following section, I have attempted to present a methodological system of comprehending a cultural tradition that has been ruled by the ideological needs of social elites and which has been characterised by several major authoritative texts and long periods of dogmatic literary stability, interrupted by briefer periods of crisis in
which the Arthurian legend has failed to remain constant in its usual socio-political role, before it has returned to an authoritative – or paradigmatic – state.

Kuhn himself rejected any attempt to employ his theory of paradigmatic shifts to any branch of knowledge outside of the ‘hard sciences’. In 1977, fifteen years after the publication of *Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn wrote that ‘a paradigm is what members of a scientific community, and they alone, share.’ His rejection of the applicability of his theory to other discourses partly rests on the significance of his use of the term ‘paradigm’. While the *OED* defines ‘paradigm’ as ‘a pattern or model of something’ or ‘a typical instance of something’, Kuhn suggested a much greater significance: a conceptual model which underlies the theories and practices of a particular branch of science and, hence, a complete world view. Hardly can Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, as great as it is, be confidently claimed to be a complete world view. But nonetheless, in terms of the Arthurian legend, Tennyson’s *Idylls* and Geoffrey’s *Historia* did represent the whole Arthurian story for their contemporary readerships. And in the case of Geoffrey and Tennyson in particular, their Arthuriads did present an epic monument to their patronising class: the Anglo-Norman elite of the mid-twelfth century and the English bourgeoisie of the nineteenth – epics which heavily defined their social and cultural self-image.*

Kuhn’s comment on the inappropriate applicability of his theory to other discourses is questionable on several grounds. As a scientist himself, Kuhn would have been very much aware of how a theorist has little control on the appropriation of

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* Malory’s position is harder to gauge. In his Arthuriad, Malory had offered his class ideological consolations for many losses – among them the martial and political diminishment of the knight, the collapse of the French dominions and the waning of the feudal system. How influential Malory may have been, however, is more obscure. As discussed below, the *Morte Darthur* did influence a considerable influence on later writers, while Malory himself seems to have been greatly esteemed. Yet the taste for romance was challenged by the puritan revolution of the next century, as well as the cultural abandonment of the medieval in favour of the Classical. Moreover, the destruction of the monasteries greatly reduces our knowledge of the cultural life of the mid-sixteenth century.
their work. Also, Kuhn, in denying the possible application of his theory to other 
discourses, was also making an attempt to preserve the ‘public face of science’ and to 
protect its ‘autonomy’ from ‘marauding outsiders like Marxists and New Agers’.25 
Certainly, it was not until the 1970s that Kuhn began to heavily emphasise that the 
paradigmatic structure of science was wholly inapplicable to researchers outside of 
the hard sciences.26 Also, at no point did Kuhn refer to cultural discourses – much less 
legends – in his discussion of paradigms. In my use of the paradigmatic model as 
relevant to the production of the Matter of Britain, I have not tried to argue that some 
obscure connection between the discipline of science and the discipline of writing 
Arthurian literature. Likewise, the paradigmatic model is one which I believe is not 
general to literary production, but specific to the historical manifestations of the 
Arthurian legend as they have appeared in England from Geoffrey’s Historia to 
Tennyson’s Idylls. The paradigmatic model of Arthurian literary production is, I 
believe, the only explanation of the evolving Arthurian legend which can account for 
English Arthuriana’s anomalous position with regard to the wider European and, since 
the nineteenth century, international manifestations of the legend. More regulated, 
more historiographical and more malleable to political-governmental propaganda, the 
English paradigmatic Arthurian tradition in the medieval period is the subject of the 
next section.

The structure of Arthurian literary production in Medieval Britain

In the medieval period interest in the Arthurian story period extended across 
Christendom. Treatments of the story of Arthur varied greatly between societies, 
depending on the cultural utility each national or social group was able to derive from 
the narrative. Within the constituent parts of the British Isles there developed very
different Arthurian traditions. Bar a few scattered references and a fifteenth-century translation of the French *Queste del Saint Graal* (c. 1225), Irish Arthurian literature is almost nonexistent.\(^{27}\) Scottish Arthurian texts – chiefly historiographical – are more numerous. Generally, the Arthur of the Scots was envisioned in reaction to the English use of Arthur as a figurehead for their imperial ambitions. The chronicles of John of Fordun (c. 1385), Walter Bower (c. 1440), Hector Boece (1527) and William Stewart (1534) repeatedly stressed Scotland’s historical independence and asserted that the British throne belonged not to the illegitimate Arthur but to Gawain or Mordred, the rightful heirs of King Lot and Anna, Uther’s legitimate daughter.\(^{28}\) They essentially present antitheses to Geoffrey’s *Historia* and its English derivatives.* Yet, Scottish literature seems never to have developed an Arthurian tradition that was independent of English colonialism.

Wales, of course, possessed a much older Arthurian corpus. Yet the precise nature, or natures, of its cultural utility is difficult to determine. Often the Arthurian legend has been perceived as a cultural consolation for the misfortunes of Welsh history.\(^{29}\) Yet the erratic presentations of Arthur suggest that the myth did not always operate in such a simplistic manner. N.J. Higham has recently argued that the pre-Galfridian Arthur was largely a localised figure and did not become a pan-Welsh hero until the twelfth century.\(^{30}\) Thus, while the dynasties of Gwynedd and Dyfed were keen to patronise a legend about a ‘*dux bellorum*’ and great Christian warrior in the *Historia Brittonum* (829-30) and the *Annales Cambriae* (c. 954), other locales were less inclined to produce celebratory Arthurian literature.\(^{31}\) For instance, the Arthur of the *Vitae Sancti* of the eleventh and twelfth centuries is but a ‘foil’ for the various saints to demonstrate their superiority over secular powers. The Arthur of these texts

\* An unjustly imperious Arthur is also evident in a late fifteenth-century romance (usually thought to be Scottish), in which he is contrasted unfavourably with Golgaros, a knight who resists Arthur’s feudal aggression, ‘[a]s my eldaris of ald / Had done before me’ (*Golagros and Gawane*, ll. 453-4).
appears as a hell-bent villain, a tyrant and a would-be rapist – hardly reconcilable to the earlier Christian warlord.\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Culhwch ac Olwen} (c. 1050) presents Arthur as a heroically irresponsible king who alienates his chief vassal, Kay, who subsequently abandons Arthur’s court and will not be reconciled with him even ‘when the latter was wanting in strength or when his men were being killed’.\textsuperscript{33} The calamitous effects of such poor kingship can be witnessed in \textit{Pa gur yv y porthaur?} (‘What Man is the Gatekeeper?’), in which Arthur, having lost his kingdom, recalls the exploits of his former warriors – especially Kay, who has seemingly turned against Arthur.\textsuperscript{34} No single Arthur emerges from the early Brythonic literature, much less one that can be described as providing simple historical escapism. Rather, the Arthur of early Welsh was an ideological device used for numerous purposes: dynastic propaganda, Christian politics and elucidation of poor leadership.

Geoffrey of Monmouth’s greatest achievement – and certainly his greatest contribution to the Arthurian legend – was his ability to synthesise a diverse and conflicting corpus of Brythonic literature into a coherent stable text. The \textit{Historia} was remarkably popular in Wales; translations of his Latin history, known as the \textit{Brut y Brenhinedd}, are found in roughly sixty manuscripts – far more than any other Welsh Arthurian text.\textsuperscript{35} Subsequent literary production was more susceptible to French influence than its English counterpart would be. The three romances, \textit{Geraint}, \textit{Owein} and \textit{Peredur} (c. 1250) are all heavily marked by French literary styles, though their narratives are probably Welsh in origin.\textsuperscript{36} The Grail also makes its appearance in Welsh literature before English, with translations of the \textit{Queste del Saint Graal} and the \textit{Perlesvaus} appearing in the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{37} But after these romances were produced and the earlier tradition was recorded, Welsh literary interest in Arthur appears to have been increasingly marginal.\textsuperscript{38} While the collapse of Welsh political
independence in the late thirteenth century encouraged the scribes of Wales to preserve what existing literature there was, it did not encourage contemporary writers to produce narratives of an earlier period of Celtic superiority. Although there appears to have been a folk-belief in the return of Arthur to lead the Welsh against the English, in their heroic tales the poets and bards of Wales were soon able to turn to Owain Glyndŵr as a realistic figure of national redemption and resistance.39

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Elis Gruffydd noted in his late Chronicle (c. 1550) that the Welsh were not as interested in Arthur as were the contemporary English.40 As with most of Europe, Arthurian literature in England began with Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia and following this archetype the Arthur of the English was overwhelmingly political. Unlike on the continent, the English Arthur was chiefly a figure of historiography, rather than romance, and as a ‘historical fact’ was eminently adaptable to ideological manipulation. The excessive political usage of the myth by elites of medieval and early-modern England gave rise to the peculiar shape of English Arthurian literary production. In order to facilitate the close relationship between medieval state ideology and the Arthurian legend, the development of the Matter of Britain in England was a far more structured and regulated affair than it was in the rest of Europe. With such extensive ideological utility the narrative could scarcely be left in the hands of individual romancers and their patrons, as had occurred in France, whose uses of the Arthurian story might not always be in accord with monarchical and national interests. Essentially paradigmatic, the cultivation of the legend in England has traditionally been an authoritarian enterprise with major texts operating as archetypes that govern subsequent literary production in terms of its main narrative, themes and ideological utility.
There were two such stages before the nineteenth century. The first was the Galfridian (from the middle of the twelfth century to the beginning of the fifteenth); the second, the Malorian (from the late fifteenth century to the late sixteenth).

Geoffrey’s *Historia* ignited Europe’s fascination with the Brythonic hero; but for the Anglo-Normans his work was of particular ideological importance. The *Historia* was the work of a foreign *arriviste* from the borderlands of the Welsh-English Marches. It synthesised a diverse corpus of Celtic myth and historiography and refashioned it within the structure of contemporary French and Classical literary styles. It was a new literary edifice – a monument to the Anglo-Normans’ place in European culture. It furnished Geoffrey’s patrons with a historical identity similar to that provided by the Charlemagne *chansons* to the French Capetian dynasty. It equipped the conquerors of England with a predecessor of heroic proportions, a pan-British king who would be utilised in numerous later attempts to extend English sovereignty over Wales and Scotland. But, more immediately, Geoffrey’s *Historia* also represented the Anglo-Normans’ subjects, the Saxons, as relatively recent invaders of Brythonic Britain – a position that allowed the foreign elite to consolidate their own position in England through disavowing the right of Saxon suzerainty.

Malory’s *Morte Darthur* was received in a very different climate. While both the *Historia* and the *Morte* were written during periods of civil war, the reign of Henry II (1154-89) heralded a period of social, economic and, above all, cultural growth and stability in comparison to the ‘The Anarchy’ (1135-54) of dynastic conflict and unsettled government. Thus, while the *Historia* was written in a civil war context, it continued to be read – and adapted by subsequent historians – in a long period of political and intellectual ascendancy. In comparison, the *Morte Darthur* was written in a period of even more destructive civil strife, the War of the Roses (1455-
which formed the climax to half a century of dimishment in England’s place in European affairs. After the French repudiations of the Treaty of Valois (1420) England’s continental ambitions sharply diminished and the country spent much of the century in destructive civil wars.

Malory’s *Morte* did not so much replace Geoffrey’s *Historia* as apply a nostalgic lens through which ‘England’s’ former greatness could be viewed. Malory did this through combining elements of Geoffrey’s narrative* with the French romances, which had largely been absent in Galfridian literary production.44 Throughout, Malory extensively abbreviated his French sources, greatly reduced their magical features and controlled religious allegory and doctrinal expression. In contrast he expanded upon accounts of martial conflict, increased the sense of heroism surrounding his chief characters and placed much emphasis on the virtuous qualities of secular chivalry. These alterations reduced the conflicts which had existed between the French and English traditions.45 The effect was to expand and humanise Geoffrey’s historiography. It imbued a new sense of spectacle into the old story; its more recognisable, ‘human’ characters were more appealing to writers and more imitable for courtly princes, as several Tudor-age figures would demonstrate. But, most importantly, it Anglicised a body of great foreign literature – once more establishing Arthur as the English elite’s own.

The success of any paradigm lay, fundamentally, in its popularity. The *Historia* survives in over two hundred and ten manuscripts (with many more being lost over time) while Malory’s *Morte* was printed six times between 1485 and 1634 and would have existed in an unknown quantity of non-extant manuscripts also.46 Ninety years after Malory completed his Arthuriad – and at the height of the

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*Geoffrey’s narrative was known to Malory through John Hardyng’s *Chronicle* (c. 1465), a minor source throughout the *Morte*, and the chronicle-derived *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (c. 1350).*
destruction of the libraries of the great monastic houses – John Bale, antiquarian and bibliophile, was able to state that ‘[i]n our times, Malory enjoys an illustrious reputation’. Such popularity gave rise to numerous derivative works which increased the authority of the paradigm, which led to an unwillingness among other writers to deviate from the paradigmatic narrative and ideological base. The *Morte Darthur* was the basis for several subsequent works: *Sir Lancelot du Lake, The Legend of King Arthur, King Arthur’s Death* and the parodic *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* (all late fifteenth century). And Malorian echoes are also apparent in Sydney’s *Arcadia* (composed 1580), Hughes’s *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588), and Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1590-6). The paradigmatic effect of Geoffrey’s *Historia* was more pronounced, with the Galfridian story of Arthur being reproduced in numerous medieval histories, including Wace’s *Le Roman de Brut* (c. 1155), Layamon’s *Brut* (c. 1200), the chronicles of Robert of Gloucester (c. 1270), Thomas Bek of Castleford (1327) and Robert Mannying of Brunne (1338), as well as the anonymous *Short Metrical Chronicle* (shortly after 1307). These and the later prose *Brut* (evolved from about 1370 onwards) kept the Galfridian Arthur of history in circulation until the Tudor period, with Caxton publishing the *Brut* in 1480.

But the Galfridian and Malorian paradigms’ cultural authority was not the result of organic literary development; Geoffrey’s and Malory’s success was not merely the outcome of having written entertaining stories. Their authority relied on their intimate relation to national politics. The Arthurian story was patronised, employed and monopolised by the secular elite of medieval and early-modern England. It was used for propagandist effect by numerous English monarchs from Henry II to Henry VIII, with generations of kings attempting to establish themselves as the heirs to the Arthurian imperium. The ‘historical fact’ of Arthur’s empire played
a major part in legitimatising England's colonial ambitions with regard to Wales and Scotland – as well as being used by Henry VIII in 1537 to establish independence from Rome. Sub-paradigmatic literary production maintained the close associations with the English crown. Geoffrey's *Historia* was dedicated to the various powerbrokers of the day; Wace's *Brut*, written under royal patronage, reproduced Geoffrey's story but extended its ideological utility as propaganda for Henry II. Later, as kings of England lost their Anglo-Norman identity, subsequent historians rewrote the *Historia* as an Anglicised epic – again preserving the associations between the contemporary monarch and the figure of Arthur. Pierre de Langtoft's fourteenth-century chronicle, for instance, after rehearsing the traditional Galfridian story of Arthur, later makes numerous comparisons between Arthur and Edward I, claiming that even 'Arthur had never [held] the fiefs so fully' as Edward held Cornwall, Wales and Ireland. In the Malorian period, Henry Tudor employed his slender genealogical descent from the Welsh princes to present himself as the direct descendent of Arthur, thus legitimatising his claim to the Welsh-English throne, as well as demonstrating the power of the English monarchy through many Arthurian spectacles, pageants and tournaments. Above all, the later sub-paradigmatic writers made the Arthurian story more representative of the ideals, tensions and beliefs of the evolving social groups they ideologised.

* The most common of the *Historia*'s dedicatees was Robert, Earl of Gloucester. An illegitimate son of Henry I, Robert was a court favourite and became a leading magnate of the Anglo-Norman realm with territories in both England and Normandy. He was a powerful figure in the Time of Anarchy, first supporting Stephen, but later capturing and deposing him in 1141, in favour of Matilda. Following his father, Robert developed a scholarly reputation. He certainly became an extraordinary patron, sponsoring Henry of Malmesbury’s *De Regum Gestis Anglorum* (1125) as well as Geoffrey's *Historia*. He also continued the building of Tewkesbury Abbey. Nigel Higham has written that 'Arthur's background had similarities with the family circumstances of the similarly royal but illegitimate Robert, [...] eldest surviving son of Henry I' (*Myth-Making and History*, 225). This raises the possibility that Arthur's illegitimacy, absent in all earlier extant literature, may even have been modelled on Geoffrey's greatest patron.
With such ideological utility at their disposal, the political elite were unwilling to extend the propagandist franchise to social groups whose interests might be at variance with their own. Such a situation had arisen in France in the thirteenth century. The Vulgate cycle (c. 1215-36) was a huge compendium of heterogeneous and contradictory romances roughly organised not upon the political history of pre-Conquest Britain but around the story of the Grail and the grandeur of individual warrior aristocrats. Texts such as the *Queste del Saint Graal* (c. 1225) and the non-Vulgate *Perlesvaus* (c. 1210) were not only indifferent to the national and monarchical implications of the Arthurian story, they were directly opposed to the secular world of chivalry and dynastic politics. In these texts the secular-ideological functions of earlier Galfridian chronicle and romance were inverted: Arthur became the leader of a band of bloodthirsty, hell-bound villains, and the pursuit of earthly goals – fame, martial prowess and riches – were transformed into evils which, in the *Queste*, only adherence to the teachings of Cistercian monasticism could legitimise.

In England, such a tradition never seriously challenged the statist, secular use of the legend. As Felicity Riddy has written, only texts ‘sanctioned’ by the *Historia* were fit to be translated from the French and consumed in England. Texts which challenged the Galfridian paradigm flared only ‘momentarily into textual life’ before dying out. Thus the English romance tradition was mainly comprised of either versified episodes drawn from the chronicles themselves, such as *Arthur* (c. 1400) or the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* (c. 1350), or were translations of French romances reconciled to the Arthur of the Galfridian tradition, such as the *Stanzaic Morte Arthur* (c. 1400) or the fourteenth-century translation of Chrétien’s *Perceval* (c. 1177) which

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* Riddy argues that the whole period of medieval Arthurian literature is governed by the *Historia*. My contention differs in that I believe a major break in the Galfridian authority occurred around 1400, with Malory’s *Morte Darthur* establishing a new authority over subsequent cultural production.
removed all traces of the Grail, that most ideologically troublesome element of the Arthurian story, being the least reconcilable to secular politics.59

Over time the Arthurian story expanded in terms of narrative and cultural utility, though these extensions rarely compromised the ideological interests of the primary audience, the state and monarch. Yet as the paradigmatic version became more entrenched in English culture it became less able to respond to social and political changes, such as the political calamities of the fifteenth century or the Reformation of the following century. At these points Arthurian literary production went into crisis.

There was a demonstrable decline in the authority of the Historia in the fifteenth century. With England suffering a series of political cataclysms the feudal elite became too occupied waging insular, destructive wars to patronise a myth about imperial expansion and strong, central government. Arthurian literature became more diverse, more antagonistic to the older Galfridian tradition. Indeed, after 1400 not one substantial Arthurian literary work was produced that can be said to fit within the established Galfridian paradigm. French Grail texts began to be translated for mercantile readerships — as did romances relating to Merlin.60 Literature satirising Arthur and his aristocratic followers became popular. He appears as an unjust aggressor in Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carlyle (c. 1400) and The Turke and Gowin (c. 1450), an irresponsible monarch in King Arthur and King Cornwall (c. 1450) and The Avowing of King Arthur (c. 1425) and as a foolish cuckold in Sir Corneus and The Boy in the Mantle (c. 1450).61 He and his knights are continually defeated on their quests by lowly carls, imperious hosts and old haggard women.*

* Several of these ‘crisis-period’ Arthurian texts are ‘King and Subject’ stories, a major genre in the late medieval period. In Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carlyle, for instance, after the low-born carl has admonished a ‘hard lesson in true courtesy’ to his social superiors, Kay and Baldwin, the poem ends in an Arthurian feast, the most common means of symbolising the validation of the dominant order. Yet
This crisis was resolved, however, by Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* which restored the Arthur to its traditional elitist and statist form and which also absorbed the other ideological conflicts of three hundred years of Arthurian literary production into a new paradigm.

The crisis of the Malorian paradigm can be said to have begun, quite precisely, in 1534, with the passing of the Act of Supremacy. Although the self-conscious Arthurianising of the early Tudor dynasty seemed to have equalled that of the Plantagenets, Malory's paradigm did not achieve the longevity of Geoffrey's. The historical (and historically incredible) Arthur was enlisted in the cause to establish spiritual and temporal independence from Rome. Yet after this divorce from the Catholic Church, the figure of Arthur was of ever-diminishing importance. Humanist and Puritan scholars, including Vives in 1528 and Roger Ascham in 1570 attacked the legends of Arthur as immoral and harmful.62

Arthur could not survive for long in such a climate. The ascension of James VI of Scotland to the English throne in 1603 brought a flurry of Arthurian masques and pageants designed by Ben Jonson, Thomas Campion, William Camden and others designed to propagandise the new king.63 Malory continued to be published until 1634 and works like Robert Chester's poem sequence *Loves Martyr* (1601, reworked as *The Annals of Great Britaine* in 1611) continued to keep the stories of Arthur in circulation, as did a large number of cheap popular broadsides. Yet Arthur was steadily moving away from the interests of high culture. The great poets of the seventeenth century – Milton, Jonson and Dryden – abandoned any thoughts they had

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here it is the carl who initiates the celebrations and invites Arthur to attend his feast: demonstrating through the splendour of his hospitality that this carl (who appears to be a landowner of considerable worth) is very much the equal of Arthur's knights, if not of Arthur himself. Similar conclusions brought about by the non-aristocratic intruder into the Arthurian court occur in *A Carle of Carlile* – a later version of the *Syre Gawene and the Carle of Carlyle* narrative – *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *King Arthur and King Cornwall*. 
of writing epic treatments of the legend and no great work on the Arthurian story was produced until the nineteenth century. Many seemed to share Milton’s opinion, given in his *History of Britain* (1677), that the story of Arthur was a ‘simple fraud of a fable’.64

Yet the legend Tennyson inherited was not that of Milton’s despondency. The nineteenth-century Arthurian revival began a long time before he took up the legend – the story of Arthur occupying the minds of many earlier writers and scholars, including Thomas Warton, Robert Southey, Thomas Love Peacock and Walter Scott. The first chapter examines the ways in which these writers influenced Tennyson’s approach to the legend, before moving on to discuss how the *Idylls* restored the Arthurian story to its Galfridian and Malorian eminence – as well as its paradigmatic structure. It concludes with a survey of the *Idylls*’ monumental influence on subsequent literary production, which lasted until the outbreak of the Great War.

The second chapter concentrates on the historical moment when the Tennysonian paradigm ceased to dominate the Arthurian story: the 1914-1918 conflict. The Matter of Britain was largely abandoned in these years – a tale of Britons being overwhelmed by Saxon hordes was hardly the basis for morale-boosting literature. Yet while the war was a quiet time for Arthur, these were the great years for the ‘maiden knight’, Sir Galahad. Evident in poetry, art and particularly journalism, Galahad, along with St George, embodied the chivalric ethos which defined so much of Britain’s wartime propaganda. The cultural significance of the knight in these years was the result of the Victorian cult of Galahad, which had developed throughout the nineteenth century as an ancillary to the larger Arthurian paradigm, and was sustained until the war’s end by a succession of sermonising bishops, moralising artists and
homilising public-school masters. Yet at the end of the conflict Galahad was almost wholly discarded – becoming a rare figure in post-war Arthuriana. In contrast, the story of Arthur, now divorced from its Tennysonian paradigm, began to be rewritten by a host of writers who had emerged from the war with a sense of disassociation with the Victorian past, including T.E. Lawrence, David Jones, John Masefield and T.S. Eliot.

Galahad’s absence is particularly noticeable in the first body of literature which matured in the absence of the Tennysonian paradigm: the story of the Grail. The third chapter considers how scholars such as Jessie L. Weston and Alfred Nutt recreated the ‘noble tale off the Sankegreall’ in the early years of the twentieth century, before it was taken up and embellished by creative writers, such as Eliot, Mary Butts, Arthur Machen and John Cowper Powys. The resulting literature was very different from the tales of Galahad and the Grail produced in the nineteenth century. Usually set in the modern day, with little or no reference to its traditional Arthurian frame, this new Grail was concerned with mysterious rituals, themes of sexual fertility and spiritual rejuvenation, while scholars and writers alike paid close attention to the early Celtic literature which had largely been excluded under the auspices of the Anglocentric Idylls. Yet this newly-awakened interest in the Grail did not produce a unified body of literature. Indeed, the field was diverse and often combative as writers struggled to appropriate the significance of the mystical object for their own scholarly and ideological ends. This heterogeneous Grail proved to be the prototype for the post-war Arthurian legend as a whole.

Chapter four breaks from the study of what has predominantly been English literature in order to discuss the Arthurian legend as produced by the Celtic nations. Many writers, including James Joyce, James Bridie, T. Gwynn Jones and Henry
Jenner, contributed to a series of Irish, Scottish, Welsh and Cornish traditions that lay outside of the better-known English (or Anglo-American, as it is often understood) conception of the modern Arthurian story. Many of the Celtic writers, often working in regional languages, were amongst the first to reclaim the Matter of Britain from its Tennysonian mould. This chapter also pays attention to the role Arthur has played in the construction of Cornish and Welsh national identities, though it also considers the failure of each of the Celtic nations to continue to develop their Arthurian traditions into the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter five continues the study of the role of 'Celtic' literature in four major reworkings of the Arthurian story: those of Ernest Rhys, John Masefield, David Jones and Charles Williams. In their approach to the Matter of Britain these poets – the only writers saving T.H. White to attempt to rewrite the entire legend in the interwar period – can all be termed Anglo-Celtic. Unlike the earlier English Arthurian writers and the Celtic nationalist poets of chapter four, Rhys, Masefield, Jones and Williams were all concerned with remaking the legend into an inclusive British myth, which utilised both the early Welsh literature of the Mabinogion and the English Morte Darthur of Thomas Malory. And though their politics varied from socialism to radical conservatism, they each sought to realise the Arthurian legend as somehow 'essential' to Britain, not just spiritually, but culturally, socially and politically.

The final chapter is an examination of T.H. White’s The Once and Future King, a work that proved to be perhaps the most popular retelling of the legend in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet the work is also an anachronism, a text which largely ignores the considerable scholarly and creative advances in the legend that had emerged in the first half of the twentieth century and which, in its revised 1958 form (that known as The Once and Future King), reinscribed the Anglocentricity
of the Arthurian story – thus obscuring the idea of Britishness with which the legend had been imbued during the interwar period. As well as moving away from its earlier Anglo-Celtic basis, as White revised his Arthurian in the 1950s it also became a much more ideologically conservative version of the Arthurian story. This chapter concludes with a brief survey of the numerous versions of the story to emerge in the post-war years, the most important of which was the trend for historical realism and the triumph of the novel as the dominant Arthurian medium. A brief conclusion contains an overview of the disappearance of the paradigmatic structure of the English Arthurian tradition, along with a series of speculations on why the form of the legend changed so dramatically in the twentieth century.
Chapter One

From 'chaff and draff' to national epic: Tennyson's

*Idylls of the King* and nineteenth-century Arthuriana

When Tennyson's 'Morte d'Arthur' was first published in 1842 its mournful verses, written 'under the shock' of Arthur Hallam's death, were offset by 'The Epic', a poetic frame of eighty-two lines which recounts a light-hearted Christmas Eve spent among four male friends after a day occupied with skating, playing forfeits and kissing girls beneath the mistletoe. During this evening it is mentioned that one of those present, Everard Hall, had once written an epic on the Arthurian legend while at university, most of which has been destroyed.¹ Cajoled by his friends to read the surviving fragment of this work, Hall initially refuses:

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‘Nay, nay,’ said Hall,
‘Why take the style of those heroic times?
For nature brings not back the Mastodon,
Nor we those times; and why should any man
Remodel models? these twelve books of mine
Were faint Homeric echoes, nothing worth,
Mere chaff and draff, much better burnt.’²
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In time, Hall relents and reads them the surviving fragment of his epic retelling of the legend, the 'Morte d'Arthur'. By presenting his account of the death of Arthur as an undergraduate poem, Tennyson was excusing its archaisms and Classical echoes; but the poet was also noting the difficulties in refashioning the ancient story of Arthur for a nineteenth-century readership. Hall’s disparagement of the poem reflects Tennyson’s own struggle to compose an Arthurian epic: his early notebooks contain several unrealised schemes for such a work and the question ‘why should any man / Remodel models?’ is one that occupied the poet throughout his life.

But Everard Hall’s remarks are pertinent to many writers’ attempts to retell the story of Arthur between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Like Hall, Ben Jonson, John Milton and John Dryden all planned, then set aside, their schemes to produce an Arthurian epic, while some that were produced could fairly be described as ‘mere chaff and draff’. Works such as John Dryden’s semi-opera, King Arthur (1691), Richard Blackmore’s epic of 1685 and 1697, as well as Fielding’s proto-pantomime, Tom Thumb (1730), are aberrations within the larger structure of Arthurian literary production and were rarely commended by critics. They were composed almost wholly in ignorance of the literary tradition of the Middle Ages: the Age of Reason spurned the ‘barbarism’ of the cultural heritage of the Middle Ages in favour of the adopted Classics, while writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had neither the knowledge nor the sympathetic means of reproducing the Arthurian story effectively. After the Reformation, Arthur’s story, tainted with Catholicism and the ‘barbarism’ of the Middle Ages (and, after the English Civil War, absolute monarchism), had drifted away from high culture and moved into the lower domains of popular culture and political propaganda.
Here in this underworld Arthur existed for some two hundred years, before emerging – first in antiquarian scholarship, then in increasingly popular forms of creative literature – to command a position in Victorian culture that was so ubiquitous that it rivalled even the Arthur of Geoffrey’s twelfth-century Historia. The forefathers of Victorian medievalism – above all Thomas Warton and Walter Scott – had produced a far more sympathetic readership for tales from the medieval past than had existed since the Reformation. Scholars made the old romances available to new readers, while poets and novelists were demonstrating how these tales could be made relevant to contemporary culture.

Tennyson’s Idylls of the King (1859-91), which incorporated the 1842 ‘Morte d’Arthur’ in its conclusion, was the culmination and the greatest expression of nineteenth-century Arthuriana. It synthesised many of the discordant versions of the medieval legend that had grown concurrently with the rediscovery of the romances in the late eighteenth century. Tennyson took the many antagonistic nationalist, political and cultural uses of the myth evident in the Romantic period, and replaced it with an Anglocentric, liberal-bourgeois epic. Due to its remarkable popular and artistic success Tennyson’s version of the legend regulated Arthurian literary production throughout the remainder of the Victorian age. His Idylls effectively became the story of Arthur, their influence apparent everywhere – in poetry, prose, drama, visual art, architecture, music and scholarship. In this way the cultural production of Matter of Britain not only re-attained the eminent position that it had enjoyed in the Middle Ages, it also regained the ‘shape’ that it had possessed between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, which was, as discussed in the introduction, essentially paradigmatic. But before examining the Idylls’s paradigmatic position in nineteenth-
century literary culture, it is worth considering the how the Arthurian story was able to gain a sympathetic readership in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

**Modern Arthurian literature before Tennyson**

For several centuries after the Reformation, Arthur’s literary environment had been confined to political propaganda, chapbooks, broadsides and burlesque theatre. His court and list of knights had diminished into obscurity, their names seldom remembered. Even Arthur’s queen had been forgotten: in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries she was as likely to be called Emmeline or Dollololla as Guinevere. Thomas Warton’s *Observations on ‘The Faerie Queene’ of Spenser* (1758) and his monumental *History of English Poetry* (1774-81) marked the beginning of the Arthurian story’s revival as a high cultural commodity. His great knowledge of medieval romance, gathered from an exhaustive study of the manuscripts in the Bodleian, the recently-founded British Museum, as well as the collections of personal friends, ushered in a new era of appreciation for the literature and culture of the Middle Ages and his position as one of the key founders of British medievalism ought to be better recognised. His chief aim in the *Observations* and his *History* was to rescue medieval literature from contemporary ‘prejudice and ignorance’ and to elevate it to the position of ‘true poetry’:

> For however monstrous and unnatural these compositions may appear to this age of reason and refinement, they merit more attention than the world is willing to bestow. [... Because of] their terrible graces of magic and enchantment [they] rouse and invigorate all the powers of imagination: to start the fancy with those sublime and alarming images, which true poetry best delights to display.

Warton believed that medieval literature – and Arthurian literature in particular – would rejuvenate contemporary literary production. A poet himself, whose output
included Arthurian verses, Warton was convinced that present 'English literature and English poetry suffer, while so many pieces of this kind still remain concealed and forgotten in our MS libraries.'

Yet when the medieval manuscripts were recovered from their obscure resting places, what emerged was not an immediate rejuvenation of English literature, but a site of national anxieties. Stephanie Barczewski has argued that the Arthurian legend moved from an inclusive myth of British identity in the early part of the nineteenth century to a more exclusive Anglocentric conception in the second half of the century. Yet the Arthur of the Romantic age shows very little sense of British cohesiveness between English, Cornish, Scottish and Welsh writers. Rather, a number of conflicting 'traditions' regarding the Matter of Britain were formulated at this time, with writers from each constituent part of the United Kingdom attempting to lay claim to a cultural pre-eminence with regard to medieval Arthurian literature, though other literary debates were concerned with questions of morality, religion and class.

Scholars and creative writers from Scotland (James Pinkerton, David Lang, Walter Scott and Anne Bannerman), Cornwall (William Hal, George Woodley, Thomas Hogg and R.S. Hawker) and Wales (William Owen Pughe, Iolo Morganwg, Owen Jones) excavated and reworked native Arthurian traditions for their own nationalist purposes. English scholars also republished medieval Arthurian literature: Thomas Percy (1765), Joseph Ritson (1783 and 1802), George Ellis (1805) and John Dunlop (1814) all published Arthurian ballads, romances and résumés. By 1850 nearly every English Arthurian text had been published, the most important being the three editions of Malory's *Morte Darthur* produced between 1816 and 1817.
The first republication of the *Morte* since 1634 has often been heralded by critics as the pivotal factor in the Arthurian resurgence. Yet an immediate effect is hard to discern. Indeed, at the time English Arthurian scholarship was heavily influenced by Celtic and Continental textual studies. Le Grand d’Aussy’s *Fabliaux* (1779-1781), which contained several Arthurian pieces, was translated twice and published in five editions by 1800, and a further edition was made in 1815. Likewise, Dunlop’s *History of Fiction* (1814) gave narrative synopses of several French romances, while Robert Southey’s introduction to the 1817 edition of the *Morte Darthur* (an important influence on Tennyson’s *Idylls*) summarised many more. Southey scarcely mentioned any English Arthurian work and he made it clear that he considered the *Morte* to be little more than a series of translations of French romances, a selection which Scott believed had been ‘extracted at hazard, and without much art or combination’. Southey also had doubts as to the worth of the Arthurian legend for contemporary writers, declaring that ‘no poem of lasting popularity has been produced upon a Round Table story.’

Similarly, English scholars and poets, who had seldom demonstrated an interest in Welsh literature, began to learn Cymraeg – including Sharon Turner, George Ellis, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey. Although Joseph Ritson characterised Welsh scholars as possessing ‘more vanity’ and ‘less judgment’ than any other ‘people in the world’, others, such as Turner, wrote spirited defences of the antiquity of medieval Welsh poetry. But perhaps the most important of the Celtic Revivalists’ English protégées was Charlotte Guest, who between 1838 and 1849 published a three-volume translation of *The Mabinogion*, which as well as being an important work in itself also stimulated the work of numerous academics, authors and
poets. It was also, as discussed below, pivotal in Tennyson’s composition of the
*Idylls of the King*.

Creative writers, meanwhile, were similarly in thrall to the Celtic conception of the Arthurian legend. John Thelwall’s ‘The Fairy of the Lake’ (1801), Felicia Hemans’s ‘Taliesin’s Prophecy’ (1822) and Thomas Love Peacock’s *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829) were all rooted in Welsh scholarship and in Hemans’s and Peacock’s cases, they were also concerned with the destructive effects of Saxon and English colonisation (something even more notable by the fact that Peacock was at this time employed by the East India Company). Peacock’s 1829 work is also important in that it was the very first novel-length treatment of the legend – a form that would not become popular with Arthurian writers until T.H. White’s *The Sword in the Stone* (1938). The main hero of *The Misfortunes of Elphin* is the literature and culture of Wales – a culture that had traditionally possessed little credit in England. Its characters, narrative and incidental poetry were all drawn from the scholarship of Pughe (of whom Peacock was a great friend) and others. And as if to declare its indebtedness to the research of the Celtic revivalists, *The Misfortunes of Elphin* even provided the first English translations of several Welsh Arthurian poems contained in the *Myvyrian Archaiology*.

The Arthur of the Romantic period was, then, a diverse and contradictory figure which represented a variety of mutually antagonistic national ideologies. The gradual formation of Great Britain from the sixteenth century had meant that the national sphere in which the Arthurian revival took place was very different from those of the medieval period. The Matter of Britain was the property of a diverse set of writers: Cornish separatists, English satirists and colonial apologists, as well as Welsh and Scottish scholars who exhibited cultural pride in their respective literary
pasts. Romantic Arthurian production was essentially a battle for possession of the ideological utility of the legend. English literature, though clearly fascinated by the Arthurian story, appeared to be losing this cultural contest; it was in thrall to a conception of the Matter of Britain as something inherently foreign. Coleridge summarised the attitude in 1833: ‘As to Arthur, you could not by any means make a poem on him national to Englishmen. What have we to do with him?’ Yet Tennyson, at least, thought that nineteenth-century England could have a lot ‘to do’ with Arthur.

**Tennyson’s early Arthurian poems: domesticating the legend**

Tennyson’s *Idylls* was the great reassertion of the Arthur of the English, eclipsing all other versions of the legend produced in the nineteenth century. Among the last verses to be written for the *Idylls of the King*, ‘To the Queen’ (1873), summarised Tennyson’s achievement in adapting the story of Arthur for the Victorian world. His Arthur was:

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Ideal manhood closed in real man,
Rather than that gray king, whose name, a ghost,
Streams like a cloud, man-shaped, from mountain peak,
And cleaves to cairn and cromlech still;
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Tennyson’s Arthur was not a historical Celtic chieftain; his Arthur was not the legend that clung to the Scottish ‘cairn’ or the Welsh ‘cromlech’. Rather, Tennyson’s Arthur was a distinctly English king. ‘To the Queen’, however, was a late epitome of the *Idylls*, written after nearly all of the individual parts of the poem were complete. His progression from his early notes to the final edition the *Idylls* is far more influenced by the disparate versions of Arthur, evinced in Romantic literature and scholarship, than is usually stated by his commentators. Indeed his Arthurian oeuvre can be seen as
a microcosm of the ideological tensions inherent in the Arthurian myth throughout the century. And like the ‘chaff and draft’ of Everard Hall’s epic, much of Tennyson’s early work was destroyed or never fully realised.

Tennyson’s first attempt at the Matter of Britain was a Celtic Arthuriad set in Lyonesse, a now ruined part of Cornwall, which would chronicle the gradual encroachment of the Saxons upon the kingdom. After this initial scheme became unrealisable he turned to ‘The Lady of Shalott’ (1832), based on a popular Italian novelette, *Qui conta come la Damigella di Scalot mori per amore di Lancialotto de Lac* (1804). This poem was one of several attempts by contemporary English poets to present an alternative to the heavily Celticised version of the Arthurian story. Like Letitia Elizabeth Landon’s ‘A Legend of Tintagel Castle’ (1833) and Reginald Heber’s ‘La Morte d’Arthur’ (1830), Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’ did not attempt to Anglicise the legend directly – the weight of Welsh, Scottish and French literature precluded such an approach at this time – but rather sought to reconcile Arthur to the moralism of contemporary bourgeois English culture. These writers did this through turning legends of Arthur into a domesticated epic.

Tennyson and Landon both chose to treat the story of Lancelot and Elaine, though neither, it seems, had read Malory. ‘The Lady of Shalott’ used the story to reflect upon Tennyson’s prospective life as a poet, employing the image of Elaine’s mirror (by which she observes the outside world) as metaphor of the artist’s task of discerning and recording life through an artificial lens. As a result the poem became

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* Tennyson claimed that ‘‘The Lady of Shalott” is evidently the Elaine of the *Morte d’Arthur* [sic], but I do not think I had ever heard of the latter when I wrote the former’. See the preliminary notes to ‘The Lady of Shalott’ in *Tennyson: a selected edition*, 18-20 (19). Given the slightness of Arthurian detail in Landon’s ‘A Legend of Tintagel Castle’ (bar Lancelot himself, no traditional Arthurian character features in the poem) knowledge of Malory seems unlikely, though not impossible. The probable source of the poem was most likely a prose synopsis – such as contained in the résumés of Ellis or Dunlop (see above) – or even perhaps Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’, which had appeared the previous year.
the subject for several artistic narrative treatments, most famously by John William Waterhouse in 1888. Although Tennyson’s poem proved to be the more popular of the two, Landon’s ‘A Legend of Tintagel Castle’ more obviously demonstrates the element of domesticity that later writers (including Tennyson) would weave into the medieval legend. Lancelot’s affair with Elaine was transformed by Landon into a narrative that presented the masculine, warlike world as fundamentally at odds with domestic happiness:

They might have been happy, if love could but learn
A lesson from some flowers, and like their leaves turn
Round into their own inward world, their own lone fragrant nest,
Content with its sweetness, content with its rest.

But the sound of the trumpet was heard from afar.
And Sir Lancelot rode forth again to the war.
And the wood-nymph was left as aye woman will be,
Who trusts her whole being, oh false love, to thee.35

Female abandonment was a common feature of Landon’s verse (though rarely was the deserter as illustrious a hero as Lancelot), but its inclusion here marked a turning point in Arthurian literature. Post-medieval Arthurian writers had rarely written of romantic or sexual engagements with any degree of seriousness. Before the nineteenth century they were usually a source of ribald humour, as in Fielding’s *Tom Thumb* (1730), where Arthur’s queen, Dollalolla, is described as ‘a woman entirely faultless saving that she is a little given to Drink; a little too much a Virago towards her Husband. And in love with Tom Thumb’.36

The nineteenth century took a sterner moral view. Walter Scott, in his ‘Bridal of Triermain’ (1813), chastised Arthur for his dalliance with Guendolen, a fairy temptress, which keeps the king from fulfilling his obligations to the land. Saxon advances remain unchecked while ‘Caliburn, the British pride, / Hangs useless by a
lovers' side'. Such neglect of an individual's duty to his community was denounced by Scott, as he declared: 'How mirth can into folly glide, / And folly into sin!' Landon was similarly concerned with the correspondence between personal desire and public duty, but, unlike Scott, Landon placed her moral emphasis upon the individual's responsibility to intimate, rather than societal, relationships. Essentially, she elevated the domestic sphere above that of the political. In the *Idylls*, Tennyson would synthesise the attitudes of Landon and Scott in his attempt to establish a firmer equilibrium between the domestic and political domains.

Written on a more ambitious scale was Reginald Heber's 'Le Morte d'Arthur'. Although incomplete, this was the first attempt in the nineteenth century to retell the whole Arthurian story. Heber was also the first English writer to realise the importance of Malory in such an endeavour. He adapted the story as a domestic tragedy: at the time of the poem's beginning Arthur has already won his European dominions, and the destiny of the Round Table is firmly controlled by the scheming, wily and doleful female characters, whose roles are greatly increased from those in Malory. This was also a much more respectable version of the medieval story; Heber removed scenes of bloodshed and altered what he thought unchaste: Arthur's fatal sin, for example, is transposed from the incestuous relationship with his half-sister to the slaying of Sir Paladore, who is here the lover of Morgue and father of Mordred. Had he not pursued his religious career so zealously (he became, in 1823, the first Bishop of Calcutta, a diocese which included India, Ceylon and Australia), Heber's 'Le Morte d'Arthur' could have been a major Arthuriad. As it was, Heber's work still exercised an influence on subsequent literature: the structure of the 'Morte d'Arthur' - driven by dialogue, retrospective accounts of earlier episodes not included in the central story

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*Heber actually began his retelling of Malory in 1810: six years before the *Morte Darthur* was reprinted.*
and introspective soliloquies – would be used by Tennyson in his own full-length treatment of the myth.

These works presented a version of the Arthurian story which, through their respectability and domesticity, suggested that the legend could be made pertinent to contemporary middle-class readerships. Yet Tennyson himself was unconvinced of the surest means of producing a great epic that could be made relevant to nineteenth-century England. In 1842, along with a much-revised version of ‘The Lady of Shalott’, he published three more Arthurian poems: the ‘Morte d’Arthur’, ‘Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere’ and ‘Sir Galahad’. The first of these was a poetic vision of Arthur’s removal to the Isle of Avalon, where he is to be healed of his ‘grievous wound’. Although the poem found great success, particularly when it was transformed, in 1869, into ‘The Passing of Arthur’, the conclusion to the *Idylls of the King*, initial praise was by no means unanimous. John Sterling commented in his review that ‘the miraculous legend of “Excalibur” does not come very near to us, and as reproduced by any modern writer must be a mere ingenious exercise of fancy’ and Leigh Hunt seemed equally dubious on the appropriateness of Tennyson’s treatment of a medieval story. It was strictures such as these that had caused Tennyson to insert his ‘Morte d’Arthur’ within the contemporary frame of ‘The Epic’, and to present the poem as the work of a fictional undergraduate.

The forty-five line ‘Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere’ is in many ways an expansion of Malory’s discourse on the ‘lusty moneth of May’, in which lovers, like the trees and flowers that ‘burgenyth and florysshyth’, do ‘spryngith, burgenyth, buddyth, and florysshyth in lusty dedis’. Tennyson’s poem is a lyrical description of the lovers’ illicit affair. Its setting is harmonious, even collusive, with their romantic designs: the misty mountains laugh, the birds sweetly sing and even the ‘drooping
chestnut-buds began / To spread into the perfect fan'. Only the ambiguous final lines hint at the tragedy that approaches:

A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.44

The poem is free of the censure Tennyson would later heap upon the lovers in the *Idylls*. It is a fragment of a much larger poem devised by Tennyson, which was never published and was perhaps never completed to the poet’s satisfaction. This larger work has not survived, save in a prose synopsis made by J.M. Kemble.* What did survive, however, with its heady imagery and sympathetic account of the lovers’ affair, became an important inspiration for the Pre-Raphaelites.45

Perhaps the most influential of the 1842 poems was ‘Sir Galahad’, an eighty-four line monologue, delivered by the ‘maiden-knight’, in which he ruminates on how ‘faith and prayer’ and his ‘virgin heart’ provides him with greater strength than that given to other, less chaste men:

My good blade carves the casques of men,
My tough lance thrusteth sure,
My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure.46

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* '[I]n the Spring, Queen Guinevere and Sir Lancelot ride through the forest green, fayre and amorous: And such a queen! such a knight! Merlin with spindle shanks, vast brows and beard and a forehead like a mundane egg, over a face wrinkled with ten thousand crow-feet meets them, and tells Sir L. that he’s doing well for his fame to be riding out with a light o’ love &c. Whereupon the knight, nowise backward in retort, tells him it is a shame that such an old scandal to antiquity should be talking, since his own propensities are no secret, and since he very well knows what will become of him in the valley of Avilion some day. Merlin, who tropically is Worldly Prudence, is of course miserably floored. So are the representatives of Worldly Force, who in the shape of three knights, sheathed, Sir, in trap from toe to toe, run at Sir L. and are most unceremoniously shot from their saddles like stones from a sling. But the Garde Joyeuse is now in sight; the knight I confess is singing but a loose song, when his own son Sir Galahad (the type of Chastity) passes by; he knows his father but does no speak to him, blushes and rides on his way! Voila tout. Much of this is written and stupendous’ (quoted in Ricks’s headnote to ‘Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere’, 97).
Like the Galahad of ‘The Holy Grail’ (1869), his quest is a purely individualistic one and he fails to embody an ideal of social commitment, which Tennyson would later hold as the ideal of the Round Table, flawed though that institution would appear. In the opening lines, the three-time repetition of ‘My’ emphasises the knight’s detachment from the world around him – already there is something of the egoist in Tennyson’s presentation of Galahad. His knight errantry, though he champions maidens ‘To save them from shame and thrall’, is subsumed within Galahad’s greater quest for spiritual glory. Whether in spite or because of this egotism, ‘Sir Galahad’ became a hugely influential poem. It inspired numerous romantic treatments by visual artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddall, Edward Burne Jones, George Frederick Watts, Arthur Hughes and Joseph Noël Paton (see figs 3-9).

Tennyson’s poem also inaugurated the Victorian cult of Galahad initially patronised by Muscular Christians,* as a means of encouraging schoolboys to lead chaste, wholesome and socially-conscious lives, but which later fell subject to increasingly jingoist discourses on the importance of serving England and Empire with an almost spiritual dedication (as discussed in the following chapter).

*His recent history of the topic, Donald Hall stated that the ‘muscular Christian’ movement is associated with ‘physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself... [For] muscular Christians, the male body appears as a metaphor for social, national, and religious bodies, while at the same time it attempts to enforce a particular construction of those bodies’ (Muscular Christianity, 1995, 7-8). The robust moralism of such writers as Thomas Hughes, Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald and Charlotte M. Yonge typify the tradition which lasted until the First World War.

The Idylls of the King as bourgeois epic

The success of Tennyson’s 1842 Arthurian poems did little to assure the poet of the form his eventual epic should take, and he continued to plot a series of unrealised large-scale works, including a five-act ‘masque’, which was abandoned in the late
By 1856, however, he began to develop the *Idylls of the King*, the work that would take the rest of his life – and the core of the Victorian era – to complete.

First to be published were ‘Nimue’ and ‘Enid’, in a trial edition of 1857, and ‘Guinevere’ and ‘Elaine’, in 1859. Although renamed in later editions, the early titles of these poems drew more attention to the women of the legend than had been evident in all the centuries of Arthurian literary production. They also consolidated the domesticated vision of the legend which the Victorian age would produce. In 1869 four other idylls were published: ‘The Holy Grail’, ‘Pelleas and Ettare’ and ‘The Coming of Arthur’, with the 1842 ‘Morte d’Arthur’ re-emerging as ‘The Passing of Arthur’. ‘The Last Tournament’ and ‘Gareth and Lynette’ were added in 1872; the earlier ‘Enid’ was divided into two poems, ‘The Marriage of Geraint’ and ‘Geraint and Enid’, and the last poem, ‘Balin and Balan’, was added in 1886 to make up the Latin epic twelve. The Victorian era had its national epic and Arthurian literature had a new paradigm.

As with Geoffrey’s *Historia* and Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, at the centre of Tennyson’s work was a process of synthesis and editing – a means of making the Arthurian myth not only pertinent to Tennyson’s age and class, but also the dominant cultural myth of his times. One of the main dilemmas facing Tennyson was the nineteenth century’s anxieties over the immorality of the medieval Arthurian story, fears which go back as far as the sixteenth-century Puritanism of Roger Ascham, who had written of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*:

> The pleasure of which booke standeth in two special poyntes, in open mans slaughter, and bold bawdrye: in which booke, those be counted the noblest knights that do kill most men without any quarrell, and commit fowlest aduoulteres by subtlest shiftes [...] What toyes, the dayly reading of such a book may worke in the will of a yong jentleman, or a yong mayde, that liveth welthelie and idleie, wise men can judge, and honest men do pitie.
In the nineteenth century, fears over Malory, while less hysterical, were no less apparent. In his rewriting of the *Morte Darthur*, Reginald Heber had deemed it prudent to omit many of the Malory's 'immoral' passages. One of the 1816 editors of Malory thought it necessary to make perform some 'highly needed pruning' to the original text so that the it might take its place among the family's bookshelves, rather than remain 'secreted from the fair sex'. Although the deluxe 1817 edition made many fewer cuts in the original text, in its introduction, Robert Southey was aghast at the barbarity of many French romances, as well as being morally shocked by the theme of 'aggravated' adultery contained in the *Morte* itself. Southey also thought the French writers had committed a 'foul offence' in engrafting vices and dishonour upon Tristram, 'whom another writer has described as a Knight of prowess and of worth'. This oddly personal defence of the moral character of Arthurian figures is also found in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *King Arthur* (1848). This text went to extreme lengths to rehabilitate the virtuousness of the myth, including Lytton's decision to recast the adulterous Guinevere as two persons: one became Arthur's wife, the other Lancelot's bride. Lytton did this, he claimed in his preface, 'to vindicate the fidelity of the Cymrian queen Guenever from the scandal which the levity of the French writers had [added] most improperly'.

Tennyson did not resort to these drastic alterations. Instead he included and even expanded on the lascivious elements of the myth, but contained them within a tightly-controlled system of antitheses. Thus the evil of Vivien is contrasted to the goodness of Arthur; Arthur's ideal of truth juxtaposed with her vision of '[t]he old true filth'. In such close juxtaposition, the extremes of both virtue and evil become more pronounced. Such a construct allowed Tennyson to draw on the most 'immoral'
of all Arthurian sources: the French romances, which had been so worrisome to his predecessors.

Although Vivien is mentioned in a brief passage in Malory,\textsuperscript{55} it was the Vulgate \textit{Merlin}, summarised with extensive quotation in Southe\'s introduction, which provided the genesis for Tennyson\'s \textquote{wily woman}. Southe\'s introduction described Vivien as \textquote{sorrowful and vexed}, attempting to \textquote{fawn to flatter} in order to \textquote{delude and deceive}.\textsuperscript{56} Tennyson followed Southey so closely in creating this \textit{femme fatale} that one early reader of the idyll claimed \textquote{that such a poem would corrupt the young, that no ladies could buy it or read it}.\textsuperscript{57} Tennyson quickly recalled the trial edition. But within the larger structure of the \textit{Idylls} Vivien\'s licentiousness was transformed into \textquote{the evil genius of the Round Table}.\textsuperscript{58} She became the primogenitor of all the wickedness that befalls Arthur and his kingdom – including the discovery of Lancelot and Guinevere\’s adultery.\textsuperscript{59} Indeed, her much-vaunted immorality was refashioned into criminality: Swinburne\’s facetious comment that she was a \textquote{simply a subject for a police court} was entirely consonant with Tennyson\’s depiction of her.\textsuperscript{60}

Thus Tennyson rarely had to perform the \textquote{highly needed pruning} his predecessors thought necessary in order to make the Arthurian story permissible for contemporary readers. It was through emphasising, rather than removing, the wicked elements of the Arthurian story, that Tennyson achieved the \textit{Idylls}\' proper moral tone.*

It is notable that Tennyson did not begin his \textit{Idylls} with tales drawn from Malory, but like many of his Romantic predecessors, drew from non-English sources. Yet unlike Peacock, Hemans and numerous scholars, Tennyson was not content to

\* Although Tennyson rarely altered the narrative of his sources, he did produce occasional cuts, especially with regard to the moral character of Arthur. The most notable example is Arthur\’s non-paternity of Mordred. In the original text of \textquote{Guinevere}, for instance, Mordred is described by the king as his \textquote{sister\’s son} (I. 569). In the later 1870 edition of the poem Mordred is further removed from Arthur, becoming \textquote{the man they call / My sister\’s son – no kin of mine, who leagues / With Lords of the White Horse} (II. 569-71).
reproduce foreign models— he appropriated them into an Anglocentric structure. Such a process is evident in his treatment of the Merlin and Vivien story in its unification of French ‘immorality’ with English ‘respectability’. But the appropriation of foreign literature into an English structure is even more pronounced in the contemporary ‘Enid’, Tennyson’s adaptation of the thirteenth-century Welsh romance, ‘Geraint fil[ius] Erbin’. ‘Geraint’ was one of the five Arthurian tales contained in Charlotte Guest’s translation of *The Mabinogion*, a text which reasserted the cultural importance of an older Welsh corpus which was autonomous to the English Arthurian tradition.

As with his later treatment of the *Morte Darthur*, it is a rather bloodless retelling. In the original, Geraint abandons the knightly world of tourneys and battle in order to reside in peace with Enid until her shame at his perceived cowardice spurs him into further martial conflict. It articulated the conflicts between the familial obligations and the duties of a feudal, predominantly homosocial, community. Tennyson domesticated the tale. In ‘Enid’ the dramatic action is germinated in a marital misunderstanding, as Enid, at night, weeps at the slurs that men say of him:

> True tears upon his broad and naked breast
> …awoke him, and by great mischance
> He heard but fragments of her later words,
> And that she feared she was not a good wife.61

Later, as Geraint learns of his mistake in doubting his wife’s fidelity, he is reconciled to her, apologising profusely for having doubted her and declaring that ‘henceforward [he would] rather die than doubt’.62 Whereas in the Welsh original (as translated by Guest), Geraint is merely ‘grieved for two causes; one was, to see that Enid had lost her colour and her wonted aspect; and the other, to know that she was in the right’.63 Essentially Tennyson was transforming the feudal tensions of the original Welsh
romance into an ode to virtuous married life. Tennyson made further changes to his Welsh source: rather than the dramatic action of the original, Tennyson's version was comprised of a series of dialogues; and instead of the more fantastical elements of the Welsh romance, the idyll was more naturalistic – more recognisable to a contemporary Victorian audience. He was also careful to remove the Welsh nationalist sentiments that were evident in the earlier years of Arthurian scholarship and literary production. His remodelling of ‘Geraint’ perfectly fits into the larger, domesticated structure of the central section of the Idylls – its Welsh origins lending no more than a Celtic flavour to a poem dedicated, as Tennyson wrote in ‘To the Queen’, to ‘an ever broadening England’.

After successfully synthesising diverse French and Welsh sources into an English bourgeois structure, Tennyson mostly drew his subsequent idylls from the Morte Darthur, though several are almost wholly original. But unlike Malory, whose protagonist is most often Lancelot, Tennyson placed Arthur at the epicentre of his work. More than anything else, the king of the Idylls is a paragon of virtue. In the Romantic tradition he was frequently castigated as the most criminal of all the Knights of the Round Table – he was an adulterer in Walter Scott’s ‘The Bridal of Triermain’, a coward in Anne Bannerman’s ‘The Prophecy of Merlin’ (1801) and an ineffectual ruler in a host of other texts. But in the Idylls he is repeatedly described as a ‘blameless king’, capable of inspiring not only great deeds from his followers but also imbuing them with something of his own Christ-like nature. The monk

* It remains unclear whether Tennyson knew Chrétien’s Erec et Enide, the focus of which is not about the primacy of marriage (as in Tennyson) but the need for a warrior-knight to fight.

† Of the other nine Idylls, the most original were ‘The Coming of Arthur’, ‘The Last Tournament’ (which took only incidental details from Malory) and ‘Guinevere’, which derived only its setting from the Morte Darthur.

‡ ‘For Lancelot was the first in Tournament, / But Arthur mightiest on the battlefield’ (‘Gareth and Lynette’, ll. 485-6).
Ambrosius describes Arthur’s knights as ‘like to coins, / Some true, some light, but every one of you / Stamp’d with the image of the King’. A similar passage occurs in Bedivere’s description of the founding of the Round Table, at which ‘[a] momentary likeness of the King’ appeared in each of the knights’ faces. These knights revere ‘the King, as if he were / Their conscience, and their conscience as their king’. In an age of constitutional monarchy, Tennyson did not present Arthur as some warlike autocrat; instead, it was as a moral entity – ‘Ideal manhood closed in real man’ – that Tennyson made the figure of a sixth-century king, and hence the whole Arthurian legend, relevant to his contemporary readers. Within this ‘[n]ew-old’ tale, he was the figurehead of a new moral code – chivalry – that was presented as an ideal model of Victorian society. Like Arthur’s knights, the reader became stamped with the image of the king.

Yet despite Arthur’s perfection, the focus of the Idylls is firmly on the cynicism, falsehood and moral decay which gradually overwhelm Arthur’s court. Indeed, Tennyson’s conception of Arthurian society was rooted in its demise: the poem that was to become the conclusion to the cycle, the 1842 ‘Morte d’Arthur’, was the first to be composed and thus the creative inception of the Idylls was its very destruction; the Arthurian story was essentially rewritten as tragedy. In the first poem of the narrative sequence, ‘The Coming of Arthur’, the king proclaims in response to Rome’s demand for tribute: ‘The old order changeth, yielding place to new’ – words echoed in the final idyll as the kingdom is destroyed. And between these two poems, the Idylls chart this demise through the symbolism of contrasting themes brought jarringly together. The personal failure of Arthur to uphold the systems of power and authority are the result of his inability to marry his own lofty idealism with the sensual world, symbolised by Guinevere. Merlin’s destruction is the result of the intellect
being similarly corrupted by the sexual, in his desire for Vivien. Lancelot and Guinevere’s adultery demonstrates the disastrous conflicts between passion and the social construct of marriage. The whole kingdom is destroyed by the knights’ and their ladies’ inability to harmonise domestic desires with public duty. It is no accident that of the ten central idylls of this great domestic tragedy, all save ‘The Holy Grail’ are directly focused on the relationships of brothers, lovers, husbands and wives, and the impact these relationships have on the state. Although this is a theme that is apparent in many medieval romances – the Stanzaic Morte Arthur being a notable example – never before had the impact of each character’s action and moral state mattered so much to the wellbeing of society.

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The question Everard Hall asks in ‘The Epic’ is ‘why should any man / Remodel models?’ Bluntly, the answer is that the Victorian era required a national epic. More precisely, the bourgeoisie, through monumental achievements of industry, colonialism and social change, had acquired a dominant position which required cultural validation.* The story of Arthur had from at least the time of Geoffrey’s Historia provided elite social groups with such legitimisation. Yet the Arthurian story’s historic ideological utility resulted in a paradoxical situation for Victorian writers. They wished to invest the Matter of Britain with their own ideological positions, in order to present bourgeois power as emerging from an historical continuum, yet they also had to divorce the Arthurian story from its previous cultural utility as aristocratic

* Of course, the English bourgeoisie were already achieving cultural validation through the form of the realist novel. The great ideologues of the mid-Victorian era – Dickens, Eliot, Gaskell and Thackeray among others – were already producing monuments to liberal capitalism by the time Tennyson was publishing the Idylls from 1859 on. The realist novel, however, operated in a piecemeal fashion. Its concerns, by necessity of its genre, were geographically-localised and temporally specific. What Tennyson provided was an epic – raising the concerns, ideals and beliefs of the English middle classes to the status of myth. The Idylls are as close an embodiment of the bourgeois ideological superstructure as one poet could achieve. It was unique among the cultural achievements of the Victorian age.
and monarchical ideology. Major alteration of the legend's central story was impossible – it was too well known and, besides, there had to seem to be an apparently unbroken form of tradition that underlay the whole myth. Yet Tennyson nevertheless achieved success – largely due to his poetic approach, which, following Reginald Heber, was dialogic rather than narrative.

Tennyson did not rewrite the narrative of the Matter of Britain, but provided a new reading of it. The story of Arthur and the knights of the Round Table lies outside Tennyson's poems: in Malory and the broad corpus of medieval romance. Within the *Idylls* the narrative of Arthur's reign is 'remembered, imagined, turned into the stuff of legend.' Unlike Malory's tales, which largely consist of direct action occasionally interspersed with characters' thoughts and feelings, which are all the more pronounced for their infrequency, Tennyson's figures provide continual introspection, dialogue and spoken reflections. These form a commentary on the legend, inscribing a new set of meanings (moral, religious, social and political) onto the pre-existing narrative framework. And this metatextual signification gains authority from appearing internal to the meaning of the myth: the characters' 'thoughts', psychology and symbolism appear to drive the very narrative around which they are clustered.

Indeed, this sense of internalisation was utterly central to Tennyson's concept of Arthur, as he stated in a letter to J.T. Knowles:

*Idylls of the King* implies something more and other than the mere legends of Arthur: else why did I not name the books 'Idylls of King Arthur'? It should have been clearer to my readers that in the very title there is an allusion to the King within us.  

This approach seems almost unique in Western literature – only the *Divine Comedy* forms a predecessor. Indeed, Tennyson was an astute reader of Dante: according to
Pattison, he owned eleven copies of the *Divine Comedy* and it is seems likely that the *Idylls*’ dialogic technique was consciously taken from Florentine’s work.\(^7\)

There are many structural affinities between the *Idylls* and the *Divine Comedy*. Both poets constructed their epic works from a huge variety of cultural allusions, historic and contemporary, Classical and Christian. Both works remodel and alter the significance of the past and its myths, though this is rarely achieved by narrative changes. Instead, Dante and Tennyson effect the re-inscription of meaning dialogically. Thus, for example, it is Ulysses himself who confesses to the reader why he is condemned to the eighth circle of Dante’s Hell (canto xxvi, ll. 90-142) for the medieval sin of intellectual promiscuity. While this sin – an anachronistic imposition of fourteenth-century Christian belief – is obviously superimposed by Dante, when voiced by Ulysses himself, it appears to be internal to the Classical myth. Essentially, Dante’s re-signification of the story of Ulysses appears to work interiorly. Through having the inhabitants of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* themselves articulate the causes of the Round Table’s collapse, Tennyson’s *Idylls* perform the same feat of ‘internally’ transforming the meaning of the medieval Arthurian tradition. As a result, Tennyson transformed the meaning of a whole legend, with all its plurality of intent, yet barely altered one significant narrative detail. As Tennyson’s ideal of Arthur was stamped on knight and reader, it was also superimposed upon the older Arthurian legends. As the epilogue to the cycle declares, Tennyson’s Arthur was certainly not ‘that gray king’ of

\(^*\) Of Tennyson’s non-Arthurian poems, ‘Ulysses’ is perhaps the most obvious instance of his poetic borrowing from Dante. Ostensibly, the resignification of the Odysseus story in ‘Ulysses’ is very different from the ‘interior’ alteration of meaning in the *Idylls*, as ‘Ulysses’ is a sequel, or coda, to Homer’s *Odyssey*. In the *Idylls* the knights and their king exist within the Malorian narrative frame, whereas when Tennyson’s Ulysses says ‘I cannot rest from travel’ he speaks long after the events of Homer’s tale. However, Tennyson’s primary source was not Homer, but Dante’s *Inferno* (canto XXVI). And through his imitation of the monologue of Dante’s Ulysses, Tennyson’s own mariner not only alters the meaning of Homer’s original, but Dante’s as well: for as Dante condemned the curiosity and presumption of the ancient Greek in his desire for new adventure, Tennyson’s Ulysses is exalted for his restless aspiration (‘Death closes all; but something ere the end, / Some work of noble note, may yet be done, / Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods’, ll. 53-5). Thus Tennyson not only narratively alters the *Odyssey* he also, through dialogue, interiorly alters Dante’s canto.
Scottish or Welsh myth, but nor was he ‘him / Of Geoffrey’s book, or him of Malleor’s’. 75

The *Idylls* exhibited as much of the Victorian world as one poet could muster – ‘all its lights / And shadows, all the wealth and all the woe’. 76 It articulated England’s moral aims and its cultural aspirations. It elevated the English bourgeois state, the ‘crowned Republic’, to the level of myth. Tennyson’s domestication of the Arthurian story not only made it relevant to his readership, it made the ‘crowing common-sense, / That saved [the nation] many times’ equal to the martial heroism of Britain’s imagined past. 77 The ‘faint Homeric echoes’, apologised for in ‘The Epic’ of 1842, became a chorus proclaiming the virtue and greatness of the domestic, respectable, tradition-revering middle class. Yet as it did so the *Idylls* also dramatised the social anxieties inherent in the bourgeois state – fears over cynicism and inertia, the evolving role of women in national life and the public consequences of private immorality. 78 But these were all eclipsed by the dread with which the *Idylls* spoke of the decay in ‘the faith / That made us rulers’. 79 The early nineteenth century had left the British nation the ‘mightiest of all people under Heaven’, the English bourgeoisie growing ‘wealthier – wealthier – hour by hour’. 80 Yet Tennyson repeatedly referred to ‘[t]he darkness of that battle in the West, / Where all of high and holy dies away’, which kept the image of Britain ‘as a sinking land, / Some third-rate isle half lost among her seas’ continually in the reader’s mind. 81 Thus Tennyson’s imagined British past was not only an ideal of earlier mythic greatness, it also served as a stark, though beautiful, warning to his contemporary society.
The Idylls of the King as Arthurian paradigm

There were great public and critical expectations of the *Idylls*: Tennyson had been made Poet Laureate in 1850 and reviewers eagerly anticipated his epic Arthuriad. Its impact on Victorian culture was immense. The 1859 edition sold forty thousand copies in its first few weeks and the poems were repeatedly published throughout the century. Its authority over subsequent Arthurian literature was at least as great as that of either Geoffrey’s *Historia* or Malory’s *Morte Darthur*.

This success with both readers and writers was prepared for by two earlier important pieces of medievalism: William Dyce’s Arthurian frescoes for the Robing Room at the Palace of Westminster (1851-64) and Matthew Arnold’s ‘Tristram and Iseult’ (1852). Like many before him, Dyce, when given his commission to decorate the royal chambers, expressed initial concern over the choice of Malory’s *Morte Darthur* as a suitably ethical subject. Yet his misgivings were evidently assuaged, as in 1851 he began his series of paintings: *Religion* (1851), *Generosity* (1852), *Courtesy* (1852), *Mercy* (1854) and *Hospitality* (1864). Notably, Dyce did not produce a series of historical frescoes but a range of pageants which utilised the Arthurian legend as a sequence of moral exemplars. In painting the figures of the Arthurian legend in this way, Dyce lent a striking political meaning to the myth. The figure of Arthur not only represented a myth of political continuity with the past but, by situating this fountainhead of virtue at the centre of the Houses of Parliament, Dyce also implied that within the institutions of Victorian politics resided the moral health of the country.

* The full titles of these works are: *Religion: the vision of Sir Galahad and his company; Generosity: King Arthur unhorsed and spared by Sir Lancelot; Courtesy: Sir Tristram harping to la Belle Isolde; Mercy: Sir Gawaine swearing to be merciful and never be against ladies; and Hospitality: the admission of Sir Tristram to the fellowship of the Round Table. Dyce’s first fresco, *Piety: the knights of the Round Table departing on the quest for the Holy Grail* (1849) was rejected by the Fine Arts Commission and resides in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.
— a compelling ideological strategy.* Although Tennyson's treatment of the Arthurian story was not as overtly political as Dyce’s, the latter’s highly moralised retelling of the legend clearly prefigured Tennyson’s moralisation of the medieval story.

Matthew Arnold’s version of the Tristram story was the first to be produced for centuries. The poem is divided into three parts. In the first, the dying Tristram is nursed by his wife, Iseult of Brittany, and recalls the events of his past with Iseult of Ireland in a series of flashbacks (a narrative technique similar to Tennyson’s). The second concerns Tristram’s final reunion with Iseult of Ireland and their death in each other’s arms. The third part is entirely different from the traditional story with Iseult of Brittany, now widowed, recounting the story of the disastrous love of Merlin for Vivian to her fatherless children, warning them of the terrible dangers of love. With its anxieties over passionate love uncontrolled by the institution of marriage, this section diverts the narrative emphasis away from the tragic affair of Tristram and Iseult of Ireland and places it upon the survivors of this tragedy – Tristram’s wife and the destroyed family:

Yes it is lonely for her in her hall.
The children, and the grey-hair’d seneschal,
Her women, and Sir Tristram’s aged hound,
Are there the sole companions to be found.
But these she loves; and noisier life than this
She would find ill to bear, weak as she is.85

This is medievalism of the most domesticated order, taking place amid embroidery, petted dogs and nightly prayers; its chief dramatic dynamic being bourgeois moralism, rather than the workings out of fate. The effect of the poem is not wholly unlike Landon’s earlier ‘A Legend of Tintagel Castle’. Arnold himself remained

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* The Robing Room itself is symbolic of this political continuity of the past and present, owing to the fact that the monarch’s chamber lies between the House of Lords and the House of Commons and, therefore, at the very heart of British politics.
unsure as to its merits, claiming Tennyson possessed a greater ‘poetical sentiment’ than he. Indeed, while both poets bourgeoisified the Arthurian story, their respective success lies in the differences in the scale of their poetic conceptions. While Arnold reduced the medieval tale of grand passions into domiciliary verses, Tennyson raised the domestic into a national epic.

* * * * *

Tennyson’s influence on later writers extended through narrative, style and genre. The dominant form of Arthurian literature throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century was poetic – often in a style consciously or unconsciously imitative of Tennyson – though there was some development towards Arthurian drama around the turn of the century (see pp. 57-64 below). What prose literature there was chiefly consisted of retellings of Malory, though these were almost always under the influence of Tennyson’s moralistic and domesticated adaptation of the legend. Many writers showed their debt to Tennyson in their titles, among them: Edward Hamley, ‘Sir Tray: an Arthurian idyl’ [sic] (1873), Elinor Sweetman’s ‘Pastoral of Galahad’ and ‘Pastoral of Lancelot’ (1899) and G. Constant Lounsbery’s ‘An Iseult Idyll’ (1901). Even the parodies left the reader with no doubt as to their satiric intent – lampoons of this time including William Edmondstoune Aytoun’s ‘La Mort d’Arthur: not by Alfred Tennyson’ (1849), as well as The Coming K—: a set of idyll lays (1873) by Beeton, Dowty and Emerson, and Arthur, or, the hididdle-diddles of the King, by ‘Our own Poet Laureate’ (1859).

Tennyson’s influence was almost as strong on the pictorial arts. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was partly founded on the basis of the Round Table and much of their art was directly inspired by the 1842 lyrics. William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones jointly proposed to establish an order of chivalry – the ritual for joining
was the recitation of Tennyson’s ‘Sir Galahad’. Many individual paintings and even sculptures and figures took their scenes directly from Tennyson’s poetry, though they often to claim Malory as source: William Holman Hunt’s *The Lady of Shalott* (1886-1905), George Frampton’s *Enid the Fair* (1907) and Arthur Hughes’ *Sir Galahad* (1870, fig. 7), among others. Burne-Jones’s *Merlin and Vivien* (1870-4) was based not only on Tennyson’s idyll but also on a conversation the painter held with the poet in 1858. Indeed, the depiction of affective moments in history and literature which characterises so many paintings of the Pre-Raphaelites and their ancillaries can be seen as a conjunctive to Tennyson’s poetic ethos. Similarly, although musicologists have tended to study the grander Arthurian works of Wagner and others, it is also notable that Tennyson inspired a surge in lighter Arthurian music in the mid-Victorian period. Many shorter works for piano and voice were published for performance in the drawing rooms of bourgeois England. Especially popular for musical setting was Vivien’s song, ‘In love if love be love’. And though of minor interest in themselves, they serve as potent reminders of how Tennyson transformed a medieval legend which had to be ‘secreted from the fair sex’ into a respectable epic that was welcomed into middle-class homes.

Tennyson’s *Idylls* were made available in numerous translations across Europe and, in English, they were transmitted across the Empire, often with didactic intent. In the United States Tennyson largely defined the way in which the older Arthurian myths were received. As Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack have shown, nineteenth and early twentieth-century American Arthuriana was largely written in response to the *Idylls*, though James Russell Lowell’s *The Vision of Sir Launfal* (1848) preceded Tennyson’s own version of the myth by a decade. Many works were obvious parodies, such as Edgar Fawcett’s *The New King Arthur* (1885), Oscar
Fay Adams’s *Post-Laureate Idyls and Other Poems* (1886) and, above all, Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), which formed something of a coexistent paradigm in American literature. Other versions of the Matter of Britain followed Tennyson more closely in producing domesticated versions of the legend, though often with an element of democratisation, as evident in the retellings of the legend for children, such as Sidney Lanier’s influential *The Boy’s King Arthur* (1880).

Tennyson’s conception of the myth was also evident in the utilisation of the myth as moral pedagogy by William Forbush in his proto-Scouting movement, the Knights of the Round Table. For Forbush and other American moralists the moral dangers that beset adolescents could be countered by an adherence to the rules of the nineteenth century’s conception of chivalry. And, as if to emphasise the link between Tennyson and his hierarchal organisation, not only was the *Idylls* required reading matter for all youths within Forbush’s movement but a boy could only progress through the various hierarchies of the organisation (Page, Esquire, Knight) through the recitation of large parts of the *Idylls*.97 As an instance of transatlantic retransmission, when Robert Baden Powell founded the British Scouting movement, he modelled them largely on Forbush’s knights and also urged his Scouts to read stories of chivalry, and the movement even commissioned a film that demonstrated the link between Scouts and Arthur’s knights called *Knights of the Square Table* (1917).98

Such was the power of the poetry, the success of its publication and the importance of its sanctioning by the state (through Tennyson’s Laureateship and the poems’ associations with the monarchy) that those poets and writers who did not find their world-view within Tennyson’s paradigm – among them Celticists, radicals and socialists – were either incorporated into the myth or else were forced to abandon
their efforts to write Arthurian literature. William Morris, for instance, produced a series of Arthurian poems between 1855 and 1858, which owed a debt of influence to Tennyson’s ‘The Lady of Shalott’ and the 1842 poems. Modern criticism has tended to concentrate on the more radical features of Morris’s poetry, emphasising ‘The Defence of Guinevere’, with its ‘extraordinarily modern [...] attitude to adultery’ and its attempt to ‘radically exploit’ the figure of Arthur ‘as upholder of establishment values.’ Yet Morris’s radical/conservative tendencies in respect of the Arthurian legend fluctuated continually. Although ‘Guinevere’ does present a defence of the queen’s adultery through richly textured images and emotions, another poem in the 1858 collection, ‘Arthur’s Tomb’, partly inspired by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting of the same title (fig.1), adopts a far more conventional (and Tennysonian) attitude, with Guinevere lamenting her role in the destruction of the kingdom and reviling Lancelot for his part in Arthur’s death.* The inability of Morris to reconcile his darker view of the medieval with the romantic idealism that he often displayed led him to abandon his planned epic on the Matter of Britain. What was also probably crucial to this decision was Tennyson’s obvious success in producing such a work. Morris did not, of course, share the same authoritarian political impulses that the Poet Laureate possessed and the double repellence of a narrative about medieval aristocrats and its embourgeoisement in the *Idylls* forced Morris to look toward the Norse myths in search of inspiration.

Algernon Swinburne has often been perceived as the antithesis of Tennyson, his *Tristram of Lyonesse* (1882) the poetic subversion of the *Idylls.* Personal correspondence certainly displays Swinburne’s hostility to Tennyson and his treatment of the story in ‘The Last Tournament’, which he saw as ‘degraded and

* However, ‘Arthur’s Tomb’ was published in the year Tennyson finished ‘Guinevere’, the latter text not being published until the following year (1859). Neither poem seems to have influenced the other, rather Morris and Tennyson were working on the same story with a similar method.
Yet the text with which Swinburne’s *Tristram* seems to contrast most directly is Arnold’s earlier ‘Tristram and Iseult’. Unlike Arnold, Swinburne was uninterested in the medieval as a moral theatre, in which thoughtless passions have dire consequences. There are no unfortunate orphans running about in the final verses to warn the reader of the dangers of unbridled desire. And Arnold’s other moral centrepiece, Iseult of Brittany, is presented without sympathy:

> So bitter burned within the unchilded wife  
> A virgin lust for vengeance, and such hate  
> Wrought in her now the fervent work of hate.\(^\text{103}\)

Instead, the passion of Tristram and Iseult of Ireland is the sole focus of this poem. And, again unlike Arnold, it is their death which constitutes the poem’s tragic conclusion:

> No change or gleam or gloom of sun and rain,  
> But all the time long the might of all the main  
> Spread round them as round earth soft heaven is spread,  
> And peace more strong than death round all the death.  
> For death is of an hour, and after death  
> Peace: nor aught that fear of fancy saith,  
> Nor even for very love’s own sake, shall strife  
> Perplex again that perfect peace with life.\(^\text{104}\)

Certainly, Swinburne’s version of the Tristram story is antithetical to Arnold’s account – though perhaps in making the subject of his poem exclusively that of Tristram and Iseult’s love for each other, Swinburne is partly influenced by the nineteenth-century’s domestication of all things medieval. But the common perception of his *Tristram* as forming an alternative to Tennyson’s *Idylls* is less convincing.

Following Swinburne’s own estimation of his verse, Richard Barber has written that it was composed in a unique ‘verse-form constructed according to his own
theories'. Yet there are Tennysonian resonances everywhere. In the passage quoted above the soft alliteration, the repetitions and cadences strongly resemble Tennyson’s (cf. ‘To make men worse by making my own sin known? / Or sin seem less, the sinner seeming great’, or, ‘His honour rooted in dishonour stood, / And Faith unfaithful kept him falsely true’). Swinburne’s conception of the lovers’ death as escape, couched in the language of the elements - ‘gleam or gloom of sun and rain’ - echoes Tennyson’s description of Avalon as the ‘island-valley […] Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow’. Indeed, the closeness of style between the *Idylls* and *Tristram* is evident throughout: Swinburne’s manner of relating the story through a series of set pieces, rather than through narrative progression, resembles Tennyson’s fragmentation of the traditional Arthurian legend into similar self-contained passages. Even the sea-imagery that is often celebrated in Swinburne’s poem, finds its predecessor in Tennyson’s *Idylls*.

Of course, Swinburne’s verse is less stately than Tennyson’s and there is no denouncement of Tristram and Iseult’s adultery to respond to the *Idylls’* condemnation of the lovers in ‘Guinevere’. Yet it is remarkable how many Tennysonian devices and stylistic mannerisms Swinburne adopted when producing his poetic cycle. Indeed, the whole work appears, not so much as an antithesis of Tennyson’s *Idylls*, but as an ancillary or parallel – less moral in tone but derivative both in style and also in its conception of the uses of the medieval as vehicle for domestic tragedy. And when Swinburne returned to the Arthurian myth later in his career, he did so with the ‘Tale of Balen’ (1896), a straight-forward retelling of the legend which ‘involves no moral problems’ and like Arnold’s and Tennyson’s verse ‘fits into the pattern of family tragedy’. Indeed, in its uncomplicated structure and simple, though somewhat protracted, narration, it is typical of the second-rate
adaptations which proliferated throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. A
generation after they had been written, readers appeared to have had little concept of
the poets’ differences, which are so commonly emphasised by modern critics. Thomas
Hardy certainly displayed no discrimination between them in his preface to The
Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall (1923); instead he declared that in his own
work he had ‘tried to avoid turning the rude personages of, say, the fifth-century into
respectable Victorians, as was done by Tennyson, Swinburne, Arnold, etc.’112

However opposed to the Tennysonian paradigm Victorian writers were, their
work could not help but be influenced by or subsumed within it. The extent of
Tennyson’s paradigmatic authority can be demonstrated by the relation of nineteenth-
century Arthurian literary production to the publication history of Tennyson’s poetry.
During the Idylls’ period of composition and publication in individual groups (two in
1857, two more added in 1859; four published in 1869; another two in 1872) the
dominant poetic and artistic mode of other Arthurian cultural productions reflected
Tennyson’s style: they were chiefly lyrical poems or isolated episodes from Malory’s
Morte Darthur, such as the works of Rossetti, Morris and Owen Meredith (Edward
Robert Bulwer-Lytton).113 After the publication of the Idylls as a twelve-book epic,
the nature of English Arthurian literature changed. Upon realising the full extent of
Tennyson’s tragic treatment of the legend, a tragedy that grows from malign rumours
in the early poems to full-blown calamity in the final idylls, writers became duly
preoccupied in their versions of the Matter of Britain with social and dynastic
collapse. This is particularly evident in Arthurian drama of the 1890s (discussed
below). Even the tendencies in visual representations of the myth altered from the
Pre-Raphaelites’ impressions of individual ‘affective moments’ in the legend towards
tragic epic cycles – such as in the later work of Edward Burne-Jones or F.J.
Simmons’s illustrated edition of the *Morte Darthur*, with its artwork by Aubrey Beardsley (1893).*114

This effect can be witnessed more generally. Since the accession of Henry VII to the throne of England, representations of the Arthurian legend had been predominantly celebratory – whether in pageants, masques, histories or literature. Even in the early years of the Romantic period, filled as it was with burlesque satire, Arthur was rarely seen in a less than exuberant guise. But after Tennyson, the story became firmly fixed in the tragic genre, with Arthurian poetry, drama and visual art all preoccupied concerned with Arthur’s death, the destruction of the kingdom and the ruination of an entire social system. This apocalyptic trend grew throughout the period after Tennyson’s death in 1892 and culminated in the Arthurian literature of the Great War.

**Arthurian literary production after Tennyson (1892-1914)**

If Arthurian literature produced in Tennyson’s lifetime was greatly influenced by the *Idylls*, the years immediately following the poet’s death in October 1892 witnessed the total domination of the Tennysonian paradigm. Barely an Arthurian poem was produced in Britain which veered away from the *Idylls’* domestic, tragic and moral interpretation, while its narrative and themes continued to be replicated in prose, drama, art galleries and architecture.

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* Compare, for instance, Rossetti’s famous watercolour, *King Arthur’s Tomb* (fig 1; 1854) and *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* by Edward Burne-Jones (fig 2; 1881-98). Both ostensibly narrate the same event: the mourning of Arthur, or an event that takes place after his death. The earlier painting’s focus, however, is clearly not on Arthur, who is entombed beneath the lovers, Lancelot and Guinevere. The drama of the piece is centred upon them, with Lancelot crowding the upper section of the painting in his attempt to gain a kiss from a reluctant Guinevere. By contrast, it is the tragedy of Arthur’s death that is being emphasised in Burne-Jones’s work (and in the paintings of many other artists from the 1880s onward). There is no drama surrounding the king’s dead body, which is laid out in a stately manner. Instead, the female figures circle his body, framing the audience’s eye around the dead king.
Scholarship, too, was essentially Tennysonian in approach. The *Idylls* formed something of an academic industry in the late nineteenth century. It was the subject of numerous monographs, such as those by Henry Elsdale (1878), Albert Hamann (1887) and Richard Jones (1895). The earliest scholarly editions of the *Idylls* were made by George Campbell Macaulay in 1892, while M.W. MacCallum (1894) and S. Humphrey Gurteen (1895) published book-length studies which presented the *Idylls* as the pinnacle of Arthurian literary achievement—a sentiment repeated in many later studies of the legend. Even when scholars looked on the older literary tradition—especially Malory—they did so through Tennyson’s distorting lens.

In the Romantic revival, Robert Southey had perceived Malory’s work to be a cobbled-together miscellany of superior French romances. It was a view still held by non-English editors in the late-nineteenth century, such as Malory’s great German editor, H. Oskar Sommer, who wrote of it in 1891:

[T]ruth demands that we should not rate him too highly. To put it mildly, his work is very unequal—sometimes he excels, but often he falls beneath, oftener still, he servilely reproduced his originals. Nor can his selections of material be unreservedly praised.

Yet for English scholars, post-*Idylls*, the *Morte Darthur* became a work of ‘epic unity and harmony’, as Edward Strachey put it in 1891. In 1912 George Saintsbury wrote of Malory: ‘that he, and only he in any language, makes of this vast assemblage of stories one story, and one book’. Whereas earlier writers understood it as essentially a foreign story, created by the ancestors of the modern Welsh and improved by the French romancers, the Victorians saw the *Morte* as ‘our English epic’. In 1897 Saintsbury claimed that only Malory’s ‘English genius’ was able to synthesise the heterogeneous aspects of the Matter of Britain: ‘Classical rhetoric, French gallantry, Saxon religiosity and intense realisation of the other world, Oriental
extravagance to some extent, the “Celtic vague”. While Malory did certainly Anglicise French romances, these scholars were not so much commenting on the *Morte* as constructing it as an English epic *in the manner* of Tennyson’s *Idylls*. They were imbuing the literary qualities and cultural meanings of Tennyson’s Victorian *Idylls* into Malory’s fifteenth-century *Morte*. As part of a historical impulse, they were attempting to locate the bourgeois ideology of Tennyson’s domesticated epic as emerging from England’s cultural past.\(^*\)

Creative literary production, meanwhile, can be seen to flow in three distinct courses after Tennyson’s death. First there was the merely derivative: poems that strove to replicate the *Idylls’* version of the legend, which made few alterations to the stylistic, narrative or thematic structure of the Tennysonian paradigm. Second, there were those works which attempted to extend this paradigm into new genres. There was a surge in Arthurian drama in the mid-1890s, much of which sought to reproduce the *Idylls* on stage. The plays were almost exclusively tragic and came replete with poignant death scenes and mourning Bediveres. Third, there was the non-*Idylls*-based Arthuriana. A large part of this corpus was concerned with Galahad, as derived from Tennyson’s ‘Sir Galahad’ (1842), rather than the later ‘The Holy Grail’ (1868) – this body of literature is dealt with in the following chapter. From the middle of the Edwardian period there was also an increased interest in tales ancillary to the Arthurian core story. Particularly prominent were reworkings of the Tristram and Iseult narrative in both drama and poetry, but writers were also drawn to tales of Launfal, Parsifal, and Uther and Igraine. And while the increased attention paid to non-*Idylls* Arthuriana suggested that writers were attempting to break free from Tennyson’s influence, Arthurian and ancillary literature remained domestic, often

\(^*\) In addition, the moralised adaptations of the *Morte* by J.T. Knowles and Sidney Lanier, as well as academic abridgements by Edward Strachey and his predecessors, certainly assisted in domesticating Malory’s text – again making it more in line with Tennyson’s epic.
poignantly tragic and, above all, idyllic – which were essentially the qualities of the Tennysonian paradigm. As the dramatists brought the *Idylls* to new forms, the authors who reworked Tristram, Launfal, Parsifal and others were merely appropriating a wider set of narratives into the Tennysonian tradition.

Of the imitative writers little needs to be said. They were poets who wished to reproduce the effects of the *Idylls* and the early lyrics, but who rarely possessed the talents to do so. Often these largely-forgotten poets reworked Tennyson’s verses into nominally new forms – sometimes repeating the same lines in more or less the same context. One example is Alfred Austin, the poet, novelist, critic and journalist of extreme conservative bias, who succeeded Tennyson as Poet Laureate in 1896. Two years later he produced an eulogy for his predecessor: ‘The Passing of Merlin’.

Austin’s tribute begins with an epigraph from ‘Merlin and the Gleam’ (1889), Tennyson’s last Arthurian poem, and establishes the Merlin-Tennyson association in the third stanza:

Merlin has gone, Merlin who followed the Gleam,
And made us follow it; the flying tale
Of the Last Tournament, the Holy Grail,
And Arthur’s Passing, till the Enchanter’s dream
Dwells with us still awake, no visionary theme.123

Austin’s grief at Tennyson’s passing was alleviated, however, by the thought that though the previous Poet Laureate was dead, ‘never hath England lacked a voice to sing / Her fairness and her fame, nor will she now’.124

* Austin was not always an admirer of Tennyson’s work, and his transition from hostile critic to devotee is illustrative of the latter’s rise to pre-eminence in the Victorian cultural world. He had written in 1870 that ‘Mr Tennyson is not a great poet, unquestionably not a poet of the first rank, all but unquestionably not a poet of the second rank and probably – though no contemporary perhaps can settle that – not even at the head of poets of the third rank, among whom he must ultimately take his place.’ (Austin, *Poetry of the Period*, 4).
Austin seems to have intended that one of these replacement patriotic voices would be his own. And considering some of the poem’s stanzas, contemporary readers may have believed that Tennyson had not so much died, but – like Merlin – had entered a long period of dotage, in which he endlessly repeats his earlier verse. To conclude his eulogy, Austin could find no better lines than Tennyson’s ‘The Passing of Arthur’, though repeated with lesser effect:

A wailing cometh from the shores that veil
Avilion’s island valley; on the mere,
Looms through the mist and wet winds weeping blear
A dusky barge, which, without oar or sail,
Fades to the far-off fields where falls not snow nor hail. […]

And there He will be comforted; but we
Must watch, like Bedivere, the dwindling light
That slowly shrouds Him darkling from our sight.
From the great deep to the great deep hath He Passed, and, if now He knows, is mute eternally.\(^{125}\)

Indeed, such is the effect of Austin’s collage of quotation that the whole thing appears as an unintended pastiche. Austin, it appears, was in earnest; his rehashing of Tennyson’s lines was, perhaps, intended to signal Austin’s mastery of Tennysonian verse.

Of course, not all of Tennyson-derived poetry was as lamentable as this. The Welsh poet T. Gwynn Jones based his great poem ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ (‘The Passing of Arthur’) on the same verses which Austin mauled in his eulogy to the great Victorian poet. But, whereas Austin lessened the effect of Tennyson’s verse when he imitated it in ‘The Passing of Merlin’, Jones transformed the final *Idyll* into a new literary edifice – one of the finest *Cymraeg* poems of the twentieth century. So successful was Jones’s ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ that it sparked a literary revival in Wales, which resulted in some of the finest *Cymraeg* poetry to be produced since the
fifteenth-century verse of Dafydd ap Gwilym. As discussed in chapter four, in taking Tennyson’s ‘The Passing of Arthur’ as his source, Jones appropriated what was, at the time, a predominantly English narrative and transformed it into a Welsh symbol of national renewal – Jones’s awdl concluding, not with Arthur telling Bedivere to ‘[c]omfort thyself; what comfort is in me?’, but with the king’s promise to return to his people and to bring them ‘anadl einioes y Genedl’ (‘the breath of the nation’). It proved a compelling promise for a generation of Welsh poets.

Another turn-of-the-century poet who continued to develop the Tennysonian version of the Arthurian story was the Scottish John Davidson. His ‘Last Ballad’ (1899) is the first post-Tennyson work to focus exclusively on Lancelot. In this poem Davidson took Lancelot away from the court into the wastelands of Arthur’s kingdom, where he tries to escape his ‘noxious love’ for the queen. As in Tennyson’s Idylls, ‘The Last Ballad’ is filled with the apocalyptic images of social destruction caused by individuals’ failure to harness private desires in order to serve the state. One of the best modern Scottish retellings of Arthur (further discussed in chapter four), ‘The Last Ballad’ proved influential on later versions of the story, particularly on T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land (1922; see chapter three). Davidson’s poem was also the first published Arthurian work to make serious use of the ballad form since the sixteenth century and probably inspired a number of subsequent ballad treatments on both sides of the Atlantic, including those by G.K. Chesterton and Sidney Fowler Wright.

One of the best known of these later ballads is John Masefield’s ‘The Ballad of Sir Bors’ (1913), a grim soliloquy spoken during Bors’s quest for the Grail. Clearly derived from Tennyson’s ‘Sir Galahad’ (1842), this ballad was Masefield’s first published Arthurian work. Like Tennyson’s, Masefield’s poem is set during the quest

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* That Lancelot remained in the background of most retellings of the Arthurian narrative in the nineteenth century testifies to the dominance of Tennyson’s over Malory’s version of the story.
for the Holy Grail. But unlike the superhuman Galahad, Bors is physically wearied of
his task. Whereas Tennyson’s Galahad is filled with the ‘strength of ten’, because he
is entirely spiritually sustained, Bors is wearied; his horse ‘spavined and ribbed’;
his sword ‘rotten with rust’ and his rider longs to ‘win some quiet rest, and a little
ease.’ And while Galahad ends with a declaration of spiritual indefatigability (‘All­
armed I ride, whate’er betide, / Until I find the holy Grail’), Masefield’s Sir Bors can
only pray for death:

And the bright white birds of God will carry my soul to Christ,
And the sight of the rose, the Rose, will pay for all the years of Hell.

Bors here appears as a weary soldier still following, if seemingly futilely, a righteous
dream, which proved to be symbolic of how the Victorian version of the Arthurian
story continued into a twentieth century that would prove to be radically unsuitable
for such noble, Christian quests. It was a tension which Masefield – who always
described himself as a late-Victorian – would explore throughout his work and
particularly in his Arthurian writing.*

Yet while Idylls-influenced Arthurian poetry would continue to be written
until the Great War, the dominant form of Arthurian literary production in the years
following Tennyson’s death was theatrical – though it was as Tennysonian as the
poetry of Austin and Davidson. As mentioned above, Tennyson had planned several
dramatic renditions of the Matter of Britain before settling on his epic structure, and
the dialogic form of the Idylls, with their lengthy speeches in iambic pentameter, were
easily translated onto the stage. These plays were almost exclusively concerned with
the downfall of the Arthurian kingdom, and borrowed heavily from the later Idylls,

* Masefield published Arthurian poems, novels and plays throughout his career. Particularly important
are his collection of ballads, Midsummer Night and Other Poems (1927) and Badon Parchments
(1947), one of the earliest historical-novel treatments of the Arthurian story. They are discussed in
chapters five and six.
with ‘Guinevere’ and ‘The Passing of Arthur’ featuring most often, though ‘Merlin and Vivian’ and ‘Lancelot and Elaine’ (as well as the non-
Idylls ‘The Lady of Shalott’) were prominent also. While many plays borrowed lines, themes and characterisation from the Idylls others explicitly stated their derivation from Tennyson’s poems. When, for instance, the Court Theatre staged Vera Leslie’s Guinevere in 1903, its subtitle made clear that it was ‘adapted from Tennyson’s poem’. The vogue for directly rendering individual Idylls for the stage continued into the twenties, with Sivori Levey, Ellden Mary Hill, Grace Calvert Holland and Winifred F. Allen all publishing plays written for both London and local parish audiences, often with a specifically Christian bias.

The trend for staged versions of the Arthurian story began with the transatlantic commercial success of J. Comyns Carr’s King Arthur (1895). Contemporary audiences, according to one reviewer, were so ‘saturated with and steeped in the Tennysonian version of the legend’ that they fully anticipated Carr’s drama to be a staged production of the Idylls. They were not, on the whole, disappointed. King Arthur is a well-constructed drama which rushes through many of the key scenes of the legend as they appear in the Idylls. Apart from the prologue, which is roughly analogous to ‘The Coming of Arthur’, the drama takes place in the final days of the Arthurian reign. The early preliminaries show the developing affair of Lancelot and Guinevere and the preparations for the quest of the Grail, which here serves only to weaken Arthur’s strength of knights, while Mordred and Morgan, his mother, plot his downfall. After this the play moves through a series of pageant-like episodes from the later Idylls. The death of Elaine is narrated in sub-Tennysonian blank verse, quite obviously derived from ‘Lancelot and Elaine’ and ‘The Lady of Shalott’. There follows a similarly bowdlerised version of Arthur’s final speech to his
queen as it appears in ‘Guinevere’, though Carr’s speech ends with denunciation of her rather than forgiveness:

Go, tell the world thy heart hath slain a heart
That once had once been a King’s. Yet that’s not all,
Thou too hast been a Queen whose soul shone clear,
A star for all men’s worship, and a lamp
Set high in Heaven, whereby all frailer hearts
Should steer their cause towards God; then, ’tis not I
Whose life lies broken here, for at thy fall
A shattered kingdom bleeds.\(^{136}\)

Throughout this speech, as in Tennyson, Guinevere lies prostrate at Arthur’s feet. And at the very end of the play, after Arthur has been mortally wounded, as the stage darkens and Arthur is taken from the stage, Merlin, rather than Bedivere, speaks the final lines:

The King that was, the King that yet shall be [...]  
Look where the dawn
Sweeps through a wider heaven, and on its wings
By those three Queens of night his barge is borne
To that sweet Isle of Avalon whose sleep
Can heal all earthly wounds.\(^{137}\)

To make the Tennysonian associations even more pronounced, the sets had been designed by Edward Burne-Jones, Tennyson’s most ardent and talented artistic follower.*

Patriarchal, statist and with dramatic sympathy firmly located with Arthur as both the head of government and the focus of this family tragedy, J. Comyns Carr’s *King Arthur* was the most successful and most influential of the Arthurian dramas. It replicated and simplified the *Idylls*, harnessing its dialogue and symbols to the great

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* Burne-Jones, incidentally, did not like the play and designed the sets only as a favour for Henry Irving, who staged Carr’s *King Arthur*. Burne-Jones remembered the play for ‘jingo bits about the sea and England which Carr should be ashamed of’ (Jerome V. Reel, Jnr, ‘Sing a Song of Arthur’, in *King Arthur in Popular Culture*, 124).
swathes of Tennyson-inspired art that had been produced in the second half of the
nineteenth century. The reviews were mostly appreciative,\textsuperscript{138} though George Bernard
Shaw was unsatisfied with the piece. Apart from deriding the play’s incidental music
by Arthur Sullivan and terming Carr a ‘jobber’, Shaw was particularly affronted by
Arthur’s speech to Guinevere. Describing it as an ‘unpardonable scene’, he went on:

That vision of a fine figure of a woman, torn with sobs and remorse, stretched
at the feet of a nobly superior and deeply wronged lord of creation, is no doubt
still as popular with the men whose sentimental vanity it flatters as it was in
the days of the \textit{Idylls of the King}. But since then we have been learning that a
woman is something more than a piece of sweetstuff to fatten a man’s
emotions.\textsuperscript{*}

Indeed, at a time when the London stage was filled with considerations of ‘the woman
question’ – and with dramatists such as Pinero, Ibsen, Wilde and, indeed, Shaw asking
many of the questions – Carr’s portrait of a prostrate and pathetic Guinevere does
seem anachronistic. And as Arthurian drama stretched into the next century, through
the work of F.B. Money Coutts, Ernest Rhys, Morely Steynor and Arthur Dillon, the
whole Tennysonian paradigm began to appear increasingly out of date.\textsuperscript{139} An element
of stagnation had appeared which playwrights seemed unable to counter.

Occasionally some dramatist would offer a contradiction to the patriarchal
structure of the corpus of Arthurian drama. In the same year as Carr produced \textit{King
Arthur}, Henry Newbolt published \textit{Mordred: a tragedy}, which presented Arthur as a
flawed king who contravenes his own rules of chivalry in concealing the fact that
Mordred is his illegitimate son, which leads to the concluding calamity. In the final
dialogue between Arthur and Guinevere, it is not the queen who is forced to ask for
forgiveness, but Arthur. Although she had loved Lancelot for many years, she had

\textsuperscript{*} Shaw also lamented that the notable talents of Ellen Terry, who played Guinevere in Henry Irving’s
production, were wasted on such ‘sham-feminine twaddle in blank verse’: ‘it was the old story of real
women’s parts condemned to figure as a mere artist’s model in costume plays which, from the
woman’s point of view, are foolish flatteries written by gentleman for gentlemen’.
remained loyal to the king because of her respect for his high idealism. Yet when she learns of his deceit, she too falls, later saying to the king:

I scorned thee not
For any fault of boyhood, but I heard
A man, midway upon the road of life,
A king, for justice throned, deliberate,
Upholding lust and treason for the sake
Of the old-time fellowship they claimed with him.
I heard thee: love and hate that moment broke
The dungeon-keep of duty.\textsuperscript{140}

Newbolt’s play, however, was an aberration – both in terms of the Tennysonian paradigm and the author’s own highly conservative politics.\textsuperscript{*} Unlike Carr’s play which achieved great commercial success, Newbolt’s \textit{Mordred} was never performed and is unlikely to have influenced any later dramatic treatment, and the author is now chiefly remembered for his jingoist line ‘Play up! play up! and play the game!’\textsuperscript{141}

Other playwrights who refused the patriarchal structure of Carr’s adaptation of the \textit{Idylls} include Graham Hill and the Scottish dramatist, Martha Kinross. In \textit{Guinevere} (1906) Hill largely paraphrased Morris’s ‘Defence of Guinevere’ as the queen attempts to exonerate herself in front of Arthur’s court:

And yet I lie not when I say ye lie!
Since first I came, my heart has ever roamed
Loveless through Arthur’s halls, and quite alone,
While he [Lancelot] was near that loved me as his soul.

\textsuperscript{*} It is not only Guinevere who appears very different from her usual Victorian character. Mordred, too, is treated much more sympathetically than in other Victorian texts. Throughout the play Mordred perceives himself to be aggrieved – not only because of his unrecognised relationship to Arthur but also because he sees Arthur’s idealism as tyranny:

- We do but crave
- For freedom; every current of the rime
- Sets toward a kindly faith and tend’rer laws;
- Only these vows oppress us, crying still
- ‘Thou shalt not,’ in the ear of lusty youth,
- To whom no voice should call but Nature’s own. (V.i.)

This theme of oppression continues until the penultimate scene in which, despite the protests of his knights, Arthur slays Mordred, who with his dying breath cries ‘Life! Life! One year of life – untyrannised’ (V.ii).
Love is not shame, nor lack of it a crime;  
I speak God’s truth, and tell ye that ye lie!\textsuperscript{142}

Yet despite Hill’s assertion that Guinevere is ‘not guilty’ the play, like Morris’ poem, has very little to offer by way of defence other than to repeat the refrain ‘And yet I lie not when I say ye lie’. Martha Kinross’s \textit{Tristram and Isoult} (1913), another blank-verse drama, is also sympathetic to Guinevere’s position. The play begins with Guinevere and Isoult discussing their unhappy relationships, while watching the knights of Arthur’s court engage in jousts. Yet it is the Cornish queen who becomes the feminist focus of this drama. As Isoult resists the violent Mark and brings the drama to its conclusion, through choosing to drink the poison in a last act of defiance, Guinevere is left to describe her fellow queen as ‘fearless’, but is unable to alter her own fate.\textsuperscript{143}

Kinross’s play was one of a large body of Tristram and Iseult dramas produced in the early part of the twentieth century. Antonia Williams, J. Comyns Carr, Thomas Herbert Lee, Maurice Baring, Michael Field (the pseudonym of Katherine Harris Bradley and Edith Emma Cooper) and Arthur Symons all produced such plays in the first decades of the century, with more appearing in the 1920s, including Thomas Hardy’s \textit{The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall} (1923) and John Masefield’s \textit{Tristan and Isolt} (1927).\textsuperscript{144} Verse renditions by G. Constant Lounsbery, Cyril Emra and Laurence Binyon all appeared before the First World War.\textsuperscript{145} Perhaps part of the appeal of the Tristram and Iseult story, in comparison to the Arthurian, lay in the greater freedom with which writers could compose their own versions. The nineteenth century produced four distinct retellings of the legend – each with particular appeal. There was the moral-domestic tale of Arnold’s \textit{Tristram and Iseult}; the brief Arthurian version of Tennyson’s ‘The Last Tournament’; Swinburne’s sensual and
Celticised *Tristram of Lyonesse*, as well as Wagner’s music drama *Tristan und Isolde* (1859). In addition to these texts, there was the scholarly reconstruction of the early Tristram story by French scholar Joseph Bédier, whose *Le Roman de Tristan et Iseult* (1900) was translated by Hilaire Belloc in 1903. This text supplied writers and academics alike with an ‘authoritative’ version of the legend as it may have been known to the authors of the earliest surviving Tristram literature (Thomas, Béroul, Eilhart and Gottfried) and seems likely to have inspired the new vogue for the Tristram story in England in the mid-Edwardian period.

The vogue for Tristram and Iseult drama suggests that writers were reacting against the influence of Tennyson. Those dissatisfied with the dominance of the *Idylls* paradigm also wrote on other tales ancillary to the Arthurian story. George Warwick Deeping set his first novel, *Uther and Igraine* (1903), in the period immediately preceding Arthur’s reign, while other writers turned away from the usual Arthurian cast and wrote of characters who were not prominent in the *Idylls*. T.E. Ellis took Lanfal as his protagonist in his four-act drama of 1908 while Jessie Weston’s ‘Knights of King Arthur’s Court’ (1896) concentrated on the role of Percival in the Grail quest, as did R.C. Trevelyan in *The Birth of Parsival* (1905) and *The New Parsifal* (1914). There was also a developing trend for authors to divorce the Grail from its Arthurian frame. Evelyn Underhill’s *The Column of Dust* (1909) was the first of several novels and novellas which transferred the Grail to modern rural and urban surroundings (these are discussed in chapter three).

While the vogue for producing non-Tennysonian Arthurian literature revealed many twentieth-century authors’ discontent with the dominance of the *Idylls*, none of these works challenged the authority of the paradigm. They avoided the Tennysonian

*Whether poets and dramatists chose English or German sources as their chief inspiration is usually apparent in the name-form of their hero: ‘Tristram’ signifying English influence, ‘Tristan’ betraying a Wagnerian bias.*
story, rather than trying to rewrite or adapt it to suit contemporary social contexts. And throughout the period Tennyson’s poetry had been sold and read in Edwardian and Georgian homes and numerous lesser poets and authors (often writing for children) had continued replicating the *Idylls* for new audiences. Those few writers who did dissent from the paradigm – Hill in his, rather limited, defence of Guinevere, or Kinross in her brief but sympathetic portrait of the queen – only managed to give voice to individual characters’ resistance to a nineteenth-century plot. Guinevere may rail at her treatment at the hands of Arthur and his knights, but the narrative and ideological structure of Hill’s and Kinross’s plays remain conservative, patriarchal and overwhelmingly domestic.

Whereas in the nineteenth century the *Idylls* had been an epic treatment of liberal bourgeois England, which had striven to present ‘all the lights and all the woes’ of half a century, the Tennysonian literature of the early twentieth century was increasingly reactionary, harking back to a never-never land of Victorian idealism. The element of patriarchal chauvinism evident in the *Idylls* themselves had, in the hands of Carr and his successors, become the dominant theme in subsequent Arthurian drama and the legend as a whole had become an increasingly unwieldy edifice. And yet it would require a momentous act of history to dislodge the Tennysonian paradigm and the Victorian conception of the medieval: this was the Great War.
Chapter Two

That ‘dim, weird battle in the west’: Arthurian literary production and the Great War

Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* was one of the great cultural achievements of the Victorian age. Its influence was apparent everywhere and, in terms of the Arthurian story, it dominated subsequent literary production for decades. And although as a paradigm it seems to have grown stagnant in the Edwardian and Georgian years (its literary products being the ‘uninspired beneficiaries of the Victorian momentum’, in Nathan Comfort Starr’s words), it remained a culturally persuasive and influential force: its authority only challenged by the outbreak of the Great War.¹

The 1914-1918 conflict proved ruinous for the Tennysonian paradigm, as it did so many other monuments of Victorian, bourgeois culture. The story of Arthur itself was little employed by the wartime propagandists who sought to utilise chivalry and medieval iconography as part of the ideological war effort. The story of a British civilisation overwhelmed by Saxon hordes was hardly inspirational stuff, especially when depicted, as in the *Idylls*, as a form of internal collapse. The *Idylls*, in particular, were unsuitable as wartime reading. Tennyson’s epic presented war as a wholly
destructive force. There is little martial glory in Tennyson’s depiction of the ‘last, dim, weird battle of the west’ in which ‘friend and foe were shadows in the mist, /
And friend slew friend not knowing which he slew’; or in:

Oaths, insults, filth and monstrous blasphemies,  
Sweat, writhings, anguish, labouring of the lungs  
In that close mist, and cryings for the light,  
Moans for the dying, and voices for the dead.²

And although there was a resurgence in interest in the Matter of Britain in the closing years of the war – chiefly with poets and artists registering their horror of modern warfare – the Tennysonian paradigm never fully recovered its pre-war dominance. The guns of Europe wrecked the Victorian Camelot.

Yet the Arthurian story was not entirely abandoned in these years, for many jingoists who rejected Arthur could turn to Galahad for patriotic inspiration. The cult of this ‘pure knight’ had been growing throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as an alternative to the moral complexities of the Idylls. Throughout the Victorian age, Galahad and the Grail were ancillary, rather than essential, parts of the Arthurian story and before examining the ways in which this ‘maiden knight’ was utilised during the First World War, it is necessary to examine how the cult of Galahad developed in the previous century.

The cult of Galahad in the nineteenth century

When war broke out in August 1914, many patriotic poets and propagandists utilised Victorian notions of chivalry to persuade young men to enlist in what would, they assured them, be a short, glorious war.³ Yet Arthur, Lancelot, Tristram and Perceval were seldom among those paraded heroes of the British past. This had little to do with their mythical, rather than historical, basis; after all, St George was the most
commonly evoked chivalric figure throughout the war. Rather, this absence was the
direct result of the increased domestication of the legend in the years after Tennyson’s
death. From 1892 to the eve of war, poets and dramatists had steadily increased the
domesticity of the *Idylls* – hardly a martial epic anyway – and the focus of most
Arthurian works was placed solely on the marital infidelities of Guinevere and the
mischievous plotting of Arthur’s nephew/son, Mordred. Arthur was an aged cuckold,
Lancelot was not heroic enough to drive back the Boche hordes, Tristram spent too
much time swooning over Iseult to be an effective leader of men and no text of the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had taken Gawain, the most obviously
English knight, as its protagonist.

The jingoists, however, had an alternative in one of Arthur’s knights –
Galahad. Galahad and the Grail had not been essential components of the Arthurian
story for many writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scarcely
any dramatist had included Galahad in their Arthurian plays, focussed as they were
almost exclusively on the love triangle of Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot. The
‘maiden knight’ had become an ancillary figure, with his own literary and artistic
tradition, which was only intermittently incorporated into the larger Matter of Britain
– even though, like the larger Arthurian story, it achieved popularity through
Tennyson’s verse.

It was not the Galahad of the *Idylls* that headmasters, poetasters, painters and
moralists had encouraged the public (and particularly the young) to admire. Rather, it
was Tennyson’s 1842 poem, ‘Sir Galahad’, that ignited and maintained interest in
Lancelot’s illegitimate son. The moral complexities of Tennyson’s mature Galahad of
‘The Holy Grail’ (1869) were of much less appeal than the knight who demonstrated
that physical and martial strength follows causally from moral health:
By 1914 this direct relationship would define the propagandists’ chivalric ethos. It simplified the whole Arthurian story and during the war it temporarily replaced it, as it was free from any of the morally complicated issues which enriched Arthurian literary production throughout the nineteenth century. The story of Galahad was essentially a subsidiary paradigm – in its righteous simplicity it became a version of the Tennysonian paradigm fit for sermonising bishops, jingoists and sloganeers.

The most notable thing about Tennyson’s ‘Sir Galahad’, in terms of the subsequent development of the cult of Galahad, is that Tennyson depicted the maiden knight in the midst of his quest for the Holy Grail, rather than at the point of achieving it. Had Tennyson portrayed Galahad accomplishing his ambition, the figure would have been of much less use to Victorian writers and artists. He would have been, as in the thirteenth-century *Queste del Saint Graal* or Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, explicitly and exclusively bound up with the Grail story, along with its associations with the Eucharist, Catholicism and, even more dangerously in the 1840s and 50s, the Oxford Movement. Yet, although works such as Tennyson’s ‘The Holy Grail’ and Robert Stephen Hawker’s ‘The Quest of the Sangrail’ (1863) would treat Galahad exclusively in terms of the holy vessel, many – if not the majority – of nineteenth-century Galahad texts regarded the maiden knight independent of his Grail associations. Galahad became an emblem of questing youth, irrespective of whether that quest was for chivalric, spiritual, martial or moral purposes.

Presentations of Galahad in the nineteenth century were multifarious. For many, he was a spiritual ideal, removed from the earthly plane. For Tennyson in ‘The Holy Grail’, Galahad’s single-minded pursuit of the Grail, tinged with Anglo-
Catholicism, lessened him as a suitable heroic principal, as did his total disregard for secular virtue. In other works, his virtuousness became associated with a somewhat effeminate character. Representations of Galahad as a passive, feminine youth were common in the Pre-Raphaelite art of Gabriel Rossetti, Elizabeth Siddal and the young Burne-Jones (figs 3-5). In Davidson’s ‘The Last Ballad’, Galahad’s traditional epithet, ‘the maiden knight’, is largely dispensed with in favour of calling him, simply, a ‘maiden’. And the Galahad of Elinor Sweetman’s ‘Pastoral’ (1899) is more interested in making himself floral garlands than in more typical knightly activity:

Eleven at the Table Round
With gemmy carcanets are crowned:
The twelfth hath flowers of woodroffe wild
Around his forehead bound.
He cometh singing like the lark –
He entereth gay with garlands green –
‘Art shepherd-clown or chapel-clerk,
O knight?’ said Guinevere the queen
To Galahad undefiled.

Yet an effeminate Galahad was not ubiquitous in the nineteenth century. Kate Ramage in 1884 depicted an ‘honest, manly, tender, true’ knight, with hands that are ‘[r]ough [...] and work soiled’. Her muscular portrait was more in accord with the larger body of medievalist literature which sought to reconcile Galahad’s spiritual idealism with more secular social issues – a trend that began with Charlotte M. Yonge’s novel, The Heir of Redclyffe (1853). Yonge’s first novel was written in the midst of the Victorian cult of the hero: Thomas Carlyle had published his On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in Literature in 1841 and Thomas Hughes would publish his Carlylean children’s novel Tom Brown’s Schooldays in 1857.

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* This effeminate Galahad perhaps explains why Galahad did not become a popular name for children born in the second half of the nineteenth century, while Arthur, Gareth and Lancelot all did. Perhaps the most famous (literary) bearer of this name was the ineffectual aged man-about-town, Sir Galahad, of P.G. Wodehouse’s Blandings novels – an ignominious descendant.
Redclyffe concerns a robust, contemporary youth, Sir Guy Morville, who through Christian magnanimity and the imitation of Galahad, his hero, manages to overcome his single shortcoming – a passionate, destructive temper, which threatens to overwhelm him at several points early on in the novel.* Through his imitation of Galahad, the vigorous and masculine Morville is led to a virtuous life and dies a suitably Christian death.

Yonge was a devout Anglican and ardent moralist, who encouraged virtue in her readers through ‘character and example, rather than by exhortation’. In his reading of the *Morte Darthur* and imitation of Sir Galahad, Morville is in many ways Yonge’s ideal reader. The author’s biographer, Georgina Battiscombe, remarked that it was Yonge’s ‘particular gift to make ordinary, everyday goodness appear the most exciting thing in the world’. By associating it with Galahad, Yonge raised Morville’s moral righteousness to the level of idealised chivalry. And Galahad became, in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, a far more attractive model of virtue to England’s bourgeois readers than the ascetic Grail-quester of medieval legend, or the feminised ideal of Elinor Sweetman and others. Yonge’s novel was remarkably successful and went through thirteen editions in fifteen years. It was also a favourite of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones and inspired later Christian moralists to continue to

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* Guy Morville is, in fact surrounded by allusions to the Arthurian legend and chivalry. He is repeatedly described as ‘a true knight’ and also as ‘a knight of the round table’ and ‘a chivalrous lover’ (vol. II, 29, 67, 187). The *Morte Darthur* is his companion for three summers when a boy. To his friends he extols the book’s virtues: ‘[t]he depth, the mystery, the allegory – the beautiful characters of some of the knights’ in ‘its two fat volumes’ (vol. I, 176-7). He also composes ‘a very boyish epic on King Arthur, beginning with a storm at Tintagel’ (vol. II, 246). But it is the figure of Galahad who is of the greatest importance. He is first mentioned in a parlour game played among the residents of Redclyffe Hall. Each person had to name his or her favourite flower, virtue, and character in both history and fiction, as well as at which time they would like to have lived. Guy chooses ‘Heather – Truth – King Charles – Sir Galahad – the present time’ (vol. I, 176). Later in the novel a distinguished artist asks Guy to be the model for Galahad, kneeling before the Grail. (vol. II, 157-9). This last scene is of particular importance as by 1852 when Yonge wrote *The Heir of Redclyffe* William Dyce was the only artist to have made a painting of Galahad – his *Religion: the vision of Sir Galahad and his company* (1851), the first of the Arthurian frescoes to be completed for the Queen’s Robing Room at the Palace at Westminster. The vogue for visual representations of Galahad would not begin until later in the decade.
relate the figure of Galahad to the contemporary world. A.M. Grange’s *A Modern Galahad* (1895) and J. Lockhart Haigh’s *Sir Galahad of the Slums* (1907) were direct descendents of Yonge’s novel, although their settings became increasingly more urban and squalid. The sub-genre of the poor, urban Galahad was particularly popular in America, beginning with Elizabeth Stuart Phelps’s short story, ‘The Christmas of Sir Galahad’ (1871).

Of course, Galahad never really belonged to the poor – even in the form of didactic moral tales. This most Christian of knights was far more utilised in the public school than in the ‘slums’. And, alongside Tennyson’s 1842 poem, the most influential articulation of bourgeois-gentry Galahad was George Frederick Watts’s 1862 painting, *Sir Galahad* (fig. 6), which achieved much wider appeal than had any earlier visual treatment of the legend. By 1914 copies of the painting ‘hung in nurseries and school rooms throughout England and the British Empire’. It is a very different portrait of Galahad from the slight and feminine figures evident in Siddall’s and Burne-Jones’s paintings (figs 4 and 5), while eschewing the mystical and exotic elements of Rossetti’s *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel* (fig. 3). Instead, the scene shows a young knight, of noble appearance, resting his horse while he gazes into the distance in a contemplative mood. The ground on which he stands rises steadily in front of him, symbolising the hardships of the quest before him. And though he is at rest, the armour, the broad sword and the musculature of the knight indicate that, while Galahad is still the embodiment of virtue, the task ahead of him is one of physical endurance, requiring bodily, as well as spiritual strength.

Watts’s work influenced many later English artists who treated the Grail. Unlike the earlier Pre-Raphaelite paintings of Galahad, those by Arthur Hughes (1870; fig. 7) and Joseph Noël Paton (1879, 1885; figs 8 and 9) follow Watts in
portraying the difficulty of Galahad’s quest, though both painters indulge in a
Victorian appetite for angels, who assist the knight on his journey. The painting also
achieved immediate success with critics. The anonymous Times critic claimed that
‘for stateliness, solemnity and imaginative suggestion the picture stands apart from
everything in the [Royal Academy] exhibition.’ He praised the sense of hidden drama
in the piece: Galahad’s contemplation ‘of some wide waste spread below, peopled
with adventure, and glorified with hopes of success in his quest for the Holy Grail’.

Watt’s painting found firm favour with educational establishments. Long
before Harvard University acquired the original in 1943, Eton’s headmaster H.E.
Luxmoore had repeatedly petitioned Watts to allow Eton to purchase the painting.
This being impossible, Watts worked-up an earlier sketch and presented it to the
school, where it was hung in the chapel in 1892. Luxmoore gave prints of the work
to favoured students and also declared that the painting was a useful ‘peg whereon to
hang an occasional little discourse [...] upon the dignity and beauty of purity and
chivalry’. He believed such notions were much better imparted through the medium
of Watts’s painting than through his own dry homilies. No longer the isolated, ascetic
individual of medieval literature, the Victorian Galahad had become, through the
work of Watts, Yonge and their successors, an exemplar for thousands to admire and
imitate.

The success of Watts’s Sir Galahad was founded on the hybrid nature of
Victorian chivalry – a hybrid which this painting did much to define. Watts’s painting
carries no explicit reference to the Grail: although the young knight gazes upwards,
there are no indications of the object of Galahad’s quest. Indeed, Christian
iconography is absent throughout the painting and explicit associations with
Christianity remains only in the mind of the viewer. In 1894 M.W. MacCallum
defined the chivalry of the Middle Ages as 'a kind of compromise between the ascetic theology of the medieval church and the unsanctified life of the world which the church rejected as wholly bad'. This was at no time truer than it was in the Victorian period. The violent acquisitiveness that formed the economic base of the feudal aristocracy now underpinned the economic exploitation of the British working classes as well as the indigenous populaces of the Empire's numerous colonies. In neither historical period could the tenets of Christianity be fully reconciled to the martial and exploitative nature of feudal or capitalist prosperity.

The Victorian reinvention of Chivalry was just another means of justifying these aberrations in a 'Christian' society. The behavioural code of Victorian chivalry – like bourgeois liberalism and the gentlemanly ethos – was an intermediary between the moral ethics Christianity demanded and the apparatuses of a secular, capitalist and imperial society. In its emphasis on purity (but not on chastity), on endeavour (but not on achievement), on self-discipline (but not on asceticism), chivalry was a far less stringent moral system than Christianity, yet it still preserved a semblance of virtuous living underpinned by a 'tradition' (wholly invented in the nineteenth century) which purported to stretch back to the Middle Ages. Watts's ethically-Christian, religiously-void Sir Galahad epitomised this notion of chivalry which influenced moralists up until the First World War.

The cult of Galahad, begun with Tennyson's poem in 1842 and codified by Watts in 1862, changed little in the remainder of the nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth, however, Galahad was assuming a more martial character. He featured, for instance, in several memorials dedicated to the fallen soldiers of the Anglo-Boer War. In fact, the trend for Galahad memorials began, as did so much Victorian Arthuriana, with Tennyson. Although the Poet Laureate had died in 1892 it
was not until 1899 that the Bishop of Ripon unveiled the stained glass window designed by Burne-Jones at St Bartholomew’s Church, Haslemere (1899; fig. 10), which Tennyson had attended for many years. It was possibly the success of Burne-Jones’s stained glass which influenced the decision to adopt Galahad as a figure fit to commemorate the war dead.\textsuperscript{25} It was a trend that continued until the after the First World War, when Galahad would once again be used to memorialise the fallen (see page 97).

The most notable literary example of this martialisation is Erskine Childers’s early espionage thriller, \textit{The Riddle of the Sands} (1903). The narrator, Carruthers, begins the novel as a bored, foppish junior member of the Foreign Office, who idles his hours away dreaming of the country house parties that he misses while suffering the martyrdom that is Edwardian London in August. Yet by the novel’s conclusion he has emerged as a doughty defender of Britain’s national defences, uncovering, with help from his sailing companion Davies, a Prussian plot to invade the English coasts. Both Carruthers and Davies reveal a native English heroism that belies their unlikely appearance – whether London fop, or amateur sailor.

Carruthers, with the customary assurance of the gentry, only once doubts his abilities to thwart the German’s naval plans. In order to fortify his courage Carruthers recalls the chivalric heroes of old, whom he had learnt of, no doubt, as part of his public school education:

\begin{quote}
I should have been a spiritless dog if I had not risen to [Davies’s] mood. But in truth his cutting of the knot was at this juncture exactly what appealed to me […] it imparted into our adventure a strain of crazy chivalry more suited to knights-errant of the Middle Ages than to sober modern youths – well, thank Heaven, I was not too sober, and still young enough to snatch at that fancy with an ardour of imagination, if not of character; perhaps, too, of character, for Galahads are not so common but that ordinary folk must needs draw courage from their example and put something of a blind trust in their tenfold strength.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}
As Galahad inspired Guy Morville in Yonge’s *The Heir of Redclyffe*, so does the maiden knight restore the courage of Carruthers on his latter-day quest. But the difference between Morville and Carruthers is marked. Whereas the imitation of Galahad in Yonge’s novel brought about moral improvement in Morville, Carruthers is inspired only by Galahad’s courageousness as a legendary brother-in-arms: this latter-day Galahad operates as a symbol of the intrepid adventurer’s victory against the odds. By the Edwardian period, with the threat of a large-scale European war becoming increasingly apparent, Galahad was not being used by writers merely as a moral exemplar: he was already being prepared for war.

‘The necessary supply of heroes must be maintained at all cost’: Galahad and the Great War

Three million men died in the service of Britain and Germany alone in the First World War. Millions of others fought, with millions more working hundreds of miles from the trenches, providing the industrial, mechanical and other militarist components which maintained the war-effort. Writers, along with politicians, schoolmasters, churchmen, industrialists and other spokesmen of establishment powers, glorified and encouraged these enormous strains on their countries’ populaces. Through various propagandist strategies – invoking patriotism, communality, outrage, guilt – these advocates attempted to regulate collective and individual responses to the war. Medieval iconography – which in Britain was chiefly in the form of Victorian chivalry – was one such strategy. Considering this was the first mass-industrialised international war the world had seen, the image of the medieval knight may seem
incongruous. Yet such images and related literature proliferated on both sides of the trenches, though with widely differing results.

In Germany the image of the iron warrior was an expression of iron endurance, typifying ‘the archetypal man of steel who was mentally and physically invulnerable’. Many of the German medievalist propaganda centred on the early sixteenth-century knight, Götz von Berlichingen, made famous by Goethe’s drama of 1773. Götz’s iron fist was an often-used symbol of German military ambition, which would crush all resistance in its grip. It also symbolised the unconquerability and indefatigability of the German people: Götz’s iron, prosthetic fist symbolising a fusion of iron and man. It was used, like the many images of iron-clad warriors (see fig. 11 for an example), to integrate the contemporary German soldier with the industrial, mechanised nature of modern warfare – synthesising the man with the matériel of war. The German use of medieval knightly imagery was far more relevant to the experience of modern, attritional combat than was its British chivalric counterpart.

British reaction to German images of mailed fists was associated with the barbarism of the ‘Hun’. Lloyd George, in his ‘An Appeal to the Nation’ speech of September 1914, and asked his audience:

Have you read the Kaiser’s speeches? […] They are full of the glitter and bluster of German militarism – ‘mailed fist’ and ‘shining armour’. Poor old

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* Götz von Berlichingen (c. 1480-1562), after entering the service of Frederick I, Margrave of Brandenburg-Ansbach, and the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian I, formed his private army around 1500. He lost his right hand at the siege of Landshut in 1508, but a prosthetic replacement enabled him to continue his mercenary wars for another twenty years. His iron hand is still on display at the Schloss Jagsthausen in Württemberg. Goethe’s boisterous historical drama, Götz von Berlichingen mit der eisernen Hand (‘with the iron fist’; 1773), popularised Götz’s story and was partly based upon the knight’s memoirs. Suitably for a figure much cited as an example of German resistance, Götz’s most famous expression was his reply to the Bishop of Bamberg’s demand for his surrender: ‘Er kann mich im Arse lecken!’ (He can kiss my arse). During the Second World War the SS’s 17th Panzergrenadier Division was given the title ‘Götz von Berlichingen’. Their divisional symbol was an iron fist in a shield.
mailed fist. Its knuckles are getting a little bruised. Poor shining armour! The shine is being knocked out of it.\textsuperscript{29}

British evocations of 'shining armour', by comparison, were less 'barbaric' and English chivalry was decidedly less militaristic than its German counterpart. The wartime use of chivalry comprised of a set of images and rhetorical devices, the purpose of which was to disguise the brutal realities of trench warfare. Images of crusading knights or St George slaying the dragon were commonly used in recruitment posters.\textsuperscript{30} Soldiers, or 'latter-day knights', performed 'deeds' or 'feats of arms', which were described using a series of chivalric adjectives: 'valiant', 'gallant', 'courageous' and 'noble'. Even the first day of the battle of the Somme, in which twenty thousand British soldiers were killed with a further forty thousand wounded, was reported in \textit{The Times} in terms of a medieval 'tumult'.\textsuperscript{31} The common propagandist images of saintly knights in white armour, whether St George or Sir Galahad, did little – and were not intended – to relate the horrors of the Front to those back in Britain. Whereas the German image of the dehumanised iron warriors was an attempt to reconcile the soldier to the industrialised carnage of the trenches, the language and iconography of chivalry was a propagandist strategy of obscurcation and denial.

Galahad was one of the most commonly evoked figures of chivalry during the war. Epigraphs from Tennyson's 1842 poem commonly appeared in notices of those killed in action.\textsuperscript{32} The collected letters of one's dead son could be collected under the title, \textit{A Galahad of the Trenches} (1919), and legions of dead soldiers, 'Knights of God' and Galahads all, could 'find the Grail ev'n in the fire of hell' of modern warfare.\textsuperscript{33} Unlike the larger Arthurian story, which was fundamentally tragic and therefore was unsuited for wartime propaganda, Galahad's achievement of the Grail
was wholly victorious. He was also not as domesticated as the central Arthurian characters had become in the work of J. Comyns Carr and his successors, who had reduced the Matter of Britain into little more than a tale of the dénouement of an unfortunate love-triangle.

Christian propaganda was particularly interested in the figure of the maiden knight in the war years, as several scholars have demonstrated. Chivalry – already a hybrid of Christian values and secular moral pragmatism – was an easier doctrine to espouse from the pulpit than the pacifist ideology which a serious reading of Christian scripture implies, and churches were eager to re-establish themselves in the minds and souls of the public after increased secularisation in the second half of the nineteenth century. In the Anglican Quiver of May 1916, Charles Brown wrote of the ‘modern call to knighthood – to play our part with Christ in winning the world, righting its wrongs, healing its woes, destroying the works of the devil’ and so on. In the same issue, J.D. Jones published an article on ‘Sir Galahad’, which restated the Victorian equation between a moral, pure life and physical strength in arms: by remaining chaste and receiving Holy Communion, English soldiers would be able to defeat the devilish Germans.

Trench warfare altered Galahad surprisingly little. In 1911 Arthur Winnington-Ingram, the Bishop of London (1901-1939) and medieval enthusiast, urged his flock to imitate Galahad in donning ‘shining armour’ and to look up to Heaven to ask for spiritual direction. Four years later, in the midst of war, in a pamphlet entitled Cleansing London, the Bishop attacked the pimps who swarmed around the troops on leave, designating them ‘villains more mischievous that German spies, who ought to share their fate, [as they] lie in wait to stain the chivalry of our boys’. But Galahad, the incongruous Victorian, was not only utilised in religious
pamphleteering. Poets, politicians and journalists all made use of the maiden knight. *The Times* repeatedly referred to him in their war reports. Perhaps reminded of Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, one journalist writing a piece on coastal defences gave it the headline ‘A Fisher Galahad’. The article tells of a nameless man of the East coast who had discovered a U-boat a few miles off-shore. Single-handedly he attacks the German vessel, killing at least one sailor, though he is forced to abandoned his assault when other submarines surface. But the journalist not only wished to emphasise the ‘great heart’ of this unknown warrior, he was particularly keen to state the man’s Christian generosity. For, after discovering a German sailor had gone overboard:

> Without stopping to deliberate he went over the side to rescue his erstwhile foe, and he brought him safely on board. What do the men who shelled our helpless ‘E’ boat’s crew in the Baltic think of this?39

The purpose of this evocation of Galahad is, again, obscuration. Although the article is ostensibly concerned with coastal security, the journalist chose to write of the moral superiority of his ‘Fisher Galahad’ rather than of the establishment of effective means of defending Britain’s coast and breaking the German blockade, which was seriously inhibiting Britain’s war production. Where military strength was questionable, moral strength became a perfectly good replacement for wartime propagandists.

Other newspaper articles published in *The Times* used Galahad as a way of sanitising the brutalities of combat – the ‘maiden knight’ providing journalists with an opportunity to present war as a spiritual experience. One correspondent, while describing Rembrandt’s sketch, ‘Jacob’s Dream’, was moved to write:

> It is a poem of the exaltation of a young spirit that has fought and won, the glimpse into a spiritual world that comes now and again to finer spirits in early manhood. Sir Galahad had seen it, and how many have seen it in these four
thrilling years, who have left no record, but passed by the ladder to realise their dream.\textsuperscript{40}

Another article from \textit{The Times} echoed Charlotte Yonge's belief that the reading of good, adventurous and chivalrous books – particularly those relating to Galahad – would lead the young reader into becoming a gallant soldier of the trenches.\textsuperscript{41} In peacetime, would-be Galahads could be inspired to enter 'into the dark places of our great cities' where their Grail would be the alleviation of the 'stale squalor of the slums' (as they did in the novels of A.M. Grange and J. Lockhart Leigh). In wartime, however, the Grail was to be found, not in Christian charity, but in fighting for one’s country. As with all uses of Galahad, to fight for one’s country was not written of in terms of the actualities of trench warfare, but in language reminiscent of the Muscular Chivalry movement of Hughes, Yonge and others:

\begin{quote}
To-day the sun and the moon are darkened and the stars return not after the rain. But the young men are searching in the darkness, if haply they may find a light to lighten it: they are seeking – and they are not only seeking, but in the sweat of their brows and by the blood of their wounds they are making – an ideal of political Right.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

In all these journalistic examples Galahad remained unchanged from the Victorian conception. He was a moral exemplar, rather than a metaphor of militarism; moral purity, so their message went, would win out over the barbaric hordes – even if, militarily, the hordes were often in advance of Britain.

Poetic uses of Galahad and other notions of chivalry were similarly obscurantist, archaic and juvenile. In 1922 T.S. Eliot wrote that the popularity of much war verse lay in the fact that it 'appear[s] to represent a revolt against something that was very unpleasant and really paid a tribute to the nicest feelings of the upper middle-class British schoolboy'.\textsuperscript{43} Indeed, the public schoolboy’s cry of 'Play up!
play up! and play the game!', first uttered in Henry Newbolt’s ‘Vitai Lampada’ of 1897, was reworked by numerous writers during the war to articulate the upper-middle class’s (sometimes imagined) response to the war. Much of this poetry emerged from the officer-class, who had been indoctrinated in the chivalric ethos at their public schools. Rupert Brooke, who had once written a dramatic treatment of the Arthurian story in the manner of Carr, remains the best-known of these chivalric war poets. He wrote in ‘The Dead’ of 1914:

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our death,  
Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.  
Honour has come back as a king, to earth,  
And paid his subjects with a royal wage;  
And Nobleness walks in our way again;  
And we have come into our heritage.

With sentiments dutifully learnt at public school, this is patriotism and chivalry raised to an almost religious ecstasy.

But obscuration and nice feelings apart, this poetry – by both those who served at the front and those who performed the ideological work at home – had a political objective. Chivalry fought a double war during 1914-18: one against the ‘Hun’, the other against the reformers of their own country. In the words of David Cannadine, one of the aristocracy’s most elegiac historians, the Great War:

was their chance – to demonstrate conclusively that they were not the redundant reactionaries of radical propaganda, but the patriotic class of knightly crusaders and chivalric heroes, who would defend the national honour and the national interest in the hour of its greatest trial.

* Newbolt himself believed that the games mania of the public school was ultimately derived ‘from tournaments and the chivalric rules of war’ (The Book of the Happy Warrior, vii). Cricket, football and rugby were frequently evoked as metaphors of the English gentleman’s carefree attitude to war, as in Jessie Pope’s ‘Cricket – 1915’ (Roberts (ed.), Out of the Dark, 22):

Our cricketers have gone ‘on tour’,  
To make their country’s triumph sure.  
They’ll take the Kaiser’s middle wicket  
And smash it by clean British Cricket!
The theme of rejuvenation evident in Brooke's 'The Dead', was prominent in the work of many contemporary poets, among them Robert Nichols, Julian Grenfell and Charles Sorley. War presented not only a chance to eradicate effeminacy, torpidity and complacency in British society; it also offered the upper-middle classes an opportunity to justify class hegemony. Threatened by the reforms of Lloyd George before the war and terrorised by the thought of socialism, particularly after February 1917, chivalry proved an attractive myth to many of the upper-middle class because it appeared to be an unchanging code of honour held by the ruling caste since the Middle Ages. Poets who used the ideals of Galahad and chivalry had no desire to accommodate the experience of mass-industrial warfare in their propaganda. It was not so much a denial of modernity, as a denial of political reality. Even as late as the 1980s the public-school system, chivalry and the gentlemanly ethic were still being touted as the reason why Britain had won the war and survived without a revolution. If chivalry, the ideological behavioural code of the upper-middle classes, could win the war (or at least be presented as the underlying moral system in a victorious 'crusade') then the social system was, in its eyes, validated.

'But now I've said goodbye to Galahad': the end of Victorian chivalry and the rebirth of Arthur

From 1916 there was a distinct drying up of chivalrous war poetry from the Front. Many of the early war poets, among them Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell, were now dead and new voices took their place in the numerous anthologies of poetry the war years produced – including a few of working-class origin, such as Isaac Rosenberg and Ivor Gurney, who because of their class had never been indoctrinated
in the chivalric ethos. And among the public-school officers, who formed the majority of war poets, two years of trench warfare had largely purged them of a chivalrous view of war. New officers who arrived at the Front espousing patriotism ‘would soon be told to cut it out’;\textsuperscript{51} and the notion of war as a noble activity became almost exclusively confined to the jingoist establishment figures hundreds of miles from the trenches.\textsuperscript{*} Others who had written patriotic verses in the first few years of the conflict – Robert Graves and Siegfried Owen being prominent among the officer class – now recanted their former position. In ‘Babylon’ (1917), Graves placed Galahad along with Robin Hood, Captain Kidd, Jack the Giant-Killer and other figures of childhood imagination; Galahad has no place in the adult world that ‘made a breach and battered / [the childhood home of] Babylon to bits’.\textsuperscript{52} Herbert Read ferociously debunked Wordworth’s ‘Happy Warrior’ (a figure often used in chivalric poetry in the war) in his Imagist poem of the same name:

\begin{quote}
Bloody saliva
dribbles down his shapeless jacket.
I saw him stab and
stab again
a well-killed Boche.
This is the happy warrior,
this is he…\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

But it was Siegfried Sassoon who produced the most vehement rejection of Galahad and the cult of Great War chivalry. In his \textit{Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man} \textsuperscript{*}

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{*} Chivalry at the Front did not, however, die out completely. In 1918 the Canadian writer and officer Coningsby Dawson was still able to write in \textit{The Glory of the Trenches} of the ‘Arthurian’ nurses, whom he perceived as ‘great ladies, medieval in their saintliness, sharing the pollution of the battle with their champions.’ And later, when reviewing John Don Passos’s \textit{Three Soldiers} (1921), Dawson wrote that the book was ‘a dastardly denial of the splendid chivalry which carried many a youth to a soldier’s death with the sure knowledge in his soul that he was a liberator.’ See Fussell, ‘The Fate of Chivalry’.

\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Wordsworth’s ‘Character of the Happy Warrior’ (1807): ‘Who is the happy Warrior? Who is he / That every man in arms should wish to be? / It is the generous Spirit, who, when brought / Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought / Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought: / Whose high endeavours are an inward light / That makes the path before him always bright’ (\textit{Poetical Works}, 386-7, ll. 1-7)
\end{footnote}
(1927) Sassoon articulated the abandoning of the chivalric view of combat typical of his class around 1916. In one scene, George Sherston, Sassoon's protagonist and biographical analogue, visits the Cathedral at Amiens with the knightly-named Dick Tiltwood:

[T]he background was solemn and beautiful. White columns soared into lilies of light, and the stained-glass windows harmonised with the chanting voices and the satisfying sounds of the organ. I glanced at Dick and thought what a young Galahad he looked (a Galahad who had just got his school colours for cricket).54

Yet this language of public-school chivalry soon disappears. Fifteen pages later Dick is killed, 'hit in the throat by a rifle bullet while out with the mining party', and Sherston abandons knightly epithets in favour of a grimly realist account of his experiences in the trenches. This episode is one of many instances in Sassoon's work in which the chivalric ethos is first articulated and then confronted with brutal reality. His war poetry frequently employs this strategy – often in a fiercer tone. In 'The Poet as Hero' (1917), for instance, Sassoon repented of his earlier patriotic verses:

You are aware that I once sought the Grail,
Riding in armour bright, serene and strong;
[...]
But now I've said goodbye to Galahad,
And am no more the knight of dreams and show55

Instead, Sassoon's poetry goes on to chronicle the industrialised brutalities of war as well as showing how the war has brutalised his own personality – which is deliberately contrasted in 'The Poet as Hero' with the Galahad-ideal:

For lust and senseless hated make me glad,
And my killed friends are with me where I go.
Wound for red wound I bum to smite their wrongs.56
In other poems Sassoon directed his attack at the promulgators of the chivalric idea of war. ‘They’ (1916) seems to have been written in response to the Bishop of London’s chivalric pamphlets, which are also satirised in the George Sherston memoirs, and others who would turn the war into a spiritual quest. Sassoon’s Bishop says that the soldiers will not return home the same, ‘for they’ll have fought / In a just cause’ and now possess a ‘New right to breed an honourable race’. ‘We’re none of us the same”, the troops reply:

‘For George has lost both his legs; and Bill’s stone blind;
Poor Jim’s shot through the lungs and like to die;
And Bert’s gone syphilitic’

The only response the Bishop can make is to say “The ways of God are strange”.

In ‘The Glory of Women’ (1917) Sassoon again wrote of the chasm that separated those who served at the Front and those who chivalrised the experience at home. Always possessing a strong misogynistic streak, Sassoon heaps scorn on the mothers who ‘believe / That chivalry redeems the war’s disgrace’. As he confronted the Bishop’s belief in the nobleness of war with wounding, maiming, gas-induced blinding and sexual disease, so Sassoon confronted the mothers of ‘Glory of Women’ with images of son’s faces ‘trodden deeper the mud’, while their mothers, ‘dreaming by the fire’, knit socks.

* It is worth recalling when considering this poem that many propagandist pieces written at this time were centred on the role of the mother in war time. One example, quoted extensively in Graves’s Goodbye to All That (189-90), was written by ‘A Little Mother’ and appeared originally as a letter in the Morning Post before being reprinted by the Wartime Propaganda Service: “To the man who pathetically calls himself a ‘common soldier’, may I say that we women, who demand to be heard, will tolerate no such cry as ‘Peace! Peace!’ where there is no peace. [...] We women pass on the human ammunition of ‘only sons’ to fill up the gaps. [...] We would sooner our loveable, promising, rollicking boy stayed at school. We would have much preferred to have gone on in a light-hearted way with out amusements and out hobbies. But the bugle call came, and we have hung up the tennis racquet, we’ve fetched our laddie from school, we’ve put his cap away, and we have glanced lovingly over his last report which said ‘Excellent’ – we’ve wrapped them all in a Union Jack and locked them up, to be taken out only after the war to be looked at.” This article sold 75,000 copies in pamphlet form.
Sassoon's verse marks the point at which the Muscular Christian Galahad ceased to be a viable cultural model for those who experienced war at first hand. Indeed, such was the force of the rejection of Galahad by Sassoon, Graves and other non-chivalric war poets that this 'maiden knight' was seldom apparent in post-war Arthurian literature, despite the fact that the Grail narrative became perhaps the most dominant aspect of the Arthurian story in the interwar period. Yet while the Muscular Christian Galahad was largely rejected, many writers continued to use medievalist archetypes to articulate their experiences of war. And one of the narratives writers began to utilise was the story of Arthur, who had been absent throughout much of the war, save for a few references to dead soldiers being worthy of a place among the Knights of the Round Table. Yet from around 1917 the tragic form that had kept Arthur away from the propagandists began to resound with new war-weary artists and writers. In particular, the commission to illustrate Arthur W. Pollard's juvenile retelling of Malory (1917) seems to have enabled Arthur Rackham to articulate his response to the horrors of modern warfare; and the apocalyptic imagery of Tennyson's 'weird battle in the west' in 'The Passing of Arthur' found new resonance with Wilfred Owen, while another poet, Benjamin Gilbert Brooks, rejected Tennyson completely in fashioning his own account of the battle of Camlan.

Pollard's *The Romance of King Arthur* (1917), an abridgement for children in the manner of Sidney Lanier (1880) and Howard Pyle (1903), typifies the contradictory uses to which the Arthurian story – and medievalism more generally – could be employed during the closing years of the war. Pollard's prose is full of the Boys-Own heroism that championed Galahad and the cult of Muscular Chivalry between 1914 and 1918. In his Preface, he wrote that in 'the days when the Arthurian romances were coming into existence, violence, cruelty, and luxury was rampant', but
that the 'greatness of these evils called forth some great virtues to counter them'.

Pollard considered the virtues of the *Morte Darthur* to be fit for the contemporary world:

"It is penetrated to its very core by the special virtues of days in which men were content to live dangerously [...] carrying their lives in their hands and willing to lay them down lightly rather than break the rules of the fame or be faithless to word or friend."\(^{63}\)

Concerning Arthur, Pollard was ambivalent. As 'a typical sportsman' Arthur is to be praised, but as a king he is not: 'he is weak in his own life and weak in suffering the outrages of his nephews'; he is willing 'to fight for an unjust cause, and does not always obey the etiquette of chivalry'.\(^{64}\) Yet if Pollard cannot condone Arthur it is notable how far the cult of Galahad had declined in that, by 1917, when Pollard sought to find a hero of 'much finer stuff' he turned, not to the 'maiden knight' who had been ubiquitous in the first three years of the war, but to a newly-resuscitated Lancelot, 'the most splendid study of a great gentleman in all our literature', as Pollard called him.\(^{65}\)

However, Pollard's cautious Muscular Chivalry is often at variance with the illustrations which accompany his retelling of Malory, drawn and painted by Arthur Rackham. Although many of his pictures are traditional in their presentation of chivalric knights and distressed damsels, some of the illustrations evoke something of the harrowing futility of Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur'. Certainly, Rackham seems to have been little interested in depicting knightly warfare as a noble or honourable pastime. Considering the lightness of much of his work for books such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1907) and *The Wind in the Willows* (1940), the illustrations for this adaptation of Malory for children are at times remarkably brutal. In one drawing (fig. 13) four knights, hung by the neck, swing from a large tree in
various states of decay. In another (fig. 14), far from the images of an idealised Galahad riding upon a medieval plain seeking the light of the Grail of many wartime propagandists, Rackham focuses the young reader’s attention upon two very large canons set to destroy the walls of the Tower of London. Artillery men, some clad in armour, others not, scramble about the scene, preparing to fire the ‘Great Guns’. Both images are pictures of the contemporary war, ostensibly set in the medieval world – and very far from the chivalry of the popular media and conservative, upper-middle class poets. In another illustration, ‘How Mordred was Slain by Arthur, and How by Him Arthur was Hurt to the Death’ (fig. 12), two knights stand upon a mound of fallen iron-clad men and their horses. Arthur has driven a lance through his opponent, Mordred, while Mordred is poised to bring down his raised sword upon his father’s head. The earth, the sky and the knights’ armour is all a muddy, trench-like brown. As with figures 13 and 14, Rackham’s painting is far more like the German use of the medieval to synthesise the soldier with the matériau of contemporary warfare. His depictions of battle entirely belie Pollard’s romanticism.

A similar break with the idealised chivalry of the wartime Galahad is apparent in the work of Wilfred Owen. Although much of the medieval Matter of Britain had been written in the wake of destructive civil war – the Historia, Morte Darthur and the Alliterative Morte Arthure – it was to Tennyson that Owen and other writers turned to in seeking to articulate their sense of the apocalypse. * Owen made frequent allusions to Tennyson’s verse throughout his short poetic career. His pre-war work is particularly reliant on allusions to and borrowings from the Victorian poet; yet in the early years of the war Owen seems to have abandoned Tennyson as a viable cultural figure.66 By 1917, however, Tennyson’s poetry must have seemed newly relevant to

* Twain’s A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court (1889), written in the wake of the American Civil War, with its industry-produced apocalyptic climax, seems to have been less influential in Britain than in America.
Owen as several works of this year contain allusions to the Victorian’s work, including ‘Cramped in that funnelled hole’ (cf. ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’), ‘Wild with all Regrets’ (cf. ‘Tears Idle Tears’) and ‘Futility’ (cf. LVI, In Memoriam). Tennyson’s ‘Merlin and the Gleam’ was also much in Owen’s mind in this year – quotations from it appearing in both his verse and correspondence. Owen’s most substantial Arthurian poem, however, is ‘Hospital Barge at Cérisy’, one of only five of Owen’s poems to be published in his lifetime. It was composed late in 1917 while Owen was convalescing at Scarborough, where he had met Siegfried Sassoon. He wrote the poem after a night spent reading Tennyson’s ‘The Passing of Arthur’, though the genesis for the poem was in existence as early as May that year.

The poem begins as a Georgian reverie, filled with childlike rhymes and rhythms:

Budging the sluggard ripples of the Somme,
A barge round old Cérisy slowly slewed.
Softly her engines down the current screwed,
And chuckled softly with contented hum,
Till fairy tinklings struck their croonings dumb.

Only the title and the significance of the river’s name indicate that this poem is set in wartime. Typically of much of the best Georgian verse, the second stanza presents a sharp tonal break from this reverie: its haunting elegiac quality and its sombre awareness of the monstrosity of recent history:

One reading by that calm bank shaded eyes
To watch her lessening westward quietly.
Then, as she heaved the bend, her funnel screamed.

* A passage contained in a letter to his mother, Susan Owen, dated May 17, 1917, is remarkably similar to Owen’s final poem: ‘I sailed in a steam-tug about 6 miles down the canal with another “inmate” […] the scenery was such as I never saw or dreamed of since I read the Fairie Queene [sic]. Just as in the Winter when I woke up lying on the burning cold snow I fancied I must have died and been pitch-forked into the Wrong Place, so, yesterday, it was not more difficult to imagine that my dusky barge was winding in to Avalon, and the peace of Arthur, and where Lancelot heals him of his grievous wounds. But the Saxon is not broken, as we could very well hear last night’ (Collected Letters, 457). Bar the mention of Lancelot (a mistake presumably corrected in Owen’s reading of ‘The Passing of Arthur’), the resulting poem, written around six months later, barely alters from Owen’s image.
And that long lamentation made him wise
How unto Avalon, in agony,
Kings passed into the dark barge which Merlin dreamed.71

The verse’s first line implies that the narrator had been reading Malory, or more likely Tennyson’s ‘The Passing of Arthur’. Whereas the language of the first verse is essentially idyllic; the second stanza returns the reader to the war, to the casualties and suffering of those on the hospital barge. The effect of the whole is to make the mournful lines of ‘The Passing of Arthur’ seem much more relevant to the experience of war than those poets and writers who had earlier invoked ‘Sir Galahad’:

Then they saw how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, clack-hooded, like a dream – by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shivered to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.72

After the war, these same lines would be evoked by a poem which would articulate the experience of those of the generation that survived the war – a poem that proved to be far more influential than Owen’s ‘Hospital Barge’: Eliot’s The Waste Land.

The reverence shown by Owen for Tennyson was not, however, matched in Benjamin Gilbert Brooks’s version of the Arthurian story. Brooks’s ‘Camelot’ (1919, composed 1917) is situated, like Rackham’s illustrations, somewhere between the trenches and Logres: Gawain resembles a NCO or at least a sergeant major with his ‘clipped black moustache, short parrot nose,’ while Lancelot’s madness seems to have been made analogous to ‘shell-shock’, his experience of the Grail quest reminding the reader of familiar descriptions of trench warfare:
Dusk brought a rattling hail. His knees
Shook, and his bleeding face, ice-bit,
Fled screaming through the raw mad wind that split
His whole beer-coloured world to clod-like lumps.73

Brooks’s ‘Camelot’ opens with a description of war among the ‘[d]ank fogs and foul mists’, where the lances of ‘a thousand knights and spearmen bold’, pierce ‘the grey torment of the storm-swept skies’.74 And violence is prominent throughout the poem – bursting into scenes unexpected. Mark, for instance, slays Iseult as they sit ‘at cards’ with Arthur and Guinevere, and when the latter queen tells Gawain of Arthur’s dire need and confesses her love for Lancelot, the traditional scene of repentance is rudely interrupted:

Hot Gawaine rose upon her blabbering.
‘Thou gilded sow, wouldst thou the Throne befoul
With this vile ordure?’ Towered his mace on high
And smashed her skull like a poisoned fly.75

And Arthur – a ‘doltish king’, who dreams ‘on his splendid sombre throne’ while his kingdom is destroyed – meets his death, not on some funeral barge, for this poem is far from a Victorian elegy, but in the midst of a regicidal mob, led by Mordred:

he towered aloft
Shouting his challenge though the great hall, until
Blow after fierce blow beat him to the ground …
When the red flames were dimmed, rank mist swirled all around.76

Violence does not so much drive the narrative of ‘Camelot’ but, rather, interrupts it at so points that it disfigures the traditional Malorian or Tennysonian story. The poem is full of extravagant imagery – ‘crimson mauve flecked stream’, a ‘naked girl, alight / With lemon, limed with pink’ and ‘dim arcades and palaces built sheer / Against the stars’ – much of which is oriental in flavour and clusters around
Guinevere who is here a Middle-Eastern queen, an offering brought by 'turban-crowned' horsemen to 'spare the wasting of their land' from Arthur's hordes.\textsuperscript{77} Such exotic additions, like the poem's violence, greatly alter the usual story. Not since Bulwer-Lytton's \textit{King Arthur} (1848) had the Arthurian story been subject to such a chaos of allusion — oriental, English, mystical, Arabian. Yet these alterations were not made in ignorance of the story. Rather these violent intrusions and disregard of the traditions of a conservative epic were the result of the disquiet felt by many by 1917.

When Brooks wrote 'Camelot' in April 1917 British resistance to the war was growing. Conscription was unpopular, vital supplies were becoming scarcer and the war of attrition seemed endless. Trade Union membership had doubled from four million to eight million during the war and work stoppages and strikes became frequent in 1917-18.\textsuperscript{78} Brooks depicted his Arthurian world in the process of violent implosion. The warring, imperial nature of Arthur's kingship, evident in the first twenty-three lines of the poem, sowed the seed of the later collapse of the kingdom. Mordred and Mark's revolt is clearly perceived as a revolt against the immorality of the Arthurian reign. They 'purge the realm', speak out against 'the Kingdom's wrongs' and rail at the 'lust' that has become the 'Sole law'.\textsuperscript{79}

Written two months after the decisive uprisings in Russia and a month after the forced abdication of Tsar Nicholas II, and with increased union militancy at home, Arthur's death at the hands of a mob ('Blow after fierce blow beat him to the ground') was an act laden with revolutionary symbolism — or acute anxiety. The poem does not condemn the regicides: the chanting of Arthur's knights at Mass is termed 'the myriad moan of gnats', and the simile of the aristocratic class as bloodthirsty parasites echoes throughout the poem. Arthur himself, as Mark and Mordred lead their revolt to his hall, is steeped in the decadence of his class, surrounded by '[w]hite slaves and tawny
silken cats stretched prone / O’er gorgeous Persian stuffs [...] Along the ebon stairs,
gold traceries / Wrought delicately’. He is oblivious of the coming revolt and
remains impotent to prevent it when confronted. Hardly, then, is this Arthur the
‘Blameless King’ of Tennyson’s *Idylls*; and from this point on the Tennysonian image
would be increasingly under threat from the writers who emerged from the war.

**Memorials and memory: the influence of the Great War on later Arthurian
literature**

The First World War had a great influence on the Arthurian literary production that
succeeded it. Most immediately, there was the final flourish of the Victorian cult of
Galahad. Several memorials were erected in Britain which utilised the figure of
Galahad, in the same way he had been used throughout the war. Many were designed
by the firm of Morris and Company – though the pacifist William Morris and his chief
designer, Edward Burne-Jones, were both now dead. The influence of Watts’s ‘Sir
Galahad’ can be seen in many of them. Five Galahad memorials are found in
churches throughout the United Kingdom, usually dedicated to a particular soldier,
whose bereaved parents often commissioned the work. Six more are found in public
schools – bastions of the upper-middle class which had cultivated the cult of Galahad
and Muscular Chivalry before the war and had patronised it throughout the war
years. Yet in relation to the hundreds of memorials that were erected by schools,
town and civic councils and other establishments and individuals, the sum total of
eleven Galahad memorials is minute. Galahad, despite the barrage of propaganda
which was produced around him during the war, did not become a popular or populist
figure. Indeed, Galahad disappeared after the war and is almost entirely absent from
the numerous Grail texts, discussed in the next chapter, which proliferated in the
1920s and 30s.

Scholarship, too, had been affected by the war. The summary of the German
literary canon given by Herbert Warren, Oxford Professor of Poetry during the Great
War, in a lecture on ‘Poetry and War’ typifies the militarisation of ‘Eng. Lit.’ at this
time:

The Germans had got it into their heads to-day that they were, before all
others, a nation of poets. How did they compare with the English? Put in naval
language, they had one super-Dreadnought, the Goethe, a powerful ship, but
hardly equal in guns or speed to the Shakespeare. They had two or three
Dreadnoughts, the Lessing, the Schiller, and the swift and dangerous craft,
largely fitted on French lines, the Heine, and a flotilla of minor vessels, but
nothing like the number of variety of the English armament.84

The Great War resulted in the diminishing of the influence of German scholarship on
English literary studies. It was now possible – desirable, even – to dismiss classic
philology as ‘Teutonic nonsense’;85 while figures such as Heinrich Zimmer, Wendelin
Foerster and Wolfgang Golther, who had exerted a huge influence on pre-war
Arthurian scholarship, were of much less importance after the war.86 The little
attention paid to Foerster – who edited the first complete edition of Chrétien’s works
(1884-99),87 thus giving Chrétien studies a firm textual basis on which to build – was
particularly noticeable.*

The diminution of the German scholars allowed a greater space for the
theories of British, American and French critics – the most well known in the interwar
period being Jessie L. Weston and E.K. Chambers, from Britain; Roger Sherman
Loomis, A.C.L. Brown and J.D. Bruce, from America; and Eugène Vinaver and, later,

* The American academic William A. Nitze was one of the few post-war scholars who deplored the
critical fate of ‘the late, quickly forgotten’ Foerster (‘Geoffrey of Monmouth’s King Arthur’, Speculum,
2.2: 318). French scholars were particularly embarrassed about the irrefutable fact that German
medieval scholarship was far in advance of their own – especially with regard to French romance
Jean Marx, from France. The war and the earlier political tensions in Europe had also given rise to a greater sense of political nationalism in literary studies, manifest in George Saintsbury’s earlier-quoted 1912 description of Malory’s pre-eminence over foreign Arthurian writers. Jessie Weston, perhaps the most influential Arthurian scholar in the post-war era (despite the fact that her academic career was largely over by the time she published *From Ritual to Romance* in 1920), published two propagandist pamphlets designed to promote the war effort in 1915. One, *Germany’s Literary Debt to France* (1915) claimed that Germany’s claim to a great literary culture was essentially fraudulent and that German culture owed its existence entirely to adopted foreign models. In another, *Germany’s Crime against France* (1915), Weston attacked the German atrocities in Belgium. As discussed in chapter five, her Arthurian scholarship was also motivated by a strong nationalist agenda, as were the studies of many others who pursued the theories of the origins of Arthurian romance in Celtic literature, including the English Alfred Nutt and the Welsh John Rhŷs and Ernest Rhys.

But the effect of the war was not only felt in the nationalist expressions of established academics: it was most manifest in those who came to read English at universities after the war. Their reading and interpretation of literature became irrevocably bound up with their wartime experiences. Robert Graves’s words on studying at Oxford in 1919, after four years spent as an officer in the Royal Welch Fusiliers, were relevant to many writers who had fought:

I thought of Beowulf lying wrapped in a blanket among his platōn of drunken thanes in the Gothland billet, Judith going for a *promenade* to Holofernes’ staff-tent; and the *Brunanburgh* with its bayonet-and cosh fighting – all this came far closer to most of us than the drawing-room and deer-park atmosphere of the eighteenth-century.
Graves’s words are no less true of those who read the Arthurian story. Graves himself wrote nothing on the Arthurian legend until the 1960s, but the influence of his wartime experience still showed when he wrote an introduction to an abridgement of the *Morte Darthur* by Keith Baines. Thinking of Arthur in decidedly military terms he wrote that ‘no strategic or tactical system can be deduced from them, except a customary concealment of reserves under the shades of trees’. He claimed that ‘[t]he original Arthur’ was ‘a heroic British cavalry general named Arturius’, and devoted much space to discussing the importance of Arthur’s cavalry. Particularly interesting is his belief that without his having been a cavalryman the Norman aristocracy would never have patronised the legend. ‘Chivalry’, he declared, ‘is now on the wane’, but he did not regret it.

The idea of the historical Arthur as a cavalry leader was a popular notion from the 1930s until the 1980s (see chapter six for discussion). This belief was initiated by R.G. Collingwood, who served in Admiralty Intelligence during the war. In *Roman Britain* (1936), Collingwood presented Arthur as a Romano-Briton heavy-cavalry commander who defended ‘a country sinking into Barbarism’. He envisaged Arthur as holding the late Roman military office of *Comes Britanniarum*, employing his mobile troops to defeat the Saxon infantry in a number of battles (as listed by Nennius) that were spread throughout Britain. But Collingwood’s Arthur was not only far more militaristic than previous ‘historical’ Arthurs, he was also a newly political figurehead: he was ‘the last of the Romans’; his victory ensured by his being ‘intelligent enough […] and vigorous enough’ to protect the final vestiges of a dying Empire. As Stephen Knight has written, Collingwood presented an Arthur that ‘validated at one blow the intelligence and will-power which are the central totems of bourgeois individualism’, as well as making the Roman Arthur into an analogue of the
imperial Englishman who, 'like the Romans before them, justified their exploitative world-wide practices by the imperatives of “civilization” and a “peace” suitable to their interests.'*96

The heroic individualism of Collingwood’s historiographical Arthur is matched in the heroism of the contemporary defender of Empire: T.E. Lawrence, whose life and writings are surrounded by allusions and parallels to the Arthurian story, and who became, in some senses, a modern-day Lancelot for a post-war society starved of individual war heroes. The letters Lawrence wrote as an Oxford graduate are filled with quotations from Tennyson’s *Idylls* when describing the Arabian desert.*97 He famously carried a copy of the *Morte Darthur* in his saddlebags throughout his experience in the Arab Revolt (1916-18),98 alluded to Malory several times in his memoir, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) and also saw the nomadic Bedouin as the equivalent of Arthur’s knights, with their own codes of chivalry.*99 Some scholars have argued – persuasively – that *The Seven Pillars* is itself modelled on the *Morte*,100 though its denouement at the fetid hospital at Damascus more closely resembles the conclusion of Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court* (1889) than Malory’s Camlan. Indeed, Lawrence’s memoir suggests many of the difficulties in using the Arthurian legend as a myth to make sense of the war: the book

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* By the time Graves adopted Collingwood’s hypothesis, however, the idea of Arthur as a heavy cavalry commander was already being challenged. Kenneth Jackson wrote of Collingwood’s theory in 1959: ‘Nothing is certain about the historical Arthur, not even his existence; however, there are certain possibilities, even probabilities. There may have been a supreme British commander of genius in the late fifth century who bore the Roman-derived name of Arthur, though it would be wrong to deduce anything about his background from his name. There is little reason to think he held any definite sub-Roman office, whether dux bellorum or otherwise, and his supposed cavalry tactics are an illusion.’ (‘The Arthur of History’, in *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, 10-11.)

† Apart from direct references to Malory, themes of Arthurian largesse and heroism form a template for Lawrence’s descriptions of his Arab companions: ‘There entered a tall-strong figure, with a haggard face, passionate and tragic. This was Auda […] His hospitality was sweeping; except to very hungry souls. His generosity kept him always poor, despite the profits of a hundred raids. He had married twenty-eight times, he had been wounded thirteen times; whilst the battles he provoked had seen all his tribesmen hurt and most of his relations killed. He himself had slain seventy five men, Arabs with his own hand in battle […] Of the number of Turks he could give no account.’ Such a list of kills would not be out of place in the *Historia Brittonum*, in which Arthur is said to have killed nine hundred and sixty men in a single charge.
is caught somewhere between a Boy's Own adventure of imperial derring-do ('purest jingoism and Morning Postliness', he later wrote)\textsuperscript{101} and the repugnance felt at such an endeavour (its inherent imperial glory subverted by the infamous scenes of homosexual rape, atrocity and the scenes at Damascus).\textsuperscript{102}

Angus Calder has claimed that the fame of Lawrence's exploits in Arabia is predicated on the fact that while there 'were lots of VCs' awarded to soldiers fighting in France and Flanders, there were 'no epic heroes'.\textsuperscript{103} In Lawrence there was a modern-day knight of romance, whose experience of war – fought on horseback across an expansive sandy peninsular, dressed in resplendent samite Arab dress (a personal gift from Prince Feisal) – was a compelling alternative to the poetry of Owen, Sassoon and Rosenberg, as well as the experiences of millions of young men who had fought on the Western Front. Whereas the millions of entrenched troops had been machine-expendable, the myth of Lawrence glorified individualism – the tenacious genius capable of leading and uniting a foreign, disparate people through sound British qualities.\textsuperscript{*} While Germany and the USA had overtaken Britain economically and militarily, Lawrence could still signify the justice of Britain's imperial mission – even if he rejected it personally. In post-Great War Britain the myth of Lawrence signified what Arthur had symbolised in medieval Britain; it was only fitting that Lawrence should chronicle his own career in Malorian terms.

However, post-war Arthuriana was generally a much more sombre affair than the medieval romanticism of Lawrence of Arabia's public persona. Laurence Binyon's *Arthur: a tragedy*, for example, is as much a memorial to the dead of the

\textsuperscript{*} The American journalist Lowell Thomas, who described Lawrence as 'Britain's modern Coeur de Lion' and did much to initiate his fame, wrote in a contemporary account of Lawrence's officers: 'Each man had his own task and went his own way. Each was a free-lance and conducted himself with much the same freedom as did knights of old' (James, *Golden Warrior*, 279).
First World War as is his most famous poem, the Remembrance Day favourite, ‘For the Fallen’ (1914):

The day goes to the night,  
And I to darkness, with my toil undone,  
Yet something, surely, something shall remain.  
A seed is sown in Britain, Guenevere;  
And whether men wait for a hundred years  
Or for a thousand, they shall find it flower  
In youth unborn. The young have gone before me,  
The maid Elaine, Gareth, and Gaheris – hearts  
Without reproach, poured out. But now I know  
The tender and passionate spirit that burned in them.  
To dare all and endure all, lives and moves,  
And though the dark comes down upon our waste,  
Lives ever, like the sun above all storms;  
This old world shall behold it shine again  
To prove what splendour men have power to shape  
From mere mortality. 

In an unusual conclusion to the story, these last words of Arthur are spoken, not to Bedivere, but to Guinevere, to whom the king is reconciled. Distraught, the queen is comforted by Lynned, a nun, whose words end this mournful play:

Love, only love, that knows no measure, love  
That understands all sorrows and all sins,  
Love that alone changes the hearts of men,  
And gives to the last heart-beat, only love  
Suffices. Come we apart and pray awhile  
For the noble and great spirits passed from us.

First performed at the Old Vic in 1923 with incidental music by Edward Elgar,

Binyon’s Arthur was one of the last, and perhaps the finest, of the Tennysonian plays.

Binyon, however, had been born in the midst of the Victorian era (1869); and was well into middle age when he wrote this play. Few younger poets were interested in maintaining the Tennysonian tradition, or would turn to the Idylls, as Binyon had done, when they came to retell the Arthurian story.
Siegfried Sassoon, as already discussed, subverted the Galahad-ideal which was central to so much wartime propaganda in his *Memoirs of George Sherston* (1928-37). John Masefield, already the author of one Arthurian poem, ‘The Ballad of Sir Bors’ (1910), would turn to the Matter of Britain in a more martial mood in the mid 1920s. His *Midsummer Night and Other Tales in Verse* (1927) is a startlingly violent series of ballads which retell the story of Arthur from his birth to death, and which are clearly influenced by Masefield’s experience of war as an ambulance man at the Front. Far from the simple ballad-form of Masefield’s poems lies the work of David Jones. Yet his modernist masterpiece, *In Parenthesis* (1937), was another attempt to articulate the author’s experience of war through the medium of the Arthurian story. Like Masefield, Jones drew on a wide range of Celtic and English versions of the Matter of Britain, but unlike Masefield, Jones did not so much retell the narrative of Arthur as relay the experiences of a London-Welsh battalion via a complex series of allusions and quotations from various Arthurian and other medieval tales. Moreover, whereas the Great War propagandists, as well Binyon, Lawrence, Sassoon and Owen, were all writing either within, or in reaction to, the Tennysonian paradigm or the cult of Galahad, Masefield and Jones attempted to reconfigure the entire Arthurian story – to rewrite the Arthurian story anew and without any Tennysonian influence. Such an effort took time: in Jones’s case it took nearly nineteen years, while Masefield struggled throughout his career to rework the Matter of Britain into a truly British epic. Masefield’s and Jones’s Arthuriads, however, are discussed in chapter five, as they are infused with many elements which are not solely concerned with the Great War – chief among these being the desire to create a new British (that is Anglo-Celtic) identity, the collapse of economic liberalism in the late
1920s as a result of the Great Slump (1929-33), and Britain's diminution as a world power.

As for the Tennysonian paradigm, it was already embattled at the conclusion to the war. During the 1920s it was subject to a series of erosive forces, which largely saw the *Idylls* as an antiquated expression of a bygone world of religious and social values. Of course, Tennyson's influence did not suddenly disappear – the *Idylls* continued to have effect on Arthurian literature until the Second World War – but its domination was steadily worn away, as new writers gained ascendancy over their Victorian predecessor.

Yet the flourish of new versions of the Arthurian story that appeared in the post-war years did not only challenge Tennyson's dominance – they altered the very make up of Arthurian literary production in England. No longer operating in a paradigmatic state, since the 1920s the reproduction of the Arthurian legend has been a far less dogmatic enterprise that it was in medieval or Victorian England. Instead, what emerged in these years was a new form of Arthurian literary production – one typified by trends, rather than paradigms, and with certain writers influencing, rather than dominating, subsequent authors. These literary movements have usually been diverse and contradictory and have failed to possess the synthetic qualities of Tennyson's *Idylls*, or Geoffrey's or Malory's Arthuriads. Indeed, as the Arthurian story became subject to a greater number of extreme political and social forces than it had known in the nineteenth century, no single post-war text was able to encompass an entire world view, as Tennyson's *Idylls* had done. In the twentieth century an Arthurian paradigm would seem to be impossible.

The first major trend to emerge after the Great War was a rejuvenated interest in the Holy Grail. It was an interest dynamised by the scholarship of Jessie L. Weston
and a literary movement epitomised by T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a text which represented a bridge between the dogmatic, Tennysonian paradigm and the new, emancipated Arthurian legend. Like the nineteenth-century cult of Galahad, the Grail was largely separate from the Arthurian corpus and it could be dealt with briefly, without writers having to refashion the entire narrative cycle. This made the Grail story more responsive to contemporary changes in society. Moreover, both the scholarship and literature concerned with the Grail steadily became less Anglocentric – with Celtic myths, Buddhist texts and pre-Christian religions all occupying important positions within the newly-reconfigured Grail story. Its authors, meanwhile, while all working in England during the 1920s and 30s, were American, Irish and Welsh, as well as English. This eclectic body of literature demonstrated the new ways in which the Arthurian story (or at least a certain part of it) could respond to a very different world from that of the nineteenth century. This modern Grail legend is the subject of the next chapter.
Above (fig. 1) Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Arthur’s Tomb – the last meeting of Lancelot and Guinevere* (1854).

Below (fig. 2), detail from Edward Burne Jones, *The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (1881-98).
Fig. 6, George Frederick Watts, *Sir Galahad* (1862).
Above (fig. 7), Arthur Hughes, *Sir Galahad* (1870). Below left (fig. 8), Joseph Noël Paton, *Sir Galahad* (1879). Below right (fig. 9), Joseph Noël Paton, *Sir Galahad and the Angel* (1885).
Fig. 10: Tennyson Memorial Window, St Bartholomew’s Church, Haslemere, designed by Edward Burne-Jones (1899). The text on the scroll is from Tennyson’s ‘The Holy Grail’, ll. 464-5, 476-7.

Below is the plaque which is mounted beneath the window.
Above (fig. 11), an example of German Iron Warrior propaganda (1915).

Clockwise from right: three illustrations from Alfred W. Pollard’s *The Romance of King Arthur* (1917), by Arthur Rackham: ‘How Mordred was Slain by Arthur, and How by Him Arthur was Hurt to the Death’ (fig. 12); ‘Sir Beaumains Espied upon Great Trees how there Hung Full Goodly Armed Knights by the Neck’ (fig. 13); ‘Sir Mordred Went and Laid a Mighty Siege About the Tower of London, and Shot Great Guns’ (fig 14).
Chapter Three

‘Here in the heart of waste and wilderness’: Jessie L. Weston, T.S. Eliot and the Holy Grail

The *Idylls* never recovered their pre-war dominance. Had there been a latter-day Wace or Layamon who would have reconciled the *Idylls* to a new age, as the older poets had adapted Geoffrey’s *Historia* for later generations – had some poet who was sympathetic to King Arthur and Tennyson, such as Wilfred Owen or Rupert Brooke, survived the war – subsequent Arthurian literature may have been different. As it was there were no *Bruts* to Tennyson’s epic and this paradigm faded into Victorian nostalgia or, worse, ridicule.

Instead, Arthurian literature in the years following the Great War was more imaginative and more original than it had been since the Arthurian Revival of the Romantic period. And like the Arthurian literature of the Romantic period it was scholars who led the way. The literary work of T.S. Eliot, Arthur Machen, Virginia Woolf, Mary Butts and John Cowper Powys was all built upon the academic endeavours of such scholars as Alfred Nutt, A.E. Waite, J.D. Bruce and, above all, Jessie Weston. Their theories on the origins of the Arthurian story – and the Grail
legend, in particular – were new and contentious; in their arguments with each other they were invariably dismissive and combative. The bitterness to which some of these critics occasionally descended demonstrated that the medieval stories could still matter to a contemporary world, and that the Grail was not merely a ‘peg’ from which public-school headmasters might hang a homily about purity and duty.

In hindsight, the fact that it was the story of the Grail which would re-ignite interest in the Arthurian story is perfectly understandable. Galahad had been one of the most evident propaganda figures during the war – that post-war writers would take up his story and transform it is to be expected. Added to this is the fact that the most exciting scholarship to emerge from the pre-war scholars was primarily concerned with the Grail. The diminishing appeal of Christianity in Britain was another factor – much of the literary interest in the Grail was concerned with fashioning new, or refashioning existing, belief systems. But the biggest factor in explaining why writers chose the Grail story, rather than the larger Arthurian legend, was that the Grail story was, simply, much shorter. Post-war poets and novelists did not attempt to reconfigure the whole Arthurian story – such a task took Tennyson decades (as it probably did Geoffrey and Malory). Those who did come to rewrite the whole Arthurian story in later years—Charles Williams, David Jones and John Masefield – spent many years reading and cogitating on the legend before they unveiled their epics. The Grail, by comparison, offered a more concise narrative, more malleable to writers’ immediate concerns and anxieties.

Before examining the Grail scholarship which led to much of this literature, it is worth noting one major difference in Grail literature before and after the war. Since the inception of England’s interest in the Arthurian story, with Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia*, the Matter of Britain has always been intimately and anxiously
associated with governmental power—whether monarch-praising chronicles, kingly pageants or pictorial adornments of Westminster Palace. Such intimacy had required a certain regulation of the Arthurian story: such ideological utility had to be maintained. Only in periods of crisis—epitomised by the fifteenth-century popular ballads and the anti-papist condemnation of the mid-sixteenth century—was the Arthurian story unregulated by such powers. In the 1920s the Grail became patronised by all reading classes. The Grail story became the subject of crime novels (such as Charles Williams’s novel *War in Heaven*, 1930) and the popular fiction of Arthur Machen and George Moore. Galahad and the Grail became popular names for racehorses: Prince Galahad, Sir Galahad, King of the Grail, Silver Grail, Holy Grail. Less grandly, Galahad was also a popular name for some prize-winning dogs.¹

More seriously, questing knights were no longer the symbols of the conservative bourgeoisie. Although the Tory Lord Chancellor could describe the Liberal peer William Lygon as ‘the Sir Galahad of the Free Trade movement, without a stain upon his purity’, the victorious Labour party of 1924 could also appropriate the legend.² In one election rally Ramsey MacDonald claimed that a socialist Britain was ‘the Holy Grail’ of the Labour party; it would be achieved, he said, ‘by knights like Keir Hardie’.³ No longer was the Grail a symbol of imperial endeavour and elitist institutions; now it was a value in the context of democracy and plurality.

**Jessie Weston and early Grail scholarship**

There were a multitude of Grails evident in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: Christian Grails and Pagan Grails; Western Grails and Eastern Grails. Their origins were found in Celtic mythology, in ecclesiastic imagination, even in the rites and rituals of Cathars, Templars and Tarot-card readers.⁴ Four physical Grails were
unearthed: one in Nanteos was put on display in 1876, another in Glastonbury in 1906, with a further two being dug up in Palestine in the 1930s – all found their believers and critics. But perhaps the most influential of all Grails for writers of the post-war generation was that of Jessie L. Weston. Her Ritualist account of the Grail (pre-Christian and pre-Celtic in origin) proved persuasive for many poets and novelists who sought to reinvent the Arthurian story in the 1920s and 30s – most famously, though perhaps erroneously, T.S. Eliot. Weston’s critical writings demonstrate, more eloquently than any other scholar’s corpus, how late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century academia freed itself from the influence of Malory and Tennyson.

The daughter of a successful tea merchant, Weston (1850-1928) received a cosmopolitan nineteenth-century upbringing, studying music at the Hildesheim conservatory in Germany, taking art classes at Crystal Palace and studying with Gaston Paris, the medieval scholar, in France. The continentalism, scope and eclecticism of her learning, as well as her independence from traditional English higher education (which, as a young woman in the 1870s, she was excluded from anyway), meant that Weston was never beholden to the English literary or critical archetypes which influenced many of her male Oxbridge-educated contemporaries. Although she was engaged in academic scholarship for most of her life, it was not until 1894, when she was forty-three, that she began to publish the first of twenty books and numerous articles, which were often controversial and at odds with conventional English scholarship.

Weston was never wholly satisfied with the dominance of Malory and Tennyson in contemporary English conceptions of the Arthurian story. Of the *Morte Darthur* and the *Idylls* she had written, in 1909: ‘in spite of their charm of style, in
spite of the halo of religious mysticism in which they have striven to enwrap their characters, we lay them down with a feeling of dissatisfaction.’7 Following the criticism of H. Oskar Sommer and other German medievalists (and unlike the English Strachey and Saintsbury), she thought that Malory’s redaction of the French romance tradition – which she described as a ‘réchauffée’ – was often poor in its choice of sources and the way in which he handled them.8 One of her most impressive endeavours was a seven-volume series of translations which she called *Arthurian Romances Unrepresented in Malory’s ‘Morte D’Arthur’* (1898-1907).*9

In the mid 1900s, when Weston turned to the study of the origins of the Grail in earnest, two distinct theories had emerged that dominated British and continental Arthurian scholarship. One proposed a Christian origin, the other an origin in Celtic myth. As with so much of early medieval scholarship, the German critics led the way in the Christian-origin theory – Wendelin Foerster and Wolfgang Golther being the most prominent – with the American J.D. Bruce being perhaps the most forceful of the theory’s English-language proponents.10 These held that the Grail was essentially Christian in origin and that the ‘personal invention’ of writers such as Chrétien and Robert de Boron ‘was the most important factor in the creation of these romances.’11 Even if the Grail’s source lay in the dim mist of Celtic antiquity, its origins were of much less importance than the meaning which the French romancers inscribed it with. This view, as Richard Barber put it more recently, holds that the Grail ‘is a product of a certain time and a certain place [Western Christian Europe in the mid-twelfth to mid-thirteenth centuries], and the most powerful argument for this is the way in which the major romances were written within a surprisingly short time-span.’12 These

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* Weston’s earliest scholarship is largely Germanic in orientation; indeed, she strove to make German romances well known in Britain. However, her relationship with German scholarship deteriorated in the years before the Great War – her later position being quite hostile to her former influences. This was a pattern typical of scholarship in the early twentieth century.
scholars poured scorn on those critics who sought the Grail in earlier Celtic literature, terming them 'Keltomanen'.

The Keltomanen, or the Celticists, were initially led in England by Alfred Nutt, an early mentor of Jessie Weston and publisher of many of her works. Nutt’s primary contribution to Arthurian studies was his *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail* (1888), which attempted to illuminate the importance of the Celtic tradition in the formation of later romances. Unlike Foerster, Golther and Bruce, Nutt seems to have felt little attraction towards the French Grail romances in themselves. Rather, his interests were in the roots and beginnings of the legend – origins which he felt were overwhelmingly Celtic. Although he was not the first scholar to speculate on such a relationship, he was the first to construct an extended thesis on how the French romances were produced as a result of their authors’ misunderstanding of their Celtic materials. He can be seen to have steered contemporary scholarship to a Darwinian understanding of romance production: in Nutt’s thesis evolution, rather than individual literary invention, was the Grail story’s primary force.

For Nutt a common oral tradition stretched across the whole Celtic fringe of Western Europe. This tradition could be discerned through medieval Irish and Welsh texts which had been translated and published in the nineteenth century. Particularly important were the translations from the Irish by the German scholar Kuno Meyer and those from the Welsh by Charlotte Guest. Indeed, in his role as publisher Nutt was closely involved with the dissemination of both scholars’ work. Nutt found analogues of the Grail in the numerous cauldrons of plenty and of rebirth contained in Meyer and Guest’s translations of Irish and Welsh myths – such as those in the Tuatha

* They also distanced themselves from a second group of Christian-Grail scholars. Led by A.E. Waite and heavily involved with occult rituals, these scholars pursued the study of the Grail texts in search of mystical experience and esoteric knowledge. Bruce described Waite’s theories in *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, as ‘fantastic’ and unworthy of scholarly consideration.
de Danann legend and the story of Bran in the Second Branch of the *Mabinogion*—while later Celticists, such as A.C.L. Brown, Roger Sherman Loomis and Dorothy Kempe, searched for ever-more exotic parallels.\(^{17}\) According to Nutt, these symbols and narratives were then conveyed to Anglo-Norman audiences by bilingual poets who subsequently exported it to France and the rest of Europe, where it was increasingly subject to Christian ideology.

Celtic rather than French, Pagan rather than Christian: Nutt’s views on the origins of the Grail were contentious and were refuted by the Christian-origin theorists. Bruce flatly denied them.\(^{18}\) The great German medievalist, Heinrich Zimmer, warned Celticists who possessed no knowledge of Welsh, Irish or Breton from dabbling in the early literature (most of the Celticists worked exclusively from translations).\(^{19}\) And Elise Bensel wrote that the ‘zeal’ with which Nutt and the other Celticists desired to prove their theories meant that ‘they sometimes jump at conclusions not sufficiently borne out by the facts’.\(^{20}\) There was also, of course, a strong element of national pride in stating that the origins of the Grail were fundamentally British in origin—even if that concept of Britishness was an anachronism. For now Nutt and his fellow English critics (along with a few Welsh scholars, such as John Rhŷs) were able to reject most of the claims of their continental, chiefly German, contemporaries.

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It was towards the Celtic-origin theory that Weston was initially drawn, partly because of her friendship with Nutt and partly because of her early studies with Gaston Paris, who had independently arrived at a similar opinion of the Grail’s origins.\(^{21}\) Yet Weston did not merely continue the work of Nutt and Paris; she formed a new theory of the origins of the Grail romances. She declared that the German
scholars were 'radically unsound' in their Christian bias, but she also thought that the roots of the Grail story went back much further than Celticists had previously thought. Weston believed that while the romancers of the twelfth century had altered the pagan elements of their Celtic sources, the Celtic materials were themselves records of much earlier, pre-Celtic ritual, the meaning of which the Welsh and Irish bards never actually understood. The Grail legends, she wrote in *From Ritual to Romance* (1920), are 'the confused record of a ritual, once popular, later surviving under conditions of strict secrecy' in occult practices.

Weston believed that the competing Christian- / Celtic-origin theories were in fundamental disagreement with each other due to the fact that 'the Grail legend consists of a congeries of widely differing elements – elements which at first sight appear hopelessly incongruous'. She identified the 'main features' of the Grail legend as: 'the Waste Land, the Fisher King, the Hidden Castle with its solemn Feast, and mysterious Feeding Vessel, the Bleeding Lance and Cup'. Weston claimed that to find all of these features (all of which are not present in any single Grail romance, nor in the Celtic prototypes which Nutt, and others, had identified) she was required to look beyond the Christian and the Celtic sources and into the field of comparative anthropology.

Each of the 'main features', she held, could be found in the nature rites as adumbrated in J.G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915). The Grail legend, she believed, was a remnant of a Mystery cult centred on a 'dying god' figure, similar to that of Adonis or Tammuz. In such a cult, as Frazer wrote, the people believed that the king's life or spirit is so sympathetically bound up with the prosperity of the whole country, that if he fell ill or grew senile the cattle would sicken and cease to multiply, the crops would rot in the fields, and men would perish of widespread disease. Hence, in their opinion, the only way of averting these calamities is to put the king to death while he is still hale and hearty, in order
that the divine spirit which he has inherited from his predecessors may be transmitted in turn by him to his successor while it is still in full vigour.26

Weston thought that the figure of the Fisher King of the Grail story, as ruler of the Waste Land, is a version of this dying god. Whereas in Frazer's scheme the weak king requires death to restore the land, the task of the quester in the Grail romances is to heal and aid the king. 'He is not merely a deeply symbolic figure,' Weston wrote, 'but the essential centre of the whole cult, a being semi-divine, semi-human, standing between his people and land, and the unseen forces which control their destiny.'27

In Weston's opinion, the Fisher King was himself the protagonist of the ritual: 'the very heart and centre of the whole mystery'.28 This mystery's association with the Arthurian legend was a later addition of the Celtic and Christian storytellers. The lance and the cup are not themselves directly concerned with the ritual. They are 'Life' symbols, representing the male and female genitals and signifying the forces of sexual reproduction.29 Thus the whole ritual that underlies the Grail romances is a quest for fertility - couched in sexual symbols. The Grail story is a narrative of renewal, where the division between spiritual and earthly is unknown - the Fisher King is bound to the health of the land in a mythic union and the effects of healing the King are wholly concerned with the physical good of the land (food and children). The restoration of the Fisher King brings about the total regeneration of the kingdom.

Weston first delivered this theory in a paper given to the Folk-lore Society in 1906.† But it was only after From Ritual to Romance was published that Weston's

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* This major difference between Frazer's killing of the god/king and the healing of the Fisher King is never wholly resolved by Weston.
* This paper was titled 'The Grail and the Rites of Adonis' and is a lucid account of Weston's early thesis. As her Ritualist account of the origins of the Grail developed, Weston added new details - including a discussion of the relevance of the Tarot cards (From Ritual to Romance, 77-80). Most important in her development of the Ritual thesis was her search for a specific source of the Grail legend. Weston was not content to attribute the healing of the Fisher King and his land to a generic Mystery cult. She associates the sexual wounding of the King to the figures of Attis and Adonis (the first castrated himself; the second was gored to death in the groin). And in the last third of From Ritual
Ritualist thesis found a popular audience. Many scholars praised it. Jane Harrison wrote that ‘[t]he more I read it, the more conviction grows’; F.M. Cornford wrote that ‘the argument is self-evident, once stated’ and Edwin Sidney Hartland claimed that it ‘solved what had been a problem for 700 years’. Other critics, however, remained sceptical. Bruce devoted a chapter of his *Evolution of Arthurian Romance* to pouring scorn on Weston’s Ritualist account of the Grail. One reviewer writing in the sympathetic journal, *Folk-lore*, praised its originality of thought, although had ‘reason to doubt’ whether Weston was correct in reducing the Grail story’s many elements, formed over several hundred years of literary production, into one single explanation. Roger Sherman Loomis in his 1927 study, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, initially supported Weston’s findings and stated that ‘the evidence is so palpable that one need not be either an initiate or a specialist in primitive religion to feel its force’. But in his later work he eschewed ‘Weston’s ingenious hypothesis’ due to its ‘lack of valid and clearly pertinent evidence’. Modern scholarship, on the whole, has disparaged Weston’s results.

In many ways, the cultural importance of Weston’s theory is more the result of its popularity with contemporary poets and authors than due to her precarious influence on other scholars. *From Ritual to Romance*’s publication in 1920 coincided...
with the turning away from the Tennysonian paradigm – and with it the cultural
monuments which the *Idylls* symbolised for many writers. The securities of Victorian
culture had been weakened by the war. Artists were now challenging traditional forms
and notions of what were suitable subjects for art; novelists were subverting the
conventions of the nineteenth-century realist novel; poets were abandoning
established poetic structures for *vers libre*; while writers such as T.S. Eliot were
attempting to articulate, in Edmund Wilson’s words, a ‘whole world of strained
nerves and shattered institutions’.

The appeal of *From Ritual to Romance* for poets and novelists of the twenties
and thirties lay in the stock of powerful images Weston’s book made available for a
non-specialist audience. Writers found in Weston’s work – as they did in Frazer’s *The
Golden Bough* and Jane Harrison’s feminist anthropological studies of cultural
evolution – a new set of potent symbols: the waste land, the Fisher King, the symbols
of the phallic lance and the vaginal cup. Above all Weston provided her readers with a
myth of cultural and social regeneration – a myth that resonated strongly in the post-
war years. In many ways *From Ritual to Romance* is as much a monument of
modernism and twentieth-century culture as is *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses* (1922), *The
Waves* (1931) or *The Cantos* (1917-70). And its importance as a modernist work can
be seen only through appreciation of its incoherent jumble of symbols and meanings,
assembled roughly together through the promise of re-creation and renewal.

In several ways, Weston’s scholarship was itself a form of cultural
rejuvenation. After Weston, the Grail was emancipated from the Public School ethos
and poets and novelists were no longer compelled to reproduce the Victorian literary
concept of the Grail as a Christian-humanist object, the cultural uses of which were

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conservative views of the Arthurian story and outlined her controversial opinions on the Grail and other
matters, given as accepted scholarly fact.
essentially imperial, class-conscious and militaristic. Without her scholarship, the Grail may have gone the way of Galahad – confined to the dustbin of culture, no longer of use even to substandard patriotic versifiers. It is worth noting that despite Galahad’s ubiquity from the mid nineteenth-century to the close of the First World War, he is barely mentioned in any of the literary texts of the 1920s and 30s. It is one of the most interesting features of this literary period, that the Grail story is a heroic narrative without its most famous hero.

With its preoccupation with anthropology, Celticism and ritualism *From Ritual to Romance* was in many ways the antithesis of Tennyson’s humanist paradigm. Indeed, whereas the *Idylls* were preoccupied with the notion of social and moral collapse, Weston’s scholarship was explicitly concerned with renewal and rebirth. For a brief time, it became almost as influential as the *Idylls* had been in the second half of the nineteenth century.

**T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and the influence of *From Ritual to Romance***

In terms of its Arthurian content, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* forms something of a bridge between Tennyson’s *Idylls* and the radical new symbolism of Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*. The Grail literature of the 1920s and 30s – and *The Waste Land* most of all – represent a crisis in the Arthurian tradition: a struggle between a complicated literary inheritance and a desire to write the Grail story anew. Eliot’s poem demonstrated how a post-war writer could still make use of the Arthurian legend – or at least the Grail story – through recourse to fertility rituals, sexual symbols and the motif of the barren waste land. Yet *The Waste Land* does not represent a total overhaul of the legend. The *Idylls of the King* did not suddenly cease to influence post-war writers; Tennyson was still read, or was at least remembered from youth.
Many of the *Idylls'* preoccupations and concerns with domesticity, war, internal and national collapse were still evident in Eliot’s work, though few critics and later writers would recognise them as Tennysonian in origin.

*The Waste Land*’s influence over subsequent Arthurian literature is disproportionate to its actual Arthurian content. Its references to the legend are slight and buried within a welter of allusions to Chaucer, Ovid, Spenser, the Psalms, Marvell, Shakespeare, Homer, Goldsmith, Dante, popular songs, Baudelaire, the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ulysses*. There is a quotation from Paul Verlaine’s 1886 poem ‘Parsifal’, a few allusions to the Tristan and Isolde story in the form of quotations from Wagner’s opera, two indirect references to the Fisher King, one of which is made clearer by the notes that Eliot wrote to accompany the poem, and a reference to an ‘empty chapel, only the wind’s home’, which the notes suggest is the Chapel Perilous.*37 The main indebtedness to the Arthurian story is Eliot’s use of the symbol of the waste land. The motif is evident throughout the poem: in its title, in the sense of sterility that permeates every image and every character, from the shrivelled, ancient sibyl of the poem’s classical epigraph, to ‘the young man carbuncular’ of the modern city.38 The question of which sources influenced Eliot in fashioning his waste land is worth pursuing.

Interpretations of the poem usually centre on the meaning of the waste land. They can be roughly divided into two camps. First, there are those that perceive the text to be a twentieth-century Grail romance, with an internal schema that allows the reader to understand the poem as a coherent and fully-explicable text. These explications tend to see *From Ritual to Romance* as the ‘key’ to the work and they generally express the idea that the poem’s meaning is almost exclusively concerned

* There are, however, no Arthurian characters, bar the Fisher King, nor is the Grail itself apparent at any point in the poem.
with a spiritual quest. For these the waste land is a symbol of the lack of religious values in the modern world. Second, there are those that hold that there is no such ‘centre’ to Eliot’s poem; that it is, as Eliot later wrote of it, a series of disjointed rhythmic grumblings which cannot and ought not to be organised into a unified whole. Essential to both groups of interpreters lies the precarious position of *From Ritual to Romance* as the dominant ‘source’ of the poem. Famously, Eliot wrote in the notes which accompany *The Waste Land*:

Not only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend […] Indeed, so deeply am I indebted, Miss Weston’s book will elucidate the difficulties of the poem much better than my notes can do; and I recommend it (apart from the great interest of the book itself) to any who think such elucidation of the poem worth the trouble.

But almost equally famous was Eliot’s later comment that he regretted sending ‘so many enquirers off on a wild goose chase after Tarot cards and the Holy Grail’. It seems that which Eliot one believes leads to a reading of *The Waste Land* as either fully explicable or utterly incoherent. The decision to perceive the text one way or the other is often predicated on ideological grounds, or due to academic disciplinary politics.

There is little doubt that Weston’s work did influence Eliot in his use of the Fisher King and waste land symbols. But its impact on the text has been overstated by many interpreters of the poem. It is certain that the notes to the poem (which Eliot

* Some recent scholars have suggested that Eliot may have only partly read Weston’s study; another has claimed that the pages of Eliot’s copy of *From Ritual to Romance* were never cut and that his reference to Weston’s book may have been nothing more than a literary hoax (Morton, ‘Eight Decades on and I think I Spy T.S. Eliot’s *Waste Land*, The Scotsman). Eliot certainly refused to write an introduction to a planned reprint of Weston’s study, claiming it would be ‘inappropriate’ for him to do so (Grayson, ‘In Quest of Jessie Weston’, 50, n. 67). It is also possible that, though *From Ritual to Romance* still remains the most likely source for Eliot’s use of the Fisher King, Eliot’s acquaintance with Weston’s theories may have been gathered from other sources, such as reviews of Weston’s work or her entry on the Holy Grail for the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, which includes summaries of several medieval romances, brief discussion of the Fisher King’s role, as well as a
provided in order to bring *The Waste Land* to a publishable length) are more Arthurian than is the text itself.\(^4\) Ezra Pound, who edited *The Waste Land* and whose contribution to the final draft was substantial, never commented on the Grail theme of Eliot’s poem, nor did he ever refer to Weston’s book as the source of the text he did much to create. Likewise, the original, much longer draft of the poem reveals little about the relationship between *The Waste Land* and *From Ritual to Romance*.\(^1\)

Indeed, regarding the evidence of the manuscript, Eliot appears to have seen *The Waste Land* as a series of fragments, the interrelatedness of which was not apparent – and certainly not within any discernable Grail-quest scheme.\(^4\)

For many critics the pursuit to elucidate the poem was the chief attraction of *The Waste Land*. The explications of the poem have proven as influential on subsequent literature as the text itself and, so, are worthy of examination in their own right.

The majority of the initial reviews were unconcerned with the possibility of the poem’s Grail context. Whether they were hostile or appreciative, reviewers most often commented on the sense of incoherence and disparity created in the poem and did not search for a unifying meaning. Several critics found *The Waste Land*

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\* The original draft of *The Waste Land* (that is, the fragments of verses seen by Pound and Vivien Eliot, the poet’s first wife) was published in 1971 and edited by Valerie, Eliot’s second wife. The MSS do little to shed light on Eliot’s plan for the poem with regard to either Weston or the Grail. The many substantial cuts which Pound made (the largest cuts are the 53 lines on a night on the town in Boston; 70 lines describing the morning activities of a society lady; 84 lines concerning an ill-fated sea-voyage) omit nothing that could be seen as derived from Weston. In the draft version of the poem’s first section, ‘The Burial of the Dead’, there is a line referring to the ‘king fishing’, which is crossed out and replaced with the ‘fisher King’. Both are omitted in the final version where the lines concerning the Fisher King are less obvious in their allusions to the narrator’s fishing ‘in the dull canal’ or ‘sat upon the shore’ (ll.189, 421).
unfathomable and duly damned it, such as J.C. Squire, who after reading it through several times was ‘still unable to make head or tail of it’. The enthusiastic review in the TLS (which was written before The Waste Land appeared with its notes) claimed that Eliot’s poem was ‘a collection of flashes’ which strives for ‘no effect of heterogeneity’. ‘Flashes of lightening’ was used to describe Eliot’s method in Helen McAfee’s review in the American journal, Atlantic. She praised the poem’s depiction of post-war society as a ‘waste land’ and lauded its ‘striking dramatization of this depth and bitterness.’ Another American critic, Elinor Wylie, praised the poem for its ‘extremity of tragic emotion’ which was expressed in a series of disparate voices, ‘not carefully and elaborately trained in close harmony, but coming as a confused and frightening and beautiful murmur out of the bowels of the earth’. Summarising the sense of heterogeneity and disconnectedness of the text, its abandonment of narrative structure or ‘meaning’, John Crowe Ransom wrote that it was ‘one of the most insubordinate poems in the language’.

Other reviewers, however, were more interested in reading The Waste Land as a solvable ‘puzzle’. The most important of these reviewers was the young Edmund Wilson writing in The Dial. Wilson began his essay by giving a synopsis of the Grail story, as taken from a hurried reading of From Ritual to Romance, and explains the significance of the waste land therein. The Grail quest, he held, was the unifying motif of The Waste Land, drawing together all the fragmentary and seemingly unconnected elements in a whole. It is a reading that for Weston-centric critics has barely changed in eighty years. In 1931 Wilson expanded his Westonian reading of the poem in his Axel’s Castle. A year later F.R. Leavis codified what would be the reponse of many academics to the poem in his seminal New Bearings in English Poetry, which again reduced Imagist fragments into a thematic coherence. Wilson’s
and Leavis’s ideas have been replicated and expanded by numerous critics, among them Cleanth Brooks, Grover Smith, Helen Gardner and George Williamson.52

In Weston-centred readings, the system of symbols Weston presented in *From Ritual to Romance* (waste land, Fisher King, Lance and Cup) were perceived as an interpretive structure for the poem – Brooks described it as ‘scaffolding’; Williamson called it ‘a subsumptive myth’.53 In these critics’ works, *The Waste Land* emerges as a portrait of disintegration and impotence, a description of a ruined world, ‘where once a fertility ritual may have been effectively enacted’ to restore the land to health.54 Whereas the earlier reviewers saw *The Waste Land* as a ‘complete expression of the poet’s vision of modern life’, which was very much an expression of social collapse, the later Weston-centric explicators saw the poem as primarily a contrast between a rich, spiritual past and a spiritually-void modern sterility.55 They emphasised the religious content of Eliot’s poem to a much larger degree than did the non-Weston interpreters of *The Waste Land*. F.L. Lucas, who heartily disliked the poem, claimed that ‘Miss Weston is clearly a theosophist’ (she was not), and claimed that Eliot’s poem ‘might be a theosophical tract. The sick king and the waste land symbolise, we gather, the sick soul and the desolation of this material life.’56 Wilson called the waste land ‘the concrete image of a spiritual drouth’.57 Everett A. Gillis put it simply: it is the portrayal of ‘the decline of religious values in the world’.58

Cleanth Brooks saw Eliot’s poem as primarily a religious commentary on contemporary agnosticism. His 1939 essay, ‘*The Waste Land*: critique of myth’ was a remarkable reading of *The Waste Land*’s use of Weston’s symbolism, which managed to transform a fundamentally agnostic text into an explicitly Christian poem. Brooks began by rehearsing the standard summary of *From Ritual to Romance*, before demonstrating how Eliot’s poem utilised Weston’s symbols. Brooks revealed, as he
elucidated the poem section by section, a coherent meaning to the text. This meaning, Brooks claimed, is not concerned with 'despair and disillusionment', or social collapse, or 'strained nerves and shattered institutions' as earlier critics had believed. Rather, '[t]he “Christian” material is at the centre, but the poet never deals with it directly. The theme of resurrection is made on the surface in terms of the fertility rites; the words which the thunder speaks are Sanskrit words.'

*From Ritual to Romance* had examined the medieval Grail legend in light of a Darwinian methodology of cultural evolution: Weston had read the Christian romances as later deposits of earlier Celtic and, ultimately, pre-Celtic Gnostic myths. What earlier scholars had thought of as fundamentally Christian iconography, Weston tried to demonstrate as antecedent to it. Brooks reverses the evolutionary process of Weston's methodology and tries to place the Christian message in an avowedly agnostic text. Brooks' essay was written a decade after Eliot's conversion to the Anglo-Catholic Church in 1928. At the time of writing *The Waste Land* he held no firm Christian belief; indeed, he was considering becoming a Buddhist. The 'hidden Christian centre' of *The Waste Land* is not hidden because Eliot wished to avoid 'clichés', as Brooks contends, but because Eliot was, quite simply, not a Christian. Brooks' argument appears little more than wishful thinking on the part of a conservative American Christian critic.

By 1939, then, the perception of *The Waste Land* as an utterly spiritual poem, based on Westonian symbolism, was complete. Arthurian scholars, by and large, have accepted the Weston-centred reading of Eliot's poem and have emphasised the text as a chronicle of contemporary religious doubts, maintaining that *The Waste Land*, commonly regarded as the greatest poem of the twentieth century, is fundamentally an Arthurian poem. Yet it is possible to continue to read Eliot's poem as Arthurian in
origin (or at least in part) without resorting to such a firm Weston-centric reading. Nor is *The Waste Land*’s use of Grail symbolism wholly concerned with religious signification.

‘Doth all that haunts the waste and wild mourn?’ the influence of the *Idylls* on *The Waste Land*

The search for alternative sources of the waste land has yielded a variety of possibilities. Malory, St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (c. 397), the King James *Apocrypha* (1611), Joseph Conrad’s *Lord Jim* (1900) and even Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818) have all been proffered for consideration. The waste land motif, however, was a relatively common symbol in poetry from the mid-nineteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic.

Edwin Arnold’s ‘Hagar in the Wilderness’ of 1853 is one of the first to make use of this motif in the Victorian period. It begins:

A weary waste of blank and barren land,
A lonely, lonely sea of shifting sand, […]
And not a breath to cool, -- and not a breeze
To stir one feather of the drooping trees;
Only the desert wind with hungry moan.

The poem is a Christian allegory, derived in narrative and imagery from Genesis, verses 16 and 21. Those who suffer in the desert unjustly will be eternally rewarded, is the text’s plain moral message (‘Though bitter disappointment, baffled strife, / Leave ye but laggards in the race of life; / Hope on!’). Other uses of the waste land, however, are exclusively secular. One instance of the motif can be found in one of William Morris’s ‘Northern’ poems, which begins:

O hearken, ye who speak the English tongue,
How in a waste land ages long ago,
The very heart of the North bloomed into song
After long brooding o'er this tale of woe.67

The American satirist, poet and critic, Ambrose Bierce wrote in ‘Sires and Sons’ (1909) of how ‘Wild wanton luxury lays waste the land’ and how then ‘dies the State! – and, in its carcass found, / The millionaires all maggot-like abound’.68

Contemporary Arthurian poetry may also have inspired Eliot. As Robert Ian Scott has shown, Madison Cawein’s 1913 poem, ‘Waste Land’, pre-empts much of Eliot’s use of the motif:

The cricket’s cry and the locust’s whir,
And the note of a bird’s distress,
With the rasping sound of the grasshopper,
Clung to the loneliness
Like burrs to a trailing dress.69

Another possible Arthurian influence on The Waste Land is ‘The Last Ballad’ (1899) by John Davidson, a poet whom the young Eliot much admired.70 Its descriptions of the waste land as ‘scalding deserts’ and ‘apanages of despair’ bear some resemblance to Eliot’s later depictions in ‘What the Thunder Said’.71 Once again, the waste land is a secular symbol of threatened social collapse.

Such are some of the possibilities of Eliot’s source for the waste land. Yet despite the fact that it has not been discussed before, one source looms larger than all the others: Tennyson’s Idylls of the King. Although Tennyson and other Victorian writers were not alluded to in his notes to The Waste Land, they were very much at the forefront of Eliot’s mind during the gestation of the poem. For three years (1916-18) Eliot had given tutorial classes on Tennyson and other Victorian poets at Southall for the University of London and at the time of writing The Waste Land, he delivered twenty-five lectures on Victorian literature at Sydenham, London.72
Eliot’s creative and critical relationship with Tennyson was complex. His Harvard poetry, like that of many of his contemporaries, continually echoes Tennyson’s verse. Eliot’s early professional criticism was reserved towards the Victorian’s poetry, moving to a more appreciate view by the mid-nineteen thirties. Of the Arthurian epic the more mature Eliot wrote in 1936 that in choosing the descriptive title *Idylls* ‘Tennyson perhaps showed an appreciation of his limitations. For his poems are always descriptive, and always picturesque; they are never really narrative.’ In many ways it was a statement of poetic affinity: like Tennyson, Eliot was a poet of description, whose ‘flashes of lightening’ revealed ‘the wreck of the storm’ of post-war Europe. Similarly, his work was imagistic, constructed out of impressions rather than narrative. Certainly when Eliot did turn to narrative in his later verse dramas, the success was not equal to that of his poetry. Also, both poets’ work, especially *The Waste Land* and the *Idylls*, can be considered as essentially dialogic. But there was another sense of correspondence between the two, as further suggested in Eliot’s 1936 essay. Tennyson was, Eliot held, a poet of shallowness – the pre-eminent chronicler of the decrepitude (literary, spiritual, moral, intellectual) of his day. Eliot believed he had been born in ‘an age that succeeds his own in shallowness’ and he became the twentieth century’s foremost recorder of this ‘shallowness’.

The affinities between Tennyson’s and Eliot’s waste lands are most clear in ‘The Passing of Arthur’ and ‘What the Thunder Said’, the concluding poems to both writers’ epics. Tennyson’s waste land is realised in the final battle at Camlan, which

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*In 1921 Eliot compared Tennyson unfavourably with the Metaphysical Poets, citing him as an example of Eliot’s theory of the ‘dissociation of sensibility’. In an essay written at the close of the decade, Eliot admitted that Tennyson was a ‘great’ poet, but one who often has to ‘force’ his ‘effect’ upon the reader. Here the comparison was to Dante. By 1936 Eliot’s view was more generous: ‘Tennyson is a great poet, for reasons that are perfectly clear.’ He appreciated Tennyson’s poetic ‘ear’ (he said it was the finest since Milton’s), his skill in constructing verse forms and fashioning new metres, and his originality. See Eliot, ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ (1921), ‘Dante’ (1929) and ‘Tennyson’ (1936) in *Selected Essays*, 281-91 (287-8); 237-79 (248); 328-39 (328-331).*
sees the total collapse of the Arthurian imperium. On the eve of battle Arthur asks the wind ‘doth all that haunts the waste and wild / Mourn, knowing it will go along with me?’ The battle itself takes place upon ‘the waste sand by the waste sea’, where Arthur hears the ‘great voice that shakes the world, / And wastes the narrow realm whereon we move, / And beats upon the faces of the dead’. And there is this description of Arthur being taken onto the dusky barge, attended by the Three Queens, which possesses a very similar tone to Eliot’s ‘What the Thunder Said’:

And from them rose
A cry that shiver’d to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Eliot’s description of the waste land shares a similar lexicon to Tennyson’s ‘The Passing of Arthur’: ‘dust’, ‘bones’, ‘rock’, ‘graves’ and ‘tombs’, ‘agony’, ‘lamentation’, ‘dead’, ‘death’ and ‘dying’, ‘murmur’s, ‘mutters’ and ‘rumours’. There are ruined gardens, devastated cities among hills and mountains; ‘voices’ continually cry out from the gloom, and dark, hooded figures surround the landscape. But the closeness of the two poems is not just vocabular and the depth of their intimacy cannot be perceived from a few brief images. Tennyson’s descriptions of the waste land go to the heart of Eliot’s poem. Both ‘The Passing of Arthur’ and ‘What the Thunder Said’ are conclusions to what are primarily dialogic poems: but both final sections revert to imagistic accounts of actual and physical waste lands, symbolic of the social collapse they feared or perceived in their own, contemporary societies.

Tennyson’s ruined kingdom is haunted by the voices of the dead and dying, just as Eliot’s waste land has been narrated throughout by dead or dead-in-life
characters. Both poets place a ruined chapel in the midst of their waste lands, which offer brief but ultimately empty refuge. In ‘The Passing of Arthur’ Bedivere bears the mortally wounded king to a chapel on the battle field. Lit by moonlight, Arthur rests among ‘a broken chancel with a broken cross, / That stood on a dark strait of barren land’. In *The Waste Land*, there is the corresponding description:

In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing  
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel  
There is the empty chapel, only the wind’s home.  
It has no windows and the door swings,

The similarity to Tennyson’s ruined chapel is striking. And, without a Grail chapel – even a ruined one – it is difficult to support the thesis that *The Waste Land* is some sort of transfigured Grail quest with a discernable (if disappointed) conclusion at the Chapel Perilous. Both chapels are situated next to water – Tennyson’s lies between a lake and the ocean. The first receives Excalibur; the second removes Arthur from the world. These two waters receive both the man and instrument of government (Excalibur), extinguishing the Arthurian kingdom, but bringing also a distant hope of Arthur’s return and the promise of societal renewal: ‘The old order changeth, yielding place to new, / And God fulfils himself in many ways, / Lest one good custom should corrupt the world’. Eliot’s chapel lies near the water of the Ganges, which, as Eliot often tells the reader, signifies death. But with the rain and thunder of the storm, there is some glimpse of hope for Eliot’s waste land too.

If the relationship between these two poems is established, it is imperative to discern the nature of the Tennysonian waste land from which Eliot, consciously or unconsciously, derived his barren imagery. Tennyson’s references to the waste land are numerous; their significance is overwhelmingly concerned with social and national collapse. Never does it appear linked to the spiritual health of the Arthurian
Instead, the waste land serves as a frequent description of the country that has been devastated by war and civil strife ('The Coming of Arthur', 'The Holy Grail'), which Arthur promises to restore to habitation ('Gareth and Lynette', 'Geraint and Enid'). The waste land remains a memory of the earlier strife throughout the Idylls. In 'The Coming of Arthur', the kings says that the land is '[v]ext with waste dreams'; in 'Merlin and Vivien', the wily damsel was orphaned upon the 'sad-sounding wastes of Lyonesse': her vengefulness will lead the land to another waste land.

But there is a second significance to this motif: the waste land is symbolic of public and private disharmony, domestic discord and the gradual moral decline at court. As the Idylls progress to their tragic denouement, both senses become intertwined. The earliest fusion of the motif's significations occurs in 'Geraint and Enid', which is replete with images of the waste land. Driven into self-exile from the Arthurian court because of Geraint's mistrust of his wife's fidelity, the absence of domestic harmony (precipitated by rumours of Guinevere's adultery) results in their adventures through 'the heart of waste and wilderness', filled with bitter images and encounters. The poem concludes with Arthur sending forth the forces of civilisation:

The blameless King [...] sent a thousand men
To till the wastes, and moving everywhere
Cleared the dark places and let in the law,
And broke the bandit holds and cleansed the land.

* It is indicative that although the symbol is apparent throughout the Idylls the waste land is absent in 'Balin and Balan', the episode in which 'the dolorous blow' is traditionally dealt to King Pellam, laying his kingdom to waste (cf. Le Morte Darthur, ed. Shepherd, 56-7). Tennyson, however, includes no such significance. And in 'The Holy Grail' the two references to the waste land are neither magical nor are they tied to the quest of Grail in any way.
Yet ‘Geraint and Enid’ ends with a premonition of the wasting of the whole Arthurian world in the conclusion to the *Idylls*, with Geraint taking Enid once more from Arthur’s court in fear of the rumours of Guinevere’s adultery.100

The double meaning in the motif also features heavily in ‘Lancelot and Elaine’, during Lancelot’s journeys through the ‘waste marches’ and ‘desolate isles’.101 He is driven to these ‘wastes and solitudes’ in his madness, brought on by his guilty lust for Guinevere.102 Madness comes upon him once more in ‘The Holy Grail’, when he again flees to the ‘waste fields’.103 And in ‘Guinevere’, after the lovers’ adultery has been discovered, the queen flees to the nunnery:

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she to Almesbury
All night long by glimmering waste and weald,
And heard the Spirits of the waste and weald
Moan as she fled.104
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The waste lands are the moral and geographical outlands to which the knights and ladies of Arthur’s court go when they cannot reconcile personal desires with public duty; when private sins threaten to become social tragedies. These wastes are haunted by the memories of savagery and symbolise the ensuing collapse of civilisation, as brought about in ‘The Passing of Arthur’.

The *Idylls*’ preoccupation with domestic and internal discord and their impact on civilisation is also recognisable in Eliot’s poem, though, of course, Eliot’s *The Waste Land* constructs the domestic-public interrelationship with little of the didacticism Tennyson brought to his Victorian epic. The majority of the ‘characters’ of *The Waste Land*, whether contemporary or historical, are found in relationships which are dysfunctional or sterile. Among the historical or literary relationships there are the adulterous lovers Tristan and Isolde; the suicides, Anthony and Cleopatra; the illicit affair of Elizabeth and Leicester.105 Among the present-day inhabitants of the
waste land, there are the uncommunicative, nameless couple who argue in ‘A Game of Chess’;\textsuperscript{106} Lil and her friend, who sit in an East End pub discussing Lil’s failing marriage, pregnancy, bad teeth and abortion. There is also the ugly affair between the typist and ‘the young man carbuncular’, described in disgusted tones,\textsuperscript{107} and the later sexual encounter between a couple out at Moorgate (‘I raised my knees / Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe [...] After the event / He wept. He promised “a new start” / I made no comment. What should I resent?’).\textsuperscript{108} The transformation of the familial into the horrific continues in ‘What the Thunder Said’: there are murmurs of ‘maternal lamentation’ that ‘sound high in the air’;\textsuperscript{109} the only suggestion of children in this sterile waste land comes in the description of ‘bats with baby faces in the violet light’\textsuperscript{110} And, with its allusion to a father’s insane grief for his murdered dead son, and the ensuing bloody revenge, the third from last line, drawn from Thomas Kyd’s \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} (1592) – ‘Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo’s mad againe’ – reinforces the impression that the focus of much of the waste land is on the cataclysmic interaction between the domestic and the larger societal spheres.

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That no critic emphasised the Victorian basis of Eliot’s poem severely affected later readings of the poem. It was a neglect which allowed an undue importance to be placed on the role of Weston’s \textit{From Ritual to Romance} in making sense of Eliot’s disparate and fragmentary verses. As divorced from its proper literary-historical context, \textit{The Waste Land} was also able to be read as a primarily religious, rather than societal, text. This is not to suggest that the \textit{Idylls of the King} is the ‘key’ to \textit{The Waste Land}; nor should Tennyson’s influence be seen as a replacement for Weston’s \textit{From Ritual to Romance}. It is still likely, if we consider Eliot’s reference to Weston’s work to be sincere, that \textit{From Ritual to Romance} remains one of the most important
influences on Eliot’s poem and perhaps the most likely candidate for the creative impulse for the writing of *The Waste Land*. Nonetheless, due to the similarities in vocabulary, theme and image, there seems little doubt that Eliot’s reading of the *Idylls* tempered Eliot’s use of the waste land motif.

The associations between Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Tennyson’s *Idylls* are not restricted to a few barren images, or the sharing of a similar lexicon. Its depiction of the waste and barrenness of contemporary society is bound up with a very Tennysonian concept of the impact of the private morality on public health. Both Eliot’s and Tennyson’s poems construct their Waste Lands almost exclusively around themes of domestic discord, which lead to larger catastrophes. And in *The Waste Land*’s acute anxiety over this relationship – the central theme of so many Victorian novels and other literary works – Eliot’s work appears to be much more nineteenth century in its cultural orientation than is commonly supposed. And although the style of Eliot’s poetry (its concern with urban squalor, its details of degradation, its ostentatious display of learning, its difficulty) is archetypally modernist, its central theme (the upper-middle class’s extreme social anxiety over the collapse of society, its institutions, values and belief systems) is staunchly Victorian. It is no accident that the original title of *The Waste Land* was taken from a Victorian novel, its epigraph from an Edwardian novella. *

Also, by understanding Eliot’s use of Tennyson, we are much closer to the early critics who saw the poem as an articulation of the chaos and disintegration of Europe and America in the years following the war:

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* The original title was ‘He Do the Police in Different Voices’, taken from Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* (1864). The epigraph to this draft of the poem was from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902): ‘Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision – he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath – The horror! the horror’. This was later replaced by a passage from Petronius’s *Satyricon* (First Century A.D.).
[Eliot] is speaking not only for a personal distress, but for the starvation of a whole civilization – for people grinding at barren office-routine in the cells of gigantic cities, drying up their soul in eternal toil whose products never bring them profit, where their pleasures are so vulgar and so feeble that they are almost sadder than their pains.

As the twenties progressed and the politics of the thirties loomed larger, *The Waste Land* was no longer seen as a dystopian, fragmentary recoil to the horrors of post-war life. As new writers and intellectuals sought to make sense of the ‘immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history’ (to use Eliot’s words) Eliot’s poem became a battle ground for the competing ideological systems that would seek to make the futility and anarchy intelligible. It is unsurprising that those critics who sought to make *The Waste Land* coherent and narratively sensible were all exponents of these newly appealing political systems. Edmund Wilson, the first critic to see a sense of coherence in Eliot’s poem, was a liberal Marxist; Leavis, who codified later Weston-centric readings of *The Waste Land*, was one of the great system-builders of the day, the exponent of the Life Force; Brooks, the most systematic of all Eliot’s explicators, was a reactionary conservative Christian. Eliot himself found spiritual solace in the Anglo-Catholic wing of the Church of England and political solace in right-wing reactionism.

Whether Marxist, conservative or Christian reactionary, the interpreters of *The Waste Land* were as influential upon later writers as Eliot himself. Indeed, for many readers, *The Waste Land* became virtually synonymous with *From Ritual to Romance*; while writers like Mary Butts, who self-consciously reworked *The Waste Land* in her novel *Armed with Madness* (1928), seemed to have understood Eliot’s work as wholly centred on the Westonian Grail. Nonetheless, although *The Waste Land* became, in the hands of its explicators, the most influential of the ‘Grail’ texts of the twentieth
century, it was not the only influence on other writers who would rewrite the story of
the sacred vessel.

'The very spring of our culture': the Grail in later interwar fiction

For Eliot the Grail story was a dead end. None of his later work, written after his
conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, expressed any interest in the Grail or to related
motifs or narratives. Yet Eliot became, in many ways, the Tennyson of his generation,
his influence over later writers being almost equal to that of his Victorian predecessor.
So imitated was Eliot's *The Waste Land* that, as Brian Howard noted, 'it became
such a plague that the moment the eye encountered, in a newly arrived poem, the
words “stone”, “dust” or “dry” one reached for the waste-paper basket'. Most of
these forgotten or destroyed works were unconcerned with the waste land as an
Arthurian motif and so do not concern us here; nor do the great American novels
which also derived much of their symbolism from Eliot's poem – among them
Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Hemmingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926),
Faulkner's *Soldier's Pay* (1925) and Steinbeck's *The Winter of Our Discontent*
(1961).114

In Britain, those who continued to produce literature which consciously
derived its narratives, symbols or motifs from the Grail story wrote in the shadow of
*The Waste Land* and its critics who interpreted the text as a latter-day Grail-romance.

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1 Tennyson, however, remained a lasting influence on Eliot's poetry. *The Four Quartets* (1943) are
particularly redolent of Tennyson's verse, especially *In Memoriam* (1850). Eliot borrowed some of his
most important symbols from Tennyson, such as 'the figured leaf' ('Burnt Norton', II, 11; *In
Memoriam*, XLIII, I, 11). He derived whole passages from his predecessor's work (cf. *Norton*, II, II, 1-15,
and 'Maud', II, 102-7, 571-98). And in his use of abstract theological discourse, Tennyson's similar
employment in *In Memoriam* seems to have been an influential model for Eliot while composing his
own reflections on mortality, eternity and the passing of time.

1 Brian Howard was the basis for Anthony Blanche in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1944).
Blanche, a homosexual aesthete, recites *The Waste Land* during his undergraduate days at Oxford,
while standing on a balcony with a megaphone: "'I, Tiresias, have fore suffered all,' he sobbed to them
from the Venetian arches' while the undergraduate 'throng was on its way to the river' (34).
Responses to Eliot’s agnostic, sterile and calamitous text were varied. Some extended the assimilation of Weston’s theories into contemporary literature, or sought to reconcile the Victorian and modern versions of the story. Others responded to the non-Christian emphasis that Weston and Eliot had placed upon the myth by asserting a virulent Christian tradition, which perceived the Grail as a channel to mystic experience. But in the main authors reflected the conflict between the competing theories surrounding the Grail (Ritualist, Christian, Celtic, Pagan). The ambivalence of the Grail became its chief attraction for many writers; authors including Mary Butts, John Cowper Powys and Naomi Mitchison all utilised the Grail as a powerful symbol of contemporary social uncertainties and anxieties. By the end of the 1920s, despite Eliot’s indebtedness to the waste land of the *Idylls*, Tennyson’s paradigm would appear stripped of all cultural currency.

*The Waste Land* was not the only text published in 1922 which was concerned with the Grail story. A hostile attack on contemporary materialism, as well as a refutation of the Pagan-Ritual accounts of the origins of the Grail, Arthur Machen’s *The Secret Glory* was first written in 1913, but it was only when the author was enjoying a popular revival was he able to publish it. Set in a roughly contemporary environment, Machen’s novel tells the story of Ambrose Meyrick, ‘a miserable little humbug’ from South Wales, who suffers various torments at his public school, Lupton. He inherits the Grail from its aged Welsh keeper midway through the novel, before avenging himself on his former tormentors and travelling to the Holy Land where he is crucified, an event which brings him closer to the Grail. The Grail is here an ancient relic of Celtic Christianity which has the power to transport the holy to mystical realms. The Celtic basis of the Grail owes less to the scholarly research of
Alfred Nutt (who understood the vessel in pagan, rather than Christian terms) and more to Machen’s experiments with the occult and various Christian mystical cults.*

*  Machen (1863-1947) was an avowed anti-materialist throughout his life. His early work was influenced by the decadent movement of the 1890s and constitutes a series of lurid tales on Gothic or fantastic themes. *The Three Impostors* (1895) is commonly regarded as his best work of this period. At the turn of the century, following a period of sustained clinical depression brought on by the death of his first wife, Amy Hogg, Machen recast himself as a champion of mysticism and spirituality, which can be seen, in part, as a new means of combating the economic and scientific materialism which he saw as the ruination of contemporary society. He believed that the function of literature was to convey a sense of spiritual ecstasy. Legends of the Grail, Machen believed, were based on vague recollections of the rites of the Celtic Church. These ideas feature heavily in *The Secret Glory*, which was written around the same time as he published essays on Grail origins in Alfred Douglas’ *The Academy*. Mark Valentine’s biography *Arthur Machen* (1995) is a useful introduction.

*The Secret Glory* is a double narrative, at once a grail romance and an untraditional school story. It is in the school parts of the novel that Machen demonstrates the most obvious clash between the nineteenth-century and modern (mystical, spiritual) understandings of the medieval. They come in the form of Meyrick’s conflict with his chief tormentor, Horbury – his uncle and the bursar of Lupton School. Meyrick’s passions are medieval: he first incurs the wrath of his uncle when he is late returning to school after spending a day admiring the gothic architecture of the nearby Seldon Abbey. Being a school where the masters are ‘nothing more or less than bloated schoolboys’, Meyrick is severely beaten by his uncle for such an impudent interest.¹¹⁶ Meyrick’s elevation to the spiritual plain, however, appears to validate such a ‘genuine’ appreciation of the medieval.

Meyrick’s uncle Horbury is similarly consumed with an enthusiasm for medievalism, but of the nineteenth-century Neo-Gothic type. He appears as a malevolent portrait of one of the many other nineteenth-century public school headmasters who sought to employ Muscular Chivalry as a means of educating upper-middle class schoolboys. Horbury spends his evenings imagining the school (with
himself as headmaster) transformed into resplendent Victorian Gothic. Unlike Meyrick's mystic love of architecture and holy vessels, Horbury's vision is purely materialistic: the transformation of the school's buildings into 'red brick French thirteenth century, with Venetian detail, much admired' is done purely in order to increase school, and personal, revenues. There is something wholly inauthentic about all his dreams: he garners ecclesiastic support; designs an impressive list of 'old boys', including Walter Raleigh; and orders anything preceding the Gothic revival to be 'boarded up and used as a gardener's shed'. Presumably, the reader is meant to nod sagely when the uncle's career is abruptly ended with unfounded allegations of indecent behaviour – rumours which apparently begin with the Grail itself, now in the keeping of the increasingly vengeful Ambrose Meyrick. The increasingly sadistic tone of the latter half of the novel was common to several other Grail novels at this time, including Charles Williams's *War in Heaven* (1930) and Sherard Vines's *Return, Belphegor!* (1932).

Machen wrote several other essays and stories on the Grail, most notably *The Great Return* (1915), which, following the discovery of purportedly true Grails in Wales and Glastonbury, describes in an anecdotal style of reportage how the Grail appeared in a Welsh village, where it healed the sick and united the Anglican and Nonconformist congregations in a mystical Celtic Mass. An influence on Machen's views of the Grail was his friend and fellow mystic, A.E. Waite, who introduced

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* As a further signifier of the bursar's love of all things medievalist, Horbury also occupies himself away from classes in annotating Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur' for a selection of 'English literature for Lower Forms' (20-1).

† As part of his materialist plans for Lupton School, the bursar intends to encourage 'many more 'rich Jews' to enrol. For the 'rich Jew who desired to send his son to an English Public School was, in nine cases out of ten, anxious to do so precisely because he wanted to sink his son's connection with Jewry in oblivion [...] the more Jews the better' (24-5). Clearly aligned to the forces of materialism, and in opposition to Meyrick's and Machen's mysticism, the presence of the rich Jews in *The Secret Glory* is the first hint at the growth in anti-Semitism that became a staple part of much of the Grail literature of the 1920s and 30s, especially in Mary Butts's *Armed With Madness* (1928) and Charles Williams's *War in Heaven* (1930).
Machen to the various Christian-mystical sects with which he was associated. In 1903 they collaborated on a verse drama, ‘The Hidden Sacrament of the Holy Grail’. Apart from this play, Waite’s only other fictional contribution to the Grail legend was a religious epic, *The Book of the Holy Grail* (1921), which charted his own mystical experiences in blank verse interspersed with short lyrics.

More influential than his poetry was Waite’s scholarship on the Grail. His research was far more controversial than his mystical verses, which belong ‘firmly to the vein of late Victorian religious poetry.’ Born in New York, but brought up in London, Waite was raised in ‘genteel poverty alleviated by fervent devotion to the Roman Catholic church’. The mysteries of Sacramental Christianity would remain central to much of Waite’s life and criticism. He intensely disliked Weston’s ritual theory of the Grail’s origin (his attacks on her became increasingly personal and misogynistic), while academic scholars found his mystic understanding of the Grail utterly ‘fantastic’. Waite’s scholarship took his readers into the realms of heightened Christianity: into hidden Catholic sects which maintained the secrets of esoteric knowledge which, as is often the case with esoteric writers, Waite did not reveal.

Another adherent of Waite’s esoteric writings was Charles Williams. Williams joined Waite’s Fellowship of the Rosy Cross in 1917. After reading Waite’s *The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail* (1909), Williams sent Waite a copy of *War in Heaven* (1930), Williams’s first foray into the Grail legend. Although more famous

*Waite, Machen and Evelyn Underhill, who wrote a contemporary-set Grail novel, *The Column of Dust* (1909), which is dedicated to Machen and concerns a young clerk, Constance Tyrell, who keeps the Grail in her London flat, were all members of the Order of the Golden Dawn. The Order came to be subject to a number of scandals in the years immediately before the Great War. Waite formed The Fellowship of the Rosy Cross in 1915, which was more overtly Christian in orientation than the Order of the Golden Dawn had been. Charles Williams joined in 1917. Waite also joined The Quest Society, whose members included W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, Underhill and John Masefield. See Francis King, *Ritual Magic in England* (1970), 112; Grayson, ‘In Quest of Jessie Weston’, 37, and Barber, *The Holy Grail*, 295-6.*
for his later *Taliessin through Logres* (1938) and *The Region of Summer Stars* (1944),
Williams’s early ‘spiritual shocker’, as he termed it, has much to commend it. It is a
well-paced thriller which begins as a sensationalist crime story, a style that could not
be more different from the lofty tone of nineteenth-century Grail poetry:

The telephone bell was ringing wildly, but without result, since there was no-
one in the room but the corpse.¹²⁴

The corpse is that of a victim of a black magic ritual perpetuated by Gregory
Persimmons, a publisher of occult books. Throughout the course of the novel
Persimmons, along with a Grail scholar, Sir Giles Tumulty,* a Greek merchant and a
mysterious Jew, attempts to wrestle control of the Grail for diabolical purposes. Much
of the novel is taken up with lurid descriptions of their Black Magic rituals, and
Satanic attempts to murder, possess another’s soul and to destroy the Grail. This
Black Magic is opposed by three figures who roughly correspond to Galahad,
Perceval and Bors: the Archdeacon, Kenneth Momington and the Duke of Ridings.
For each of these latter-day knights, the Grail is revealed according to their innate
capacity to perceive the nature of vessel. The Catholic duke sees it as a sacred relic of
his Church; while Mornington, the poet, understands it through the literature of
‘Hawker, and Tennyson, John, Malory and the mediaevals’.¹²⁵ Williams, however,
leaves the reader in no doubt that although glimpses of the Grail can be perceived by
many, it is the Archdeacon’s understanding of the Grail which is the most true. For
him the Grail is a channel linking the material world, the sacraments and history to
Divine Nature itself.¹²⁶

* The title of Giles Tumulty’s latest work of Grail scholarship is *Historical Vestiges of Sacred Vessels in Folklore*, a work that sounds suspiciously like a description of the work of the Celticist and Folklorist, Alfred Nutt.
† During the veneration of the Grail, he sees ‘the chivalry of England riding upon a quest’, and to
describe it he repeats the lines from Tennyson’s ‘The Holy Grail’: ‘And down the long beam stole the
Holy Graal, / Rose-red with beatings in it’ (136).
The novel reaches its denouement with the arrival of Prester John, a rare, though not unique figure in the traditional story, probably suggested by Waite’s *The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail*. He defeats Persimmons and his accomplices and then holds a Mass, wherein the glory of the Grail is revealed for those who maintained the good fight against the Satanic forces. At the Mass the Archdeacon, like Galahad, passes into Heaven:

The archdeacon stood up suddenly in his stall; then he came sedately from it, and turned in the middle of the chancel to face the three who watched. He smiled at them, and made a motion of farewell with his hand [...] as he set foot on the first [steps of the altar he] sank gently to the ground.

This spiritual shocker, which began as a crime thriller, ends in a beatific vision of the Grail and the assumption into Heaven of a quiet, unassuming man, who throughout the novel has a psalm quietly on his lips (‘His mercy endureth for ever’). The difference from the nineteenth-century warring, questing Galahad is pronounced. The Archdeacon achieves victory through faith, not might of arms, while Grail scholars are mocked or resisted throughout the novel.

The strength of Machen’s, Waite’s and Williams’s resistance to the nineteenth century’s version of the Grail as an Anglican / Humanist symbol was grounded in the fact that each of these writers had found an alternative vision of the vessel. Machen, Waite and Williams were all interested in the Grail as a mystical object, whether Celtic, Catholic or Anglo-Catholic in orientation. It may also be relevant, when considering their resistance to traditional English interpretations of the Grail, that none of them were from the usual English upper-middle class, which provided nearly all of the Arthurian writers of the Victorian period. Machen was Welsh; Waite a naturalised American and Williams was from a working-class North London suburb. For English writers who were of Tennyson’s class and lacked a confirmed religious
belief, the problem of how to treat the story of the Grail was more problematic, its solution less readily definable.

In *Peronnik the Fool* (1921), the Anglo-Irish gentry writer George Moore favoured a hybrid approach to the Grail. Unlike the work of most other interwar Grail writers, Moore set his novel not in the contemporary world but in the medieval past – his source being a Breton tale collected by Émile Souvestre in 1841 and known in English through Andrew Lang’s *Lilac Book of Fairy Tales* (1910).*130 The tale concerns the adventures of a simple cowherd, called Peronnik, who must journey to the Castle Kerglas to obtain the Gold Basin, which has the power to supply limitless food, cure sickness and restore the dead to life, and the Diamond Lance, which is able to slay all whom it touches. When he achieves this quest Peronnik is able to free his village from the drought it has been suffering for several years. Joining the King of Brittany, the cowherd then drives out the French from Nantes, and goes on to defeat the French at Anjou, Poitou and Normandy, before travelling to the Holy Land, where he defeats the Saracens, forces their king to be baptised and marries his daughter.

Moore Christianised this Celtic tale and also added several distinctly Westonian elements. Peronnik manages to achieve his quest through a mixture of prayer, wood-lore and empathy with the natural world.131 While the Golden Basin is essentially a Celtic vessel of plenty, familiar enough to any reader of the *Mabinogion*, when used in conjunction with the Lance it becomes a restorative power that can rejuvenate a waste land that Moore configures in distinctly Westonian terms. The land is infertile because of the drought – the cattle are dying, the people are starving – caused by the sorceress who has cursed the land, while the villagers’ faith in God

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* It is unlikely that ‘Peronnik l’idiot’ is a particularly ancient Breton tale. In 1899 W. Newell wrote that ‘It has little similarity to genuine Breton folk-tales, and it is scarcely to be doubted that the account we have is only a literary recast, answering to the inventions of Hersart de la Villemarqué’ (‘The Legend of the Holy Grail. VI’, 278).
begins to waver as no knight is able to achieve the quest of the Basin and Spear. Sir Giles, who helps Peronnik on his quest, but cannot achieve it on his own, due to his being wounded in the knee, is an echo of the wounded king. When Peronnik returns to the village he throws the spear into the air and the villagers sing for rain, which comes and restores the land, bringing a ‘second springtime’, before he travels on, feeding the starving people of Brittany with the Basin, while routing its enemies with the lance.

Medieval, Christian, Celtic and Westonian, Moore’s *Peronnik the Fool* is a hotchpotch of different Grails (though interestingly the Golden Basin is never described as the Grail) and seems uncertain as how to synthesise them into a coherent whole. Nonetheless, written only a year after *From Ritual to Romance* appeared, *Peronnik the Fool* demonstrates how quickly Weston’s ideas were disseminated and appropriated by contemporary writers.

Moore’s *Peronnik* is unusual for the period in that it is set in a roughly medieval world. Written at the start of the next decade, Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931) is more typical of the post-war forays into the Grail story as it is situated in a roughly contemporary environment, stretching from the mid-nineteenth to the first decades of the twentieth century. And although Woolf’s most experimental novel does not allude to the Grail directly it can still be seen, in part, as an attempt to reconcile Tennysonian and Westonian accounts of the Grail. The novel traces the intertwined lives of six characters – Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny and Louis.

* T.S. Eliot was apparently outraged to learn that, while the American journal, *The Dial*, had offered $150 for *The Waste Land*, the Irish novelist, George Moore had been offered £100 (roughly three times the amount) for *Peronnik the Fool* (Valerie Eliot, ‘Introduction’, to *The Waste Land: a facsimile and transcript of the original drafts*, xxiv). Moore’s story appeared in *The Dial* in November, 1921; Eliot’s *The Waste Land* appeared exactly one year later. That Moore, Eliot and Machen would publish three very different accounts of the Grail legend in a period of 12 months is indicative of the cultural importance of the Grail at this time.
- in a series of interior monologues. These are interspersed with italicised passages which record the passing of time through charting the ascent and descent of the sun, the passing of the seasons and the rise and fall of the waves.

Linking these voices is Percival, whose thoughts are not recorded in the novel. Percival has been perceived in many different ways by critics: Jane Garrity has described him as an ‘archaic hero-mother’, tied to the interwar process of feminising imperial ideals, J.W. Graham saw the figure as a ‘hero of youth, illusion, unconsciousness and action’, and Michael Tratner has claimed that in Percival Woolf ‘compressed [...] all the political concerns she devoted her life to opposing: militarism, imperialism, male chauvinism, and acquisitive individualism.’ It is in Percival’s association with the Grail knight of nineteenth-century medievalism that Woolf’s character is able to combine these disparate views – though the relationship between the two has not hitherto been examined. Percival first appears at the boys’ public school where he is captain of the cricket team. He leads a purely physical existence – rowing, riding and hunting as well as playing cricket. And it is to his physicality that the other characters are drawn, adoring ‘his magnificence’. It is predicted at school that Percival ‘will certainly attempt some forlorn enterprise and die in battle’. And die he does, halfway through the novel when serving in India. But his death is needless, not part of any heroic conflict, but caused by his horse which throws him to the ground. Percival represents youth, physicality, military endeavour and Empire. Bernard describes him as ‘our captain’; Louis calls him ‘a medieval commander’. He closely resembles that other Grail knight of the nineteenth-century public school – Galahad. But added to this portrait is a more sensual, more creative force, derived from the sexual-nature symbolism Weston
understood to be the heart of the Grail problem and which, no doubt, Woolf was aware of.

Most of the characters are sexually drawn to Percival at some point in the novel. This sexual magnetism is related to a sense of paganism that surrounds Percival. Neville, watching him at school, sees Percival as ‘remote from us all in a pagan universe’, filled with ‘pagan indifference’ at the Christian ceremonies which are celebrated around him. He is intimately associated with nature; a purely physical, unreflective presence, to whom Rhoda offers a sacrifice of flowers.

Whereas Eliot and later writers (Butts and Powys in particular) presented their texts as a riot of disparate quotation relating to the nature of the Grail, Woolf, as befits a novel of memory and harmony, presents Percival as a symbolic synthesis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Percival is the past: as a ‘conventional’ hero, a representative of ‘decency’ and duty to one’s country, he is at one with Alcibiades, Ajax and Hector and the medieval knights. Yet as a memory he is also the means through which Bernard, Susan, Rhoda, Neville, Jinny and Louis are able to identify the past, and identify each other, though their own differences – sexual, gendered, professional, temperamental – would otherwise divide them. Percival joins the present to the past.

By overlaying the nineteenth century’s public-school hero with the modernist symbolism of Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*, Woolf managed to achieve, in what is the most Eliot-inspired of her novels, a satisfying conclusion to *The Waste Land*’s complex inheritance from the nineteenth century. Eliot expressed his Victorian waste

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*One of the characters of *The Waves*, Louis, bares a striking resemblance to Eliot. Unlike the other characters, Louis is not English, but Australian by birth. Constantly mindful of his colonial, commercial background, Louis forms a reverence for English traditions (47) and forever seeks a sense of order in life. Louis is employed in the area of imperial finance (Eliot worked for the shipping insurers, Lloyds), while writing his poetry at night in his attic. Cautious, bony, intelligent, formidable, Louis possesses a ‘sordid imagination. His heroes wore bowler-hats and talked about selling pianos for
land through fragmentary, incoherent verses – the nineteenth-century influence behind which being barely perceptible to his contemporary readers. Woolf, however, used the figure of Percival, the oldest of the Grail knights, to link the Victorian world view with the post-war twentieth century. While the motif of the waste land is a symbol of disharmony and lack of meaning, Woolf’s Victorian/Westonian Percival is a sign of unity and recognition (even though Percival is absent for most of the novel). Other writers, however, did not seem to strive for such a conclusive synthesis to the problem of the Grail. Instead, many were content to articulate the disparity of the Grail and the irreconcilability of the various theories of what this vessel actually meant.

Mary Butts’s *Armed with Madness* (1928) appears to be the first Grail novel to emerge from an avowedly agnostic author. It is a country-house novel populated by a community of Bright Young Things who ‘live fast and are always having adventures’. Its plot concerns the numerous mysteries surrounding a jade cup, which is found at the bottom of a dried up well and is possibly the true Grail. The drought which has caused the well to dry up is symbolic of the sterility of modern life and, like much of the novel, derives quite obviously from Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and Weston’s *From Ritual to Romance*. Butts sums up the sterility of modern life just before the ‘Grail’ is brought to the surface:

> Everywhere there was a sense of broken continuity, a dis-ease. The end of an age, the beginning of another. Revaluation of values. Phrases that meant something if you could mean them. [...] There was something wrong with all of them or with their world. [...] Shove it off on the war; but that did not help.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ She would become an Anglo-Catholic in the mid 1930s.
The appearance of the cup – which is fetched out of the well with a spear, in a further reference to Weston – offers some promise of hope to this waste land. When the cup and the lance are reunited rain appears to replenish the parched earth. But, as in *The Waste Land*, water also brings death: a boat carrying twenty three Danish sailors is wrecked upon the coast during the storm, drowning its entire crew.*

These forces of possible regeneration are represented by the various persons staying at Gaunt House: Scylla Taverner and her brother, Felix, and their friend, Ross. These are joined by the homosexual lovers Clarence and Picus, and an American expatriate, Carson, who functions as the chief Grail-quester in the novel.† Like Williams’s *War in Heaven*, published two years later, these forces of regeneration are contrasted with figures representing less spiritual interests. There are the ‘swarming’ tourists who want ‘to see something off the regulation road’ and threaten to invade the tranquillity of the Bright Young Things’ Devon estate.¹⁴⁶ There is Mr. Tracy, the cup’s original owner, who attempts to regain it from Picus, his son, who had stolen it at the start of the novel. He represents a repugnant materialism, and mutters ‘Prupperty: prupperty: prupperty’ as he plans to take back the cup.¹⁴⁷ And lastly, there is Phily, a ‘slick young animal’ with a ‘vulgar accent’.¹⁴⁸ The narrative tone is particularly disgusted by the presence of this man ‘from the gutter’ who does business with Jews.¹⁴⁹ Presumably, the Grail is only for bohemian types of the upper-middle class.

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* Cf. *The Waste Land*, IV ‘Death By Water’, in which Phlebus the Phoenician is drowned in a storm (ll. 312-21). Eliot’s poetry is also quoted at several points in the novel, as part of a web of numerous allusions to high and low culture, including, among others, Celtic legends, Negro Spirituals, lines from Ovid, Ira Gershwin and Jane Harrison’s studies of cultural anthropology. Butts believed she was working ‘on a parallel’ with Eliot, though she was working on the positive side of the Grail story, while Eliot concentrated on the negative aspects of the waste land. Eliot, who refused to write an introduction to her first novel, does not seem to have liked her work. See ‘Selections from the Journal of Mary Butts’ (1966), 172.

† Carson is a mixture of the foolish Percival and the stereotype of the dumb-American tourist (“‘God! What a beautiful place […] This is the England we think of. Hardy’s country isn’t it?’”, 11).
For Butts, the Grail was 'the very spring of our culture', 'the most wonderful thing to think about in the world'.\textsuperscript{150} She was familiar with the work of many of the chief Grail scholars of the day – Weston, Nutt and Waite are alluded to at several points – and her knowledge of their work clearly influences the way that the Grail is presented in her novel.\textsuperscript{151} Unlike the fiction of Machen, Waite and Williams, Butts's Grail has no definite origin or meaning. Indeed, it may not be the Grail at all. It appears, at various points in the novel, as the real 'Sanc-Grail', a Celtic Mass cup and even as an Indian 'poison-cup'; it is frequently used as an ashtray and once as a glass for whisky and soda.\textsuperscript{152} Towards the end of the novel, Picus, a bisexual mischievous Puck-like figure with an Oedipus complex, reveals that he planted the cup, which he stole from his father, in the well as a means of attracting the sexual attentions of another guest at the country house. There is no denouement to this novel. The 'Grail' is simply thrown back into the well and the novel ends with Clarence being cured of his psychopathic gay angst, brought on by the affair Picus, his lover, conducts with Scylla. 

Armed with Madness, then, is as confused and as perplexing in its attitude to the Grail as is the scholarship on which the book is founded.

This reactionary novel, which Virginia Woolf turned down for the Hogarth Press, with its suggestions of anti-Semitism (which are more evident in its 1932 sequel, The Death of Felicity Taverner),\textsuperscript{153} has found favour with a growing number of academics.\textsuperscript{154} The same could not be said for John Cowper Powys's Grail novel, A Glastonbury Romance (1932), perhaps the most scholarly of all Grail fictions published in the first half of the twentieth century. Interest in Powys's work peaked in

\textsuperscript{*} At an early point in the novel the guests at Gaunt House discuss the Grail and its associations for them (29-30). Felix and Clarence mention Tennyson and 'his temperance knights'. Both feel that the Idylls represent the 'Keltic Twilight', which Felix describes as 'a false way of telling about something that exists' and which 'inspired those awful pre-Raphaelite pictures [...] the world's worst art.' Others mention 'a mass said at Corbenic', Wagner and 'the female spirit of life'. Scylla says: 'Quod inferius sicut superius est', which Butts possibly took from Evelyn Underhill's Mysticism (1911), 35.
the 1970s, when *A Glastonbury Romance* was endorsed by the ‘Tolkien generation’, but seems to have been in decline ever since.¹⁵⁵

Powys’s work is a huge novel, set in contemporary Glastonbury and its environs. It possesses a Dickensian cast of characters – there are nearly fifty of them, representing a spectrum of social classes from a marquis and a captain of industry to Nonconformist preachers, brothel keepers, vagrants and socialist agitators.¹⁵⁶ Much of its plot, which is as diverse as its characters, concerns the various conflicts between Philip Crow, the industrial entrepreneur of Glastonbury, and John Geard, a nonconformist preacher known as Bloody Jonnie due to his predilection for invoking the blood of Christ in his sermons. While Crow wishes to industrialise Glastonbury, Geard sets about planning to transform the town into a centre of a new religion centred on the Grail, as well as supporting the town’s conglomerate of Communists, Mensheviks and Anarchists. The disagreements between these two men draw in all the other conflicts in the novel: materialism/spiritualism, capitalism/socialism, sensuality/prudishness, and the old and the new.

With its large list of characters, its detailed descriptions, its precise geographical location, its concerns with social problems and the impact of industry and materialism on the inhabitants of Glastonbury, Powys’s novel appears to be very much in the vein of the Classic Realist novel. Yet its concern with esoteric spiritual experience, along with its mystical passages and sometimes fantastical elements, means that *A Glastonbury Romance* resists such easy pigeon-holing. The advocation of a working commune would appear to align the book with the socialist novel; its destruction in a flood – which brings with it spiritual revelation for Bloody Jonnie as he is drowned – seems to lead away from any such categorisation.¹⁵⁷ Powys’s novel is
a textualisation of the clash between nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms, meanings and ideologies.

_A Glastonbury Romance_ is, like others in this chapter, virtually unrecognisable in its scope and theme from the nineteenth century’s understanding of the Grail. Like Butts’s _Armed with Madness_, it is in many ways an ‘answer’ to _The Waste Land_ in the sense that while Eliot wrote of the barrenness of modern life, Powys attempts to bring the rejuvenating, though death-bringing, waters to Glastonbury. As with many of the Grail texts of the 1920s and 30s, _A Glastonbury Romance_ is concerned with themes of sexual attraction, sensuality, tourism, industry, materialism, history and literary and cultural heritage. Yet for Powys there seems to be little sense of the ‘dis-ease’ or the spiritual barrenness of the contemporary world. Neither is there any dislocation between past and present. Everything in this wide-ranging novel is drawn together by the Grail, ‘the poetry of our race’, as Powys described it.¹⁵⁸

_From Ritual to Romance_ is by far the biggest influence on Powys’s understanding of the Grail. But like _Armed with Madness_, Powys’s novel frequently cites the work of past and contemporary Grail scholars, among them Charlotte Guest, John Rhŷs and Roger Sherman Loomis and Frederick Bligh Bond.*¹⁵⁹ Powys does not just present these conflicting notions of the Grail’s origins, as Butts did, but puts forward a unifying hypothesis of the Grail’s meaning which, like Weston’s conjecture, is pre-Christian and pre-Celtic in origin:

Christians had one name for this Power, the ancient heathen inhabitants of this place had another, and a quite different one. Everyone who came to this spot seemed to draw something from it, attracted by a magnetism too powerful for anyone to resist. But as different people approached it they changed its chemistry, though not its essence, by their own identity, so that upon none of

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* Bond was a scholar and an archaeologist who used spiritual mediums to guide his discoveries. In _The Gate of Remembrance_ (1918), Bond related his discovery of numerous finds at Glastonbury through a series of spiritual experiments. Like Powys, Bond believed that Glastonbury had been a centre of spirituality for the various peoples and cultures of Britain for millennia.
them it had the same psychic. [...] Older than Christianity, older than the Druids, older than the gods of the Neolithic men, the many named Mystery had been handed down to subsequent generations by three psychic channels; by the channel of popular renown, by the channel of inspired poetry, and by the channel of individual experience.¹⁶⁰

Central to Powys’s hypothesis is Glastonbury itself. It is, in Powys’s view, a centre of a mystical, spiritual power which has been experienced by its many historical inhabitants. ‘Generations of mankind, aeons of past races, have – by their concentrated will – made Glastonbury miraculous’.¹⁶¹ Like the shifting people of Glastonbury, this force is evolving and appears in various manifestations. The Grail is symbolic of this mystical power; its multiple presentations (food-providing platter, Eucharistic chalice, regenerative cauldron and so on) are symptomatic of the evolving nature of the spiritual force.

Perhaps the Grail, then, if properly understood, is a means of reconciling contradictory belief systems, as well as the nature or natures of the Grail. Powys presented history as a continuous struggle between creative, mystical forces and destructive materialist ones.¹ His hypothesis for stringing together all the divergent Grail theories of the twentieth century is essentially comparative and reductivist. Whereas Frazerian anthropology (which Weston adapted in her Grail studies) demonstrated that by comparing the features of various belief systems the ‘truth’ of Christianity is eroded, Powys sought to show how the various interrelations of divergent ideologies could be perceived to persuade a modern reader that there was some spiritual truth left in contemporary mysticism and amongst the debris of dead religions. Powys’s Grail, then, was far from a symbol of religious or social decay;

¹⁶¹ There are other such ‘reservoirs’ of ‘world magic’ at the great religious ‘centres’ of the world, including Jerusalem, Rome, Mecca and Lhasa (285).
¹ Machen, Waite and Williams, who charted a similar struggle between the forces of spiritualism and materialism, seem likely to have been an influence here.
rather he presented it as a unifying motif of Britain’s historical, multi-ethnic spiritual past.

Powys’s *A Glastonbury Romance* was, in many ways, the conclusion to the Grail texts of the 1920s and 30s as it marked the reintroduction of the Grail story into the larger Arthurian corpus. Unlike other texts discussed in this chapter (as well as many of the nineteenth century), Powys’s novel, by virtue of its size and geographical location, draws in many elements of the Arthurian story. And it is Malory’s *Morte Darthur* that forms the dominant version of the legend, not Tennyson’s *Idylls*.

Seemingly unknown to Eliot, ignored by other writers and derided by the Grail scholars who examined only the earlier romance material, the *Morte Darthur* is re-enacted amongst the characters of *A Glastonbury Romance*, through a series of analogies and allusions. For instance, Philip Crow’s plans for industrialising Wookey Hole Caves are termed a ‘Dolorous Blow’ to the land. Bloody Jonnie functions as both Merlin and the Fisher King: he brings about the modern quest for the Grail; his near-seducer is named Nimuë; his death at the close of the novel restores the land.

The ‘roles’ each character plays, however, are fluid and never absolute. Sam Dekker, for instance (who resembles the young Powys to some degree), quite consciously resembles several Arthurian characters, as Dhira B. Mahoney notes: ‘Sam Dekker, [...] having an affair with a married woman, is clearly a Lancelot figure, but when he takes a vow of celibacy to serve Christ and abjures the woman, he is Galahad or perhaps Percival leaving Blanchefleur, and when he sees a vision of the Grail, he is pierced in the vitals, like the Fisher King’.

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*In addition to the ‘roles’ each character fulfils in *A Glastonbury Romance*, the geography of Powys’s novel also corresponds to the Arthurian legend: the Waste Land is situated on the outskirts of the town (318); the tomb of Joseph of Arimethea and the grave of Arthur are located nearby (118-9); Chalice Hill, a local landmark, was the ‘real’ site of Carbonek, the Grail castle (246); Excalibur lies somewhere near (121); the chantry in which Lancelot died also lies in a preserved ruin (797-8). Even Mother Legge’s brothel is called Camelot by the locals (498).*
Powys’s *A Glastonbury Romance* is the first post-war retelling of the Grail story that made consistent reference to the Arthurian story, rather than just brief allusion. All of the important Arthurian works of the 1930s and 40s – David Jones’s *In Parenthesis* (1937), Charles Williams’s Taliessin-cycle (1938-44), T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King* (1938-58) – would include the Grail in their retellings of the story of Arthur. But *A Glastonbury Romance* marks another shift in Arthurian literature of the twentieth century, as it is part of an important body of Arthurian writing which was consciously produced as British, rather than English, literature.

Along with the work of Jones and Williams, as well as John Masefield’s *Midsummer Night and Other Tales* (1927), Powys’s novel is part of a conception of the Arthurian story which is distinctly Anglo-Celtic. Powys assembled his Arthurian knowledge from many sources, many of which are Welsh – as is one scholarly character, Owen Evans the antiquarian. The novel’s epigraph is taken from a Welsh Triad, translated by John Rhŷs. And the whole pre-Christian, pre-Celtic history of the Grail, as presented in the novel, is an inclusive notion of British heritage. Powys’s later Arthurian novels, *Morwyn; or, the vengeance of God* (1937) and *Porius: a romance of the Dark Ages* (1951), would continue to develop the idea of the Matter of Britain as an Anglo-Celtic story.*

**Conclusion**

The Grail scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries freed the way for writers to explore the Grail story in new directions. Whether Ritualist, Christian or Celtic, the diverse origin theories provided modern writers with new approaches to a traditional narrative. Yet, because of its disparate and often

*Powys, who was of Welsh-Norfolk ancestry, returned to Britain in the 1930s after spending most of his life as a lecturer in the United States. He settled in Blaenau-Ffestiniog, North Wales, where he rediscovered his Welsh ‘roots’ and wrote his later fiction.*
contradictory hypotheses, no new paradigm was formed out of the scholarship and literature which emerged from the 1920s and 30s. Clearly Weston's Ritualist theory was the most influential, yet it was archetypal, rather than paradigmatic. And the reasons for this were various.

To begin with, Weston's hypothesis did not inspire or convince everyone — numerous scholars resisted her theories, while Christian writers such as Williams, Machen and Waite rejected her pagan, anthropological reading of the Grail. Unlike Tennyson's *Idylls*, the Westonian trend did not seek to locate itself within an evolving cultural tradition, but instead it ignored all literary developments after Chretien, labelling them as corruptions. The Westonian archetype was also used by authors who consciously wanted to differentiate themselves from earlier critical and literary versions of the Grail story. Moreover, it was concerned only with a specific component of the Arthurian story — the Grail being almost always divorced from its larger Arthurian frame. And finally, the heterogeneity of the Grail texts produced in the 1920s and 30s precluded any paradigmatic formation: there were modernist verse, mystical novellas, potboilers and Anglo-Celtic prose epics; writers emerged from the working class and the gentry alike; and, though all these works were produced in England, their authors were American, Irish and Welsh, as well as English; while in the field of scholarship, they hailed from all over Europe. Whereas Arthurian literature in the nineteenth century had predominantly been a nationalist affair, after the Great War it became ever more international; and the paradigmatic formation of English Arthurian literature could never survive such a transition.

Weston's Ritualist account of the Grail was the first of the twentieth century's major Arthurian trends — a stimulating and imitable version of the Grail myth which inspired many, but not all. There would be other such trends — the historical novel, the
feminist retelling, the Anglo-Celtic revisions – but few would have the immediate impact of Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. One movement which has largely been ignored in critical accounts of the modern Arthurian story is the growth of interest in the legend in Wales and Cornwall. While seemingly localised and regional, the Celtic Arthur has played a major role in the development of a British Arthurian tradition in the twentieth century. Indeed, after the 1920s the Arthurian story – like the Grail – would no longer be a purely English narrative.
That ‘cleaves to cairn and cromlech still’: the Arthurian story in Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall and Wales

Though the Grail legend attracted a wide number of writers in England during the 1920s and 30s, this cultural vibrancy was not extended to the Arthurian story more generally. Indeed, even with the reinventions of the Grail story, English writers (scholars aside) played a relatively small part. T.S. Eliot was, of course, an American, as was A.E. Waite (a native of New York). Arthur Machen came from Monmouthshire in south-east Wales and John Cowper Powys, half Welsh by birth, elected in later life to identify himself fully with the Celtic peninsula. The Irish writers George Moore and James Joyce, in ‘Araby’ (1914; see below), had also employed the Grail myth. Only Virginia Woolf and Mary Butts can truly be seen as English authors. And though Charles Williams, a Londoner, seems to have paid little attention to the Welsh origins of his surname, the protagonist in his major Arthurian work, the Taliessin-cycle (1938-44), would be taken from the Celtic, rather than Anglo-French, tradition.
In England the deterioration of Tennyson’s literary standing in the post-war years resulted in the decline of the Arthurian story generally. By the late 1920s the *Idylls* were being criticised for their sententiousness, their over-use of allegory, their ‘departure from the spirit of the old stories’ and for Tennyson’s failure to possess ‘that universal interest in human nature’ which, apparently, marks out a great writer. In an essay written in 1929, A.C. Bradley summed up attitudes to Tennyson deftly: ‘To care for his poetry is to be old-fashioned, and to belittle it is to be in the movement.’ Of course there were still many ‘old-fashioned’ readers and Arthurian literature of the 1920s still contained many minor works which were derived from the *Idylls* – its influence was particularly noticeable in plays written for the amateur theatre, for instance. But many other writers rejected Tennyson completely. The work of Evelyn Waugh, who was certainly ‘in the movement’, amply demonstrates the contemporary aversion to the nineteenth-century poet.

Waugh’s fiction often lampoons the Victorians’ taste for medievalism, especially in architecture – examples include Llanabba Castle in *Decline and Fall* (1928) and Hetton Abbey in *A Handful of Dust* (1934). Waugh was also fond of allusions to the Arthurian legends, often derived from the *Idylls* and always made with facetious intent. The twinned themes of Victorian Gothic and the Arthurian legend are most prominent in *A Handful of Dust*. The novel’s protagonist, Tony Last, is the proud owner of Hetton Abbey, described in one fictional guidebook as ‘formerly one of the notable houses of the county, [which] was entirely rebuilt in 1864 in the Gothic style and is now devoid of interest.’ The house is not, as Tony admits, ‘altogether

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Bradley continued: ‘the antipathy to these defects seems in some cases to have so atrophied the power of enjoyment that Tennyson’s weakest poems and his best meet with the same indifference or contempt, and a reader will remain unmoved by lines which, if he were ignorant of their authorship, he would hail with delight’ (61). Certainly many readers of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* praised the modern poet for his descriptions of the aridity of modern life, when, more properly, they ought to have been hailing with delight the applicability of Tennyson’s ‘The Passing of Arthur’ to post-war Britain.
amenable to modern ideas of comfort’, but its ‘general aspect and atmosphere’ – ‘the
line of its battlements against the sky; the central clock tower where quarterly chimes
disturbed all but the heaviest sleepers; the ecclesiastical gloom of the great hall’ –
delight its owner.6 Each bedroom of Hetton is named from Malory; there is Yseult,
Elaine, Mordred, Merlin, Gawaine, Bedivere, Lancelot, Perceval, Tristram and
Galahad, where the bed is so uncomfortable that it is reserved for the most unwelcome
of guests. Tony’s own room is Morgan le Fay; Brenda, his wife, sleeps in Guinevere.

Like the Arthur of the Idylls, Tony’s ‘whole Gothic world [...] come[s] to
grief’ when he discovers his wife’s infidelity with a man named Beaver, who, if
Brenda is equated with Arthur’s queen, makes a very poor Lancelot.7 In despair, Tony
abandons Hetton and England in search of a lost city in South America:

He had a clear picture of it in his mind. It was Gothic in character, all vanes
and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements, groining and tracery, pavilions and
terraces, a transfigured Hetton, pennons and banners floating on the sweet
breeze, everything luminous and translucent.8

Of course, Tony does not find this tropical Camelot. Instead, after a bout of fever he is
rescued and held captive by the mysterious Mr. Todd, an illiterate European who is
the chieftain of a tribe of native South Americans. Here, held under the threat of
death, Tony is forced to endlessly re-read the works of Dickens (another eminent
literary Victorian whom Waugh despised for his sentimentality).

Waugh took the title of his novel from Eliot’s The Waste Land.* In the
interpretive accounts of that poem appearing in the 1930s, one of Eliot’s chief poetic
devices was the juxtaposition of an intellectually and spiritually fertile past with a
meaningless, sterile present. Although Waugh was constructing his own novel on the

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* Eliot, The Waste Land, ll. 27-30: ‘I will show you something different from either / Your shadow at
morning striding behind you / Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you; / I will show you fear in a
handful of dust.’
sense of emptiness evident in *The Waste Land*, he was not (at least in this novel) employing the Arthurian myth to contrast the present sterility with past fecundity. *A Handful of Dust* portrays the present as no more spiritually impoverished than the past — or at least the nineteenth century. Although Guy Crouchback would reverentially call upon the crusader knight, Sir Roger of Waybroke, in Waugh’s later *Sword of Honour* (1965), to pray for him and ‘our endangered kingdom’ before venturing into the Second World War, the moral seriousness of medieval Catholicism (which was invoked by other Catholic and Anglo-Catholic writers including David Jones, Saunders Lewis and the older Eliot) was not available to Waugh at this time. The Arthurian myth as Waugh knew it — that of Tennyson’s *Idylls* — was but another symbol of the moral vacuousness and cultural fraudulence of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The Grail had not been reoriented in this way. Divorced from the *Idylls* and imbued with powerful anthropological and ideological signification, through the scholarship of Weston, Nutt and others, the Grail became a counterpoint to the spiritual or social ‘drought’ which writers perceived everywhere in the 1920s and 30s and which Waugh saw as especially evident in the Tennysonian Arthurian story. As with the Grail myth, the Arthurian story would later be dynamised by a series of creative scholars, many of whom would present it as a Celtic cultural construct. Indeed the British writers who would treat the story with reverence in the 30s and 40s would be producing Arthurian literature from a decidedly Anglo-Celtic perspective.

But before considering this hybrid production, it is worth examining the literature which was being produced in Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall and Wales during the first half of the twentieth century — texts which have been ignored in most accounts of the

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*Indeed, Guy Crouchback’s quest for twentieth-century chivalry proves to be as elusive and as ultimately futile as Tony Last’s attempt to discover the South American Camelot.*
Arthurian legend in the twentieth-century. Indeed, even at the time of its production, the eminent English scholar E.K. Chambers wrote, concerning Celtic peoples' relationship to the mythic king: 'the flames which once burnt around the memory of Arthur have long ago sunk into grey ashes. He wakes no national passions now.'

How wrong he was.

**An ambivalent hero: the Arthurian legend in Ireland and Scotland**

Unlike England, the Celtic nations had never possessed a paradigmatic structure of Arthurian literary production. Welsh interest in the legend was too spasmodic, too dependent on the nation's cultural and political self-confidence to produce a sustained, authoritative tradition; while Cornish Arthuriana had always been too regionally-specific to require a dogmatic literary form. Interest in Arthur in Scotland and Ireland, meanwhile, has always been ephemeral and peripheral - a trend which continued into the modern period. For, while both countries produced a number of accomplished and experimental Arthurian texts, their quantity is not large. This historical ambivalence towards Arthur is partly a result of the Arthurian story being used in the medieval period as a means of historically legitimatising English colonial ambition towards the Gaelic countries - particularly Scotland.

The quantity of Irish retellings of the legend is especially small. What does exist is paradoxically characterised by the absence of Arthur himself, in what is best described as an anti-colonial-Oedipal trope. Yeats's 'Time and the Witch Vivien' (1889) is the earliest example. This brief poem tells of Vivien's numerous wily schemes ('war plots, peace plots, love plots') and of how she defeated Merlin ('for young girls wits are better / Than old men's any day'), before describing how she was eventually defeated by Time himself. Although Yeats presumably drew Vivien from
the *Idylls*, apart from the mention of Merlin, there is nothing here to locate her within the wider (English) Arthurian story. All Yeats did was to extract a character, a few brief themes and then recast them in a wholly different manner. Such would be the pattern in all Irish retellings.

George Moore’s *Peronnik the Fool* (1921), discussed in the last chapter, was more daring in its use of the Grail than was Yeats’s treatment of Vivien. Rather than employing the usual assortment of knights, Moore’s hero is a cowherd, whose peasant sympathy with the land allows him to achieve his quest. Moore also employed the Ritualist theories of Weston, along with a Breton folk-tale, rather than the traditional Tennysonian or Malorian sources. Once again, Arthur is absent from this tale.

Another novel which took as its central concern an Arthurian theme, but which avoided mention of the king himself, was Padraic Colum’s children’s tale *The Boy Apprenticed to an Enchanter* (1920). An Irish nationalist of militant persuasions, Colum was never likely to write a typically English-derivative Arthurian story. Set in Ireland, chiefly on the West Coast, Colum’s novel concerns Eean, the apprentice of the title, who is sold by his poverty-stricken family to Zablun, a wicked Enchanter whose feats include the destruction of the tower of Babylon. Zablun is a cruel master to Eean, who escapes and begs Merlin (who has previously abandoned sorcery for the love of Vivien) to assist him. Merlin, in a brief return to the magical world, helps Eean in defeating his former master. Preoccupied as it is with Eean’s rebellion against

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* Merlin’s relationship with Vivien shows strong affinity with Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites: ‘He was two score years of age, and she was five years less than a score. Nevertheless he thought it better to watch her dancing with bright green leaves in her red hair than to know all that would bring him from being a lesser to being a great Enchanter. Of the maidens and great ladies he had seen, some, he told her, were like light, and some were like flowers, and some were like a flame of fire. But she, he said, was like the wind. And he thought no more upon the King of the Isle of Britain, nor on the great work he was to do for him, and he spent his days in watching Vivien, and in listening to Vivien, and in making magic things for Vivien’s delight’ (90). Vivien, as in the traditional version of the story, does imprison Merlin, but only out of a jealous anxiety that he will forsake her for his duties to the ‘King of the Isle of Britain’. When Merlin assures her that he will not abandon her, Vivien releases him and together they live contented. This version of the story Colum claimed to have derived from the fishermen of Western Ireland.
an oppressive, imperial master, Colum’s novel is difficult to read without associating it with contemporary Irish separatism. The exclusion of Arthur (Merlin’s feudal lord is known only by the title ‘King of the Isle of Britain’) is but another instance of anti-authoritarianism.\footnote{12}

Colum’s friend James Joyce also displayed modern Ireland’s characteristic ambivalence towards the Arthurian story. Several scholars have examined his short story, ‘Araby’ (1914), in terms of its possible indebtedness to medieval romance; it has even been considered in terms of its relation to the Grail, with the anonymous adolescent protagonist corresponding to Chrétien’s Perceval.\footnote{13} \textit{Finnegans Wake} (1939) makes many allusions to the Arthurian story, mainly in the form of the Tristram and Iseult myth, derived from Bedier’s scholarly version and Wagner’s 1859 opera.\footnote{14} The work is ostensibly set in the Dublin suburb of Chapelizod (Chapel of Isolde), and the daughter of the house is often corresponded with Iseult herself (with HCE, her father, sometimes casting himself into the role of Tristram, ‘violer d’amores’).\footnote{15} While allusions to the Tristram story dominate the references to the ‘Arthurian’ myth, Malory is also present in a series of, seemingly incidental, parodies: ‘melodi of malodi, she lalage of lyonesse, and him, her knave arrant’; ‘the merthe dirther!’; ‘camelot prince of dinurk’; ‘outraciously envioliated by a mierelin roundtableturning’; ‘Then old Hunphydunphyville’l be blasted to bumboards by the youthful herald who would once you were. He’d be our chosen one in the matter of Brittas more than anarthur’.\footnote{16} Unlike \textit{Ulysses}, however, there is no controlling myth, or ‘scaffolding’, in \textit{Finnegans Wake} and the Tristram legend does not correspond to the role of Homer’s \textit{Odyssey} in structuring Joyce’s last work.\footnote{17}

As interesting as Joyce’s use of the Tristram legend in \textit{Finnegans Wake} is the absence of any Arthurian theme or motif in \textit{Ulysses}. Joyce’s 1922 work is customarily
discussed as both a hyper-realist account of one day in an Everyman-figure’s life (June 16, 1904), but also as an ‘encyclopaedia’ of European culture since the Hellenic birth of Western civilisation. Yet *Ulysses*, despite its plethora of allusion, myth and symbolism, makes not one recognisable reference to the Arthurian story – one of the most persistent and most recognisable of trans-European legends. Joyce’s omission of the Arthurian story, as well as the rather obscure association in ‘Araby’ and the complex system of allusion in *Finnegans Wake*, is another instance of the equivocal attitude to Arthur evinced in Irish literature in the modern period. Its themes, characters and motifs have proved irresistible to writers, but its overall framework (along with Arthur himself) has been repeatedly rejected. It is ironic that T.H. White, an Englishman, would compose perhaps the most well-known twentieth-century Arthurian epic while living in Ireland.

In Scotland literary attitudes have been equally ambivalent. John Davidson’s ‘The Last Ballad’ (1899) was written firmly within the Tennysonian paradigm, but other Scottish writers, while tending to remain within the Tennyson-Malory axis, have been more resistant to the *Idylls*’ dominance. Martha Kinross’s *Tristram and Isoult* (1913) was one of the large number of Tristram and Iseult dramas produced in the early part of the twentieth century. Critics have justly praised Kinross’s successful and bold feminist treatment of the traditional story, in which Guinevere, too, plays a prominent part (see chapter one for discussion of both texts). The various manifestations of patriarchal oppression evident in Tennyson’s *Idylls*, and exacerbated in the misogynistic dramatic adaptations of J. Comyns Carr and his successors, is firmly resisted in Kinross’ play. That it should appear from the hand of a Scottish writer is all the more fitting given that Scotland gave birth to some of the most
Another Scottish Arthurian drama was produced in 1944 by James Bridie. His ‘Lancelot’ is no less remarkable than Kinross’s feminist Tristram and Isoult. Like Kinross, Bridie was not beholden to any idealised vision of Camelot. While Lancelot is certainly his hero, he portrays him as a complex figure, more at home with the peasants and Elaine than at Arthur’s court, which is here characterised by malevolent politics of self-advancement. Bridie also presents Arthur as a misogynist, who is helpless to resist the intrigues of the court and is at one point memorably described as an ‘etherised Blimp’. The women of the court are far more modern than their antiquated male counterparts: Nimuë frequently interrupts Merlin’s grand designs with spurious asides; Guenevere cuts through the overblown chivalric language of the court and is thoroughly discourteous to medieval religion, saying of King Pelles – he ‘is a limping old fool and a superstitious old madman […] He is so dazed with the sound of church bells and besotted with incense that he doesn’t know the truth from lies.’ Bridie wrote another play at this time, the comic ‘Holy Isle’, featuring King Lot and Queen Morgause of Orkney as they fail to colonise an island of anarchists. Though Arthur is mentioned at several points, he is never present in this play, and the drama’s focus is firmly on the northern figures of the Arthurian legend.

In short, the versions of the Arthurian story produced in Ireland and Scotland in the first half of the twentieth century – while small in number – were usually antagonistic to the English, Tennysonian-Malorian Arthur. Yet neither Irish nor Scottish culture was sufficiently immersed in the Arthurian story to derive much political utility out of the myth. The case in Cornwall and Wales, however, was very different.
The chough rises: the Cornish Arthurian renaissance

The ambivalence evident in Irish and Scottish treatments of the Arthurian legend was hardly apparent in Cornish literature during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Of course, Cornwall had possessed associations with the Arthurian legend for centuries. Arthur was a regional folk hero throughout the medieval period, though by the sixteenth century writers such as Richard Carew were rejecting Arthur as a symbol of Cornish independence in favour of a more integrated sense of Englishness (which had no room for a chieftain resisting Saxon incursion). Thereafter, Arthur was only intermittently the subject of Cornish literature, though he may have continued to operate as a folkloric figure for much longer. Yet by the mid nineteenth century poets such as George Woodley, Thomas Hogg and Robert Stephen Hawker, as well as antiquarians such as H.J. Whitfield, Robert Hunt and the earlier William Hals, had once more begun to examine and explore literary possibilities of the Cornish Arthurian legend.

The crucial event in the Cornish Arthurian revival (which lasted until the advent of the Second World War) was the collapse of Cornwall’s industrial infrastructure in the second half of the nineteenth century. With the price of tin at its lowest in a hundred years, mass unemployment and the closure of the majority of

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* 'Culhwch ac Olwen' (c. 1050) is the earliest extant text to make explicit reference to Arthur’s association with Cornwall, citing Kelli Wig (thought to be modern day Callington) as one of Arthur’s strongholds (Gantz edition, 167). Geoffreys of Monmouth gave Cornwall a crucial role in the Arthurian legend: first, by situating the begetting of Arthur – wherein Uther, aided by Merlin, seduces Igema, the Duchess of Cornwall – at Tintagel; and second, by choosing to place Arthur’s final battle near the river ‘Camblam’ (modern day Camel), in north Cornwall (Thorpe edition, 205-8, 259-61). Numerous other writers, including Hermann of Tournai, John of Cornwall, Béroul and John Leland testify to the continuing association between Arthur and Cornwall up until the sixteenth century.

† In 1854 Cornwall’s copper-ore production peaked at 164,000 tons; by 1913 this figure was reduced to 420 tons. In 1871 tin production was almost at 17,000 tons; by 1913 this was reduced by over half. In the 1850s over one quarter of the Cornish labour force (36,500 men, women and children) worked in the mines; in 1911 the figure was 7,600 (now nearly all men), or about 6 percent of the workforce. In every decade between the 1860s and the 1900s, some twenty percent of the male working population departed overseas (a figure three times that of the rest of England and Wales). See Ronald Perry, ‘Cornwall’s Mining Collapse Revisited’, Cornish History, August, 2001.
Cornwall’s mines, the region entered a severe depression, interspersed with periods of famine and mass depopulation. It was during this period that Arthur emerged as a major cultural figure for depression-struck Cornwall.

The Revivalist Arthur was a figurehead for two different responses to the collapse of Cornwall’s economy and industrial identity – one ideological, the other material. The ideological response can be characterised by the growth of ethnonationalism and regional separatism, which greatly accelerated in the early years of twentieth century. It was articulated in the establishment of the Cornish language movement, an increased interest in Cornwall’s Celtic past and the creation of the Gorseth Kernow, the focal point for much of the Celtic identity politics which scholars and patriots promoted. The second – more material – response to Cornwall’s economic collapse is most obviously rooted in the huge rise in tourism which swept over Cornwall in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Powered by the railways, Cornwall proved immensely successful as a British holiday resort, with its attractive climate, dramatic coastal landscape and pleasantly-packaged mythic history. Arthur was the symbol for both: the patriots and nationalists adopted him as the emblem of Cornish Celtic pride, while the tourism magnates found Arthur to be the perfect advertisement for this most un-English of England’s counties.

A major inspiration for the patriotic Arthur was Robert Stephen Hawker, the eccentric vicar of Morwenstowe and a close friend of Tennyson, who only began working on the *Idylls* in earnest after visiting Hawker in 1848; the vicar showing him round the peninsula as well as furnishing him with several books on the legend. Tennyson even considered Hawker’s ‘The Quest of the Sangreal’ (1863) to be superior to his own version of the legend.
Hawker’s ‘Sangreal’ is of vital importance in the Cornish Arthurian tradition because it established the Grail as the central motif in subsequent retellings of the story – a motif that would grow in ideological significance in the next century. At the centre of Hawker’s poem lies Arthur’s farewell speech to the knights of the Round Table as they prepare to set out in search of the Grail. Rather than regretting the passing of his fellowship (as in Malory and Tennyson), Arthur encourages the quest for the Grail. For him, the search for the Grail will bring atonement for his reign, which has been ‘too much athirst for fame: too fond of blood’. It will be the last great deed of his imperium before Cornwall is swamped by the Saxons. He tells his knights that the Sangreal will bring them and ‘native Cornwall’ to everlasting glory:

‘Ha! Sirs – ye seek a noble crest to-day,  
To win and wear the starry Sangreal,  
The link that binds to God a lonely land.’

Arthur’s speech – which has no precedent in the English tradition – established the quest for the Grail as the supreme symbol of Celtic achievement. ‘The link that binds God to a lonely land’ is not just typical of Victorian Arthurian hyperbole, but a declaration of Cornwall’s uniqueness within the Christian world. After Hawker, almost all Cornish poets who treated the legend took the achievement of the Grail to be the vital element in the Arthurian story.

The Cornish patriotism evident in Hawker’s ‘Sangreal’ was exaggerated in several later Grail-centric Arthurian texts. In her hymn ‘Angelice’ (1926), Katherine Lee Jenner wrote of Cornwall as a ‘Holy Motherland’, whose most famed ‘sons’ – Arthur’s knights who achieve the Grail – are depicted as a nation of Christian martyrs fighting a hopeless battle against heathen Saxons. The Cornish achievement of the Grail is also at the centre of B.D. Vere’s five-act drama, King Arthur (1930). But the
Grail is not the only means of configuring Cornwall as a Christian Promised Land – the play opens with the child Jesus holidaying in Tintagel, admiring Cornwall’s mountains, vales and moors. Jesus, however, yearns to return to the East, leaving others (Arthur’s knights) to complete the sanctification of Cornwall. The meaning of the Grail is profound in these texts. It is, in many ways, an equivalent to the medieval stories of the founding of Britain by Brutus (another story that is related to the Arthurian story in Britain). The Grail’s intimate association with Cornwall – ‘[t]he link that binds to God a lonely land’ – does not only configure it as a Christian province, but furnishes the land with a unique Christian identity, with a prominent position in the divine plan.

Apart from the Grail, the other central symbol of the Cornish Arthur is, of course, the chough, in which the soul of Arthur is said to reside (there is a similar legend surrounding the raven). Although the chough appears in many forms in the twentieth century, it was Robert Morton Nance who exploited it to its greatest extent. He retold the legend in his short play, An Balores (‘The Chough’, 1932), which concludes with a call to preserve the Cornish spirit and language (Kernewek):

*Myghtern Arthur, dre dha voth,
Pan us gansa dha balores,
Re bo gans tus Kernow Goth
Bys vynytha bew dha spyrys.*

*Yeth Hernow, re-be hyneth
A’ y growth yn enewores,
Ena a-dhassergh ynweth
Maga few avel palores.*

*Nyns-yu marow Myghtern Arthur!*

[O, King Arthur, grant that all
Who shall take thy chough as token,
May sit upon thy spirit call
To keep Cornwall’s faith unbroken.]
So again our Cornish tongue
That has lain so long a-dying,
Shall rise up as strong and young
As is e'er a chough that's flying.

King Arthur is not dead!\(^{31}\)

Nance, though born in Cardiff, was one of the most prominent Cornish scholars of his
day and did much to promote the teaching of *Kernewek*, which had died out as a community language in the eighteenth century.\(^{32}\) He also established, with Henry Jenner, the Federation of Old Cornwall societies, dedicated to the advancement of the native language, taking the chough as their symbol.\(^{33}\) But Arthur's most important integration into the Cornish ethnonationalist movement occurred in 1931, when Arthur and the chough were adopted as the symbols of the Cornish Gorsedd (*Gorseth Kernow*), which was once again the work of Nance and Jenner.

'Gorsedd',\(^*\) meaning 'great seat', is a congress of druids and bards, which exists to promote literary scholarship and the creation and performance of poetry and music. Born of the nationalist and republican dreams of a largely expatriate Welsh community living in London at the turn of the eighteenth century, the first *Gorsedd Beirdd Ynys Prydain* (Gorsedd of the Bards of the Island of Britain) was held in Primrose Hill in 1792.\(^{34}\) For patriots like Nance and Jenner the establishment of a Cornish *Gorseth* had obvious appeal: it would be a focal point of Cornish political, social and cultural life, and would symbolise entry into the Celtic (Brythonic) fraternity. Brittany had founded its own Gorsedd (Breton: *Goursez*) as early as 1899. At the Cardiff Eisteddfod of that year an Arthurian ceremony was held to symbolise the unity of the bards of Wales and Brittany. A sword representing Excalibur, split into two shards, was re-united by Archdruid Hwfa Môn (the head of the 'Gorsedd).

\(^*\) 'Gorsedd', though a Welsh word, is the accepted spelling in the OED, while the seemingly anglicised 'Gorseth' is a Cornish variant.
This act, he said, was a symbol of the 'spiritual unity [...] between the Welsh and Breton nations'. The Bretons were then admitted as Bards of the Gorsedd of the Isles of Britain, and so the Breton Goursez Vreizh was established. Thus Cornwall was lagging behind its fellow Brythonic-Celtic 'nations'. But by 1928 Jenner's and Nance's industry had paid off and the Gorseth Kernow was inaugurated in order '(1) to promote the study of literature, art, music and history; (2) to promote the study and use of the Cornish language; (3) to maintain and nurture links with other Celtic cultures; (4) to provide a forum and encouragement to all who work to further these aims'.

The distinguishing feature of the ceremonies of the Cornish Gorseth is its affinity with the Arthurian legend. At the conclusion to the Gorseth's ritual, Cornwall's Chief Bard announces 'An als whath Arthur a wyth, yn corf Palores yn few' ('Still Arthur watches our shore, in the guise of a chough there flown'). The assembled bards then claim 'Nyns yu Myghtern Arthur' ('King Arthur is not dead') and lean forward to touch the sword that represents Calespur (Excalibur), upon which they swear fealty to Cornwall. The ceremony ends with the singing of 'Bro Goth Agan Tasow' ('Land of my Fathers'), the last verse of which reiterates the idea of Cornwall as a land of Christianity, Arthur and the Grail:

\begin{verbatim}
Gwlascor Myghtern Arthur, an Syns kens, ha'n Gral
May kerys genen nyns yu tyreth aral,
Ynmos-sy pup carn, nans, meneth ha chy
A gows yn Kernenek dhyn-ny.
Kernow bys vyken!
\end{verbatim}

*However, the Breton Goursez was kept secret for fear the French government should regard it as a manifestation of Breton nationalism. The first public Goursez was not held until 1903. The Welsh Gorsedd remains the primary assembly of British (Celtic) bards, with the Breton and Cornish meetings being regional subsidiaries.

† 'Bro Goth Agan Tasow', the anthem of Cornwall, is sung to the same tune as the Welsh national anthem, 'Hen Wlad Fy Nhadau. The Breton anthem, 'Bro Gozh ma Zadoû' also uses the same tune.
Cornwall in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, then, had seen the transformation of Arthur from a forgotten regional hero into a figurehead of Cornish patriotism, an emblem of the Cornish-language movement and a symbol of Cornwall's distinct Celtic identity. Such an ethnonationalist ideology would seem to be very different from the Arthur of the tourist trade. Yet, if the language movement and ethnonationalism evident in the work of such people as Jenner and Nance was an attempt, in part, to fill the void in the communal Cornish identity following the collapse of its traditional industries, tourism was the major means of reinvigorating Cornwall's economy. And if Arthur had been adopted as the emblem of the new ideology, he was also adopted as the symbol of economic readjustment.

In 1877 the Cornish journalist and Celticist E. Whitfield Crofts wrote that 'to many Englishmen Cornwall is practically synonymous with all that is dull, barren, ugly and horrible.' However, after the destruction of its mining industry, Cornwall began to be marketed as one of England's premier holiday destinations – the expansion of railways providing access for many affluent English tourists. In many ways, Tintagel is symbolic of Cornwall's transition from a primarily industrial region to one dependent on tourism. In the mid nineteenth century it was the site of a successful tin mine, but, like so many others, this was closed in 1873, after which Tintagel was reinvented as one of Cornwall's most inviting spots, its chief attraction of course being its castle's ancient association with King Arthur.

The growth of the tourist's Arthur quickly spread. In 1884 Dinah Craik published her account of her travels through Cornwall which included several
Arthurian digressions (usually adapted from Tennyson or Malory). Only six years later the Cornish folklorist Margaret A. Courtney was complaining of the numerous guide books which took visitors on tours of ‘Arthurian’ Cornwall, pointing out many sites which had no connection whatsoever with the legend. To illustrate, Courtney wrote of the visitors to Land’s End who ‘express themselves disappointed that none of the country people in that district know anything of King Arthur.’ One of these guide books was published in 1922 by Great Western Railway, written by ‘Lyonesse’. So well had Arthur served G.W.R.’s expansion into Cornwall that they named many of their locomotives after figures from the legend: Chough, Excalibur, Guinevere, King Arthur, Merlin, Sir Lancelot, Tintagel (all Duke 4-4-0 class, built 1895-6), Avalon, Lyonesse, Pendragon and Camelot (Bulldog 4-4-0 class, built 1900).

The Tourist’s Arthur has continued to grow healthily into the modern day. Guidebooks to local Arthurian sites abound, often written in pseudo-spiritual tones. The economy of Tintagel village still obviously relies on its closely cultivated associations with Arthur. The nineteenth-century King Arthur’s Castle Hotel (which was the subject of a 1938 novel by the American writer Mary Ellen Chase) has been joined by the King Arthur’s Arms and several themed cafes. In addition, there are numerous Arthurian gift shops, which sell ‘replicas’ of Excalibur, Amethyst Merlins and plastic Lancelots among the usual ‘Celtica’. Even the local taxicab firm is called ‘Camelot Taxis’. Many critics have complained about the commercialisation of Arthur. ‘English twinkie’ was the opinion of one amused American scholar; Ronald Duncan, less amused, deplored ‘the commercial exploitation’ of the Arthurian story, saying that it is the twentieth century’s typical achievement to ‘turn a poem into a bazaar; Isolde into an ashtray’. Isolde ashtrays, along with ‘Guinevere car stickers’,
were also disapproved of by The Times in the 1980s. But at least The Times found a welcome element of self-parody in the King Arthur’s Arms lunchtime offer on ‘Excaliburgers’. ⁴⁹

However, the distinction between the tourist and the patriotic Arthurs is not always clear. In 1927 Henry Jenner, one of the chief nationalist propagandists of Cornwall’s Arthurian heritage, dismissed Tintagel as a tourist trap with ‘singularly little history and not much romance attached to it’. ‘Historically and romantically’, he summed up, ‘Tintagel Castle is rather a fraud.’ ⁵⁰ Yet in an earlier essay on possible Arthurian place names in Cornwall, Jenner had been much more positive in extending the Cornish claim to the historical Arthur. ⁵¹ The Gorseth Kernow’s adoption of Arthurian rituals in 1930 corresponded with Cornwall’s hosting of the International Arthurian Congress. With various members of the Congress attending the Gorseth, including the American Celticist Roger Sherman Loomis, it seems likely that the Gorseth’s decision to adopt its Arthurian regalia was a means of attracting academic visitors in the same way that Tintagel’s tradesmen encouraged the more general tourist. ⁵²

The most complex involvement between the touristic and patriotic Arthurs took place, predictably, at Tintagel, during the late 1920s and early 30s. In 1928, the millionaire Frederick Thomas Glasscock bought what was then known as Treverna House in the village of Tintagel. He began rebuilding it as ‘King Arthur’s Hall’, which was completed in 1930. This Hall was the home of the Fellowship of the Order of the Round Table, a neo-chivalric organisation ‘based on loyalty, devotion and respect’, which became so popular (at its peak it possessed 17,000 members) that Glasscock had to commission another building to house his Fellowship. ⁵³ The result

* Jenner himself gave a paper at the conference, which reiterated his 1927 essay on the fraudulence of Tintagel’s Arthurian associations. The American Time magazine, which reported on the Congress at Truro, commented that Jenner’s findings were ‘annoying to Tintagel tradesmen’ (Sep. 8, 1930).
was ‘The Hall of Chivalry’, completed in 1933. From the outside its great stone façade looks like any provincial hotel (fig. 15). Inside, however, Glasscock’s building is one of the last great Arthurian follies. It is constructed from over fifty different types of Cornish stone, and was built entirely by local craftsmen. It contains a huge granite throne for Arthur and Guinevere, two round tables, one crafted from wood, the other from granite (fig. 17). Several William Hatherell Pre-Raphaelite paintings depicting the life of Arthur, taken from Malory, hang in the front room of the Hall; they are complemented by seventy-two very fine examples of twentieth-century stained glass designed by Veronica Whall, a pupil of William Morris. Glasscock also amassed an excellent Arthurian literature collection.54

Glasscock’s aims were not to design a tourist trap.55 His Fellowship was a serious order, which was based upon the Freemasons (of which Glasscock was a member), with a heavy dose of William Forbush’s Knights of King Arthur thrown in (but unlike Forbush’s proto-scouting movement, the Fellowship was not exclusively a children’s order).* It was a non-denominational organisation which sought to re-establish chivalry as an everyday ethical code. The Fellowship and the Halls of Chivalry were epicentres of a much larger series of philanthropic endeavours which Glasscock began at Tintagel. His years in the area were spent creating employment for the local workers, in building working men’s clubs, tennis clubs, providing accommodation for scouting and guide groups.56 The Hall of Chivalry was a microcosm representing the economic rejuvenation of Cornwall (the stones which built the Hall were quarried from all over the region), but one that was rooted in

* Duxbrey and Williams quote one contemporary member of the Fellowship’s experience of the knighting ceremony: ‘The new knight would be suitably attired for the ceremony while those already knighted wore robes of blue or red according to their rank, whether knights of the sword or sceptre. The principles of the Order were read from a scroll, prayers were said, oaths made. The ceremony started in semi-darkness until the sword Excalibur was drawn from the scabbard with great flourish and Glasscock (in the role of King Arthur) struck the new knight on the shoulder, giving him [or her] his name: Sir Galahad, perhaps, Sir Lancelot or Sir Bedivere’ (King Arthur Country, 31-2).
Cornwall’s history – both industrial (quarrying) and mythological (Arthur). Strangely, following Glasscock’s death in 1934 (he had been recruiting for his Arthurian Fellowship in America, and suffered a heart attack on the home voyage) the Fellowship was wound up and finally closed two years later. As befitting his Order’s origins, the main Hall was bought by the Freemasons of Tintagel in the 1960s. In 1993 the Hall reopened and has attracted over two million visitors; the Fellowship was also re-instigated and currently has around three hundred members worldwide.\(^{57}\)

Although Glasscock attempted to provide an alternative to tourism at Tintagel, but one that still had material benefits (unlike the establishment of the Gorseth, for instance), it was tourism, ultimately, which appropriated the Halls of Chivalry.

The difference between the Arthur of the nationalists and the Arthur of the tourists is a finer one than is commonly portrayed. Both conceptions rely on a presentation of Cornwall as somehow different (geographically, ethnically, mythologically) from England – either as a reason for political independence or as a holiday attraction for the tourism market. And attracting foreign consumers/supporters (whether holidaymakers or academics) is integral to both causes’ success. In each manifestation of Arthur during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Arthur has figured as Redeemer, whether of nationalist hopes, Kernewek revival, or economic recovery. And though the Arthurian revival declined at the start of the Second World War, Arthur remains an important figure in the Cornish economy and crucial to the hopes of Celtic separatists.\(^*\)

\(^*\) Chapter six includes a brief look at contemporary political and literary manifestations of the Cornish Arthur.
Revival and rebirth: the early twentieth-century Arthurian Legend in Wales

Like Cornwall, Wales has ancient associations with the Arthurian legend. And like its Cornish equivalent, Welsh Arthurian literature is not an unbroken tradition, with fixed, stable meanings, but is rather a series of cultural reinventions – a process which continues to the present day. But unlike the Cornish version of the legend in the twentieth century, the Welsh is largely unmarked by any consideration of, or demands made by the tourist industry. Indeed, whereas the visitor to north Cornwall can feel quickly overwhelmed by the commercialisation of the myth, the tourist in Wales will find it difficult to discover much in the way of Arthurian attractions.

There are, of course, many places etymologically or literarily associated with the legend – the most obvious being Caerleon, which became Arthur’s chief city in Geoffrey’s Historia. Wace repeated Geoffrey’s descriptions of Caerleon’s geography, churches, learning and material wealth in his Brut: thus producing the French prototype for the many plenary courts described in Arthurian romance. Wace also added the statement that ‘Caerleon was a good place then; it has deteriorated since.’ And in describing Caerleon, Layamon’s Brut followed Wace closely, but expanded on Wace’s idea of the city’s deterioration, adding a sense of magic which is largely alien in his source:

Yet never since Arthur’s visit has the town ever flourished,
Nor is it ever going to between now and Doomsday.
Some books declare as certainty that the city was bewitched,
And it is very obvious that this is quite likely.
Writers and artists continued to associate the remains of Caerleon’s Roman amphitheatre with the actual Round Table up until the nineteenth century. But despite possessing at least as great a literary pedigree, Caerleon hardly matches Tintagel in terms of commercially exploiting its Arthurian associations. But then Wales – its climes hardly as inviting as southern Cornwall – was never established as a premier tourist destination, and had little need at the start of the twentieth century to enthrone Arthur as means of attracting holiday makers.

Indeed, in 1900 the buoyant Welsh economy hardly needed to entice new industries. Heavy industry – particularly the coalfields of the south – brought greater wages, more employment and more opportunities than Wales had possessed for centuries. As a result of a century of Nonconformism, its population was literate and educated; the country possessed a network of locally-administered secondary schools; and a royal charter granted in 1893 led to the establishment of a federation of university colleges, forming the University of Wales. It had also defined itself as a Liberal nation, with an emerging nationalist movement in the ‘half-cultural half-political’ organisation of ‘Cymru Fydd’ (Young Wales), which would greatly inspire

* Up until the excavation project of 1926-7, all that was visible of the remains at Caerleon was a circular mound – which proved as evocative to some writers as did the more dramatic excavations which can be witnessed today. John Churchyard, in his *Worthiness of Wales* (1587), wrote extensively on Caerleon’s Arthurian associations (29-34) and said of the Roman remains: ‘In Arthur’s time a table round / Was there whereat he sate, / As yet a plot of goodly ground / Sets forth that rare estate’ (30). Fig. 18 shows a nineteenth-century lithograph depicting the circular mound as Arthur’s Round Table.

† In fact, Caerleon is presently attempting to realise its economic potential in identifying itself as the Welsh Camelot. On July 12, 2006, the town’s Arts Centre inaugurated what is planned to be an annual Arthurian festival, promoting Caerleon’s centricity to the medieval story. At the conclusion of this festival is the ‘coronation’ of ‘Arthur’ and ‘Guinevere’. The Ffrwm Arts Centre also holds a permanent exhibition of modern Arthurian sculpture which, it is hoped, will encourage visitors to perceive Caerleon as Britain’s premier Arthurian site. As with so much nineteenth-century Arthuriana, Tennyson is once again present in the town’s Arthurian heritage. Visitors to the local Hanbury Arms are directed to the ‘Tennyson Window’, at which the poet laureate apparently sat while visiting Caerleon in 1856, drawing inspiration for his *Idylls of the King* whilst staring at the attractive prospect of the winding river Usk (see figs 18 and 19). The *Idylls* contain several descriptions of Caerleon’s surroundings, particularly in ‘Geraint and Enid’.

* In the 1892 general election 33 out of the 34 constituencies were won by the Liberal Party. The only non-Liberal seat – that of radical Merthyr Tydfil – was occupied by Keir Hardie of the Labour Representation Committee.
the young Lloyd George, destined to become Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1908 and Prime Minister in 1916. With economic prosperity and a communal identity rooted in Liberalism and Nonconformism, Wales in 1900 was very different to contemporary Cornwall. Whereas the Arthurian revival in Cornwall had been a reaction to the destruction of its economy and regional identity; in Wales the Arthurian renaissance was the product of national confidence. This fundamental difference separates the two peninsulas’ versions of Arthur – and which prohibits any reading of a unified ‘Celtic’ Arthur in the last century.

The Welsh Arthurian Revival, which corresponded the larger Welsh Literary Revival, can be said to begin at the end of the nineteenth century and continued in a vibrant form until the outbreak of the Great War, after which it became less vigorous and gradually died out by the 1930s. Its greatest moment occurred at the 1902 Eisteddfod at Bangor, where the Chair of Poetry, the most prestigious prize of the festival, was awarded to T. Gwynn Jones for his *awdl*, *‘Ymadawiad Arthur’* (‘The Passing of Arthur’), often thought to be ‘the single most important poem of the literary revival’. It marked a major change in Welsh-language literary production, influencing a generation of poets, and defined the pre-war Welsh identification with Arthur. Before Jones’s poem achieved its success, Welsh interest in Arthur was largely confined to a few antiquarian works such as Marie Trevelyan’s folkloric study, *The Land of Arthur* (1895), Owen Morien Morgan’s eccentric *The Light of Britannia* (1897) or the *Mabinogion*-inflected Celticism of the Anglo-Welsh poet, Ernest Rhys – all of which were in English. After Jones won the chair, the Arthur of the Welsh was Romantic (a fashion which came late to Wales), nationalist and was produced almost exclusively in *Cymraeg*.

* An *awdl* is a long poem written in *cynganedd* (a complex system of alliteration and internal rhyme), and using at least one of the twenty-four strict bardic metres. The Chair, the Eisteddfod’s most prestigious prize, is generally awarded to the best *awdl* at the Eisteddfod.
'Ymadawiad Arthur' was a revolutionary poem. The usual subject matter of the nineteenth-century Eisteddfod was Biblical, theological or moral; much of it was concerned with promoting the image of a 'God-fearing, Queen-loving, Empire-supporting, self-improving, earnest and wholesomely patriotic people'. Mostly written by Nonconformist ministers, the poetry of the second half of the nineteenth century represents one of the lowest points in Welsh cultural history. The choice of the Arthurian story as an Eisteddfod subject was an indication that Welsh culture was expanding beyond its nineteenth-century Nonconformist boundaries. As early as 1890 the Welsh scholar John Rhŷs had advocated the adoption of the *Mabinogion* and the Welsh Arthurian romances as suitable subjects for the Eisteddfod poetry, but it was not until T. Gwynn Jones took up the story of Arthur in 1902 that Welsh culture found a poet to match Rhŷs's ideals.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the fact that Jones was a scholar of medieval Welsh literature (holding several academic posts at several Welsh university colleges), 'Ymadawiad Arthur' is not a poem based on native sources. Rather, like so much contemporary English Arthurian poetry, its dominant source is Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* – specifically 'The Passing of Arthur', of which Jones's poem is largely a translation. And yet, despite its obvious indebtedness to Tennyson, Jones's 'Ymadawiad Arthur' marks a point of departure from the English model, realising in the course of poem a separate Welsh tradition. The first half of the work largely follows Tennyson, with Bedwyr (Bedivere) attending the dying king before he

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1. John Rhŷs, the first Professor of Celtic Studies Jesus College, Oxford (1877-1907), was a tireless educationalist and social reformer. One of the major pre-war figures in Arthurian scholarship, his best known work is his *Studies on the Arthurian Legend* (1891), which was a major influence on Nutt, Weston and Loomis, as well as Welsh writers and scholars, such as T. Gwynn Jones. His work is discussed in the following chapter.

2. T. Gwynn Jones was not the only writer at this time to follow Rhŷs's proposal for Arthurian-themed literature. The Rhiangerdd (translation) winner at the 1901 Merthyr Tydfil Eisteddfod was 'Cilwich ac Olwen' by Testyn, and in the same year that Jones won the Chair for 'Ymadawiad Arthur' at the Bangor Eisteddfod (1902), Silyn (Robert Silyn Roberts) won the Crown, a secondary prize, for his 'Trystan ac Esylt'.

eventually throws the sword into the water (as in the usual tale, Bedwyr fears that without the sword the kingdom will not be able to withstand the onslaughts of the Saxons). Returning to the wounded king, Bedwyr is told of a time of treachery and wretchedness under an enemy, when ‘A o gof ein maes i gyd / A’n gwir, anghofir hefyd’ (‘Our land will be forgotten / And our truth also forgotten’). But Arthur also promises to return to his bro, or homeland:*

\[
A \text{ chan fy nghloch, yn fy nghledd} \\
Ga faelaf, dygaf eilwaith \\
Glod yn ôl i'n gwlad a'n iaith.
\]

[And my bell will sound, I will grasp My weapon, I will bring forth a second time Praise for our country and language.]^{70}

It is here that Jones’s poem differs most obviously from ‘The Passing of Arthur’. Tennyson’s Arthur had explicitly warned Bedivere against such a false hope in his return, saying that ‘[t]he old order changeth, yielding place to new […] Comfort thyself: what comfort is in me?’^{71} Tennyson’s Arthur would not return – Victorian England was at the zenith of its power and had no need of a promise of national renewal. The Victorian stoicism of Tennyson’s Arthur is very far from the tone Jones’s poem – the Welsh Arthur is too aware of the ‘[d]an lyn dry’n drueni’ (‘wretchedness under an enemy’) to advocate such acceptance of the wiles of fate. The focus of both poems is very different too. Although the earlier form of Tennyson’s poem (the ‘Morte d’Arthur’) was composed as an articulation of the

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*’Bro’ signifies a local region, as opposed to ‘gwlad’, or country, nation. 
^{70} Tennyson’s Arthur makes only passing reference to his fabled return: ‘I have lived my life, and that which I have done / May He within himself make pure! but thou, / If thou shouldst never see my face again, / Pray for my soul.’ (‘The Passing of Arthur’, ll. 412-5). In the earlier ‘The Epic’ (1842), the nineteenth-century narrator, after hearing Everard Hall’s recitation of the ‘Morte d’Arthur’, dreams of Arthur’s return in the guise of ‘a modern gentleman / Of stateliest port’; and all the people cry ‘Arthur is come again: he cannot die’ (ll. 294-6). Tennyson, of course, removed the poetic frame of ‘The Epic’ when the ‘Morte d’Arthur’ became ‘The Passing of Arthur’ in the Idylls, re-emphasising the point that high-Victorian England had little need for a myth of returned greatness: it was already globally dominant.
poet’s own sense of grief at the death of Arthur Hallam, ‘The Passing of Arthur’, as its name suggests, is firmly focalised on the king himself. In Jones’s awdl, the focus is firmly on Sir Bedwyr. He begins the poem as a subject of personal grief, mourning the loss of his king:

\[
i \text{minnau} \\
\text{Hoffed fu gynt, - ni pheidiaf ag yntau;}
\]
\[
\text{Ynghyd y buom yng nghadau, - ynghyd lawn ein diehgyd yn ennyd angau!}
\]

[‘He has been So dear [to me] - I will not part from him! Together we fought in battle - together To go in the moment of death would be right!’] \(^{72}\)

Later in the poem he becomes the Everyman figure, the eternal Welshman ‘faced with an uncertain future’. \(^{73}\) Representing the historical people of Wales, as well as the contemporary, Bedwyr is told that he is to carry on the fight, that he must ‘Bydd ddewr a glân, / Baidd dioddef’ (‘Be brave and pure / suffer the waiting’). \(^{74}\) And at the conclusion to the poem Bedwyr, though ‘sad and silent’, goes off to the battle again.

But he goes remembering the words of the mysterious song which has filled the air as Arthur departs for Ynys Afallon (the Isle of Avalon). The three stanzas of this song are perhaps the most famous in twentieth-century Cymraeg literature:

\[
\text{Draw dros y don mae dirion nad ery}
\]
\[
\text{Cwyn yn ei thir, ac yno ni thery}
\]
\[
\text{Na haint na henaint fyth mo’r rhai hynny}
\]
\[
\text{A ddêl i’w phur, rydd awel, a phery}
\]
\[
\text{Pob calon yn heiny a lion,}
\]
\[
\text{Ynys Afallon ei hun sy felly.}
\]
\[
\text{Yn yr fro ddedwydd mae hen freuddwydion}
\]
\[
\text{A fu’n esmwythno ofn oesau meithion;}
\]
\[
\text{Byw yno byth mae pob hen obeithion,}
\]
\[
\text{Yno, mae cynnydd uchel amcanion;}
\]
\[
\text{Ni ddaw fyth i ddeifio hon golli ffydd,}
\]
\[
\text{Na thro cywilydd, na thorri calon.}
\]
Yno, mae tân pob awen a gano,
Grym, hyder, awch pob gŵr a ymdrecho,
Sylfaen yw byth i’r sawl fynn obeithio;
Ni heneiddiwna tra’n noddo – mae gwiw foes
Ac anadl einoes y Genedl yno!

[Yonder across the waves is a tender land where
No cry remains on her soil, and there does not dwell
Disease nor age to afflict those
Who come to her pure, free air and she makes
Every heart here agile and gay,
It is the isle of Avalon which is thus.

In the happy land are old dreams
Which comforted fear for long ages
There forever lives every old hope
There, high aims multiply
Never will this one lose faith
Nor feel shame, nor break hearts.

There is the fire of every Muse that sang
The power, confidence, desire of each man who tried,
She brings energy to the one who needs revival
A strong foundation for he who will hope
We will not grow old while she shelters us
And the breath of life of the nation is there!]

The first verse is a vision of tranquility, in which Afallon becomes a Welsh Tir na n’Og, the Island of Youth, offering peace and rest for those exhausted in the attempt to keep Wales free. In the second verse, the idea of Ynys Afallon becomes more political. Here, Afallon has become the living memory of Wales – containing the hopes and dreams of the Welsh nation, where (in contrast to the Wales of treachery, which Arthur has earlier predicted) faith is upheld and treason is unknown. In the third verse, Afallon becomes a storehouse for the Welsh nation – where the soul of Wales resides eternally. It also contains the seeds of the revival of which ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ is a major part. Here, Afallon is not only the subject of this poem; it is also the inspiration for the entire twentieth-century Welsh renaissance, bringing energy to its

* This affinity with the Irish legend, though unusual, is not without precedent. John Rhŷs had quoted an anonymous Latin description of Avalon in his Arthurian Legend (1891, p. 335) which mentions the island containing an eternal spring, an abundance of flowers and the absence of age and disease. Considering Rhŷs’s influence on the Welsh revival, it is probable that Jones’s conception of Afallon was largely drawn from Rhŷs’s scholarship.
poets, housing their nationalist and cultural aspirations. In Jones’s imagination, *Afallon* is not just the resting place for an undead hero while he waits to return; it has become the spiritual home of the nation, a storehouse of Welsh identity and nationalist ambition.

So great was Jones’s reputation during his lifetime that it was written in 1918 that Lloyd George would one day be spoken of as ‘Prif Weinidog o Gymru a fu byw yn oes T. Gywnn Jones’ (‘a Welsh Prime Minister in the age of T. Gwynn Jones’). Certainly his influence on Welsh poetry is not to be underestimated, especially in terms of Arthurian literature. In the years following his victory at the 1902 Eisteddfod, J. Machreth Rees (1904), John Dyfnallt Owen (1907), D. Tecwyn Evans (1915), Pardarn Besrudd (1918), D. Cledlyn Davies (1923), William Morris (1934) and David Jones (1936) all won prominent Eisteddfod prizes for poems on Arthurian themes. ‘Elphin’ (Robert Arthur Griffith, 1902), Tegla Davies (1922) and Tom Parry-Jones (1944) were the authors of some of the most prominent non-Eisteddfod retellings of the legend; while Frank Harold Lee’s popular version of Malory, *The Children’s King Arthur* (1935) was translated into Welsh in 1953. T. Gwynn Jones himself published three versions of ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ (1902, 1910, 1925), each time making substantial changes to the diction. He also wrote scholarly works on the legend in 1926 and 1930. Yet no work achieved the same level of success as ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ and in later years, after all the initial Romantic promise of Jones’s 1902 poem, an element of cynicism crept into the Arthurian story as it was retold by the *Cymraeg* writers. Again the this trend is typified in Jones’s work.

begins with ‘[a] gwaldwr tal’ (‘a tall countryman’), presumably Arthur, returning to Wales, whereupon he overhears a ‘gwr mawr’ (‘a great man’ or politician) addressing a large assembly ‘mewn estron iaith’ (‘in a foreign language’). Lamenting bitterly the loss of Cymraeg in modern Wales (though patriotically the people still sing ‘Hen Wlad fy Nhadau’, which promises that Cymraeg will never die), the ‘gwaldwr’ returns to his boat and sails back to Afallon, from where he will not return again. The last lines seem to be a deliberate parody of the song Bedwyr hears as Arthur sails into Ynys Afallon in ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’:

\[\begin{align*}
A \text{ chlywn gynghanedd brydferth a chwerthin} \\
A \text{ nwyfus gainc gan wefusau gwin}
\end{align*}\]

‘Druan gwyr! nid oes grudd o naddant
A ddeil ar beth ond addoli’r bunt!’

[And I heard beautiful cymghanedd and laughter
And a passionate tune from lips of wine.

‘Poor men! Not one of them
Will stick to anything but worshipping the pound!’]82

‘Atro Arthur’ is a slight poem, but it nonetheless expresses the same sense of disillusion which is evident in Jones’s later work – particularly the poems which deal with Jones’s idea of Ynys Afallon: ‘Tir na n’og’ (1916), a lyrical play based on the Irish otherworld which so keenly influences Ynys Afallon; ‘Madog’ (1918), which chronicles the eponymous medieval hero’s attempt to discover America; ‘Broséliawnd’ (1922), in which Merlin refuses earthly existence to escape into a magical forest; and ‘Argoed’ (1927), which tells of how Roman invaders destroy a community of Celts living in Gaul. As this sequence of poems progressed, the idea of Afallon as a tender, restorative land diminished. In ‘Broséliawnd’, for instance, Merlin’s imagined forest is an escape from the world, not a means of restoring it, as in ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’:
Bad dim o aberth boddi ymwybod
A'i gymar, ing, yng nghwsg y mawr angof?
Ai gwellyw gwybod trwy golli gobaith
Na thagu anobaith ag anwybod?
Pen a bai gof, oni pheidiai gofid?

[What sacrifice is it to drown the consciousness
And its partner, agony, in the sleep of forgetfulness?
Is it better to know by losing hope
Than to stifle hopelessness with unknowing?
If there were no memory, would not worry cease?]84

This is an existential despair raised to national and nationalist level. Merlin enters the imaginary world of Broséliàwnd, and abandons the concerns and ‘ing’ (‘agony’) of the real world.

The last poem to deal explicitly with the idea of Ynys Afallon is ‘Argoed’. The poem begins (and ends) with a nostalgic remembrance of a Celtic community:

Argoed, Argoed y mannau dirgel...
Ble'r oedd dy fryniau, dy hafnau dyfnion,
Dy drofâu ty wyll, dy drefri tawel.

[Argoed, Argoed of the secret places...
Your hills, your sunken glades, where were they,
Your winding glooms and quiet towns?]85

Such an idyllic nostalgia, however, is only possible because of the self-destruction the Celts of Argoed choose when faced with Roman colonisation. When the invaders demand tribute, the people of Argoed refuse and they lay waste to their own land,

‘Rhyw wast o ludw lle bu fforest lydor’ (‘A desolation of ashes, where once were wild woods’).86 This poem marks the last, and most bleak, version of Ynys Afallon. In ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’, this mythic land would house all that was best of the Celtic people, and would eventually restore the nation; Tir na n’Og would at least accept the dead and reward them with the riches of peace; for Merlin, Broséliàwnd was only a refuge from the world, which seems to have had no ability to revive modern Wales;
but the significance of ‘Argoed’ is difficult to establish: the community’s death wish in the face of colonisation is fundamentally futile. ‘Argoed’ has become nothing more than a memory – and a fragmented one at that – vaguely recalled from ‘the unremembering depths’. The poem’s negative Romanticism certainly shows the collapse in the Welsh revival’s hopes, and marks the end of Ynys Afallon as a viable cultural myth for twentieth-century Wales. After the Great War, Wales became a very different place – one characterised by unemployment, depopulation and depression. If Arthur had been the country’s symbol between 1900 and 1914, he was largely, though not wholly, rejected by the poets and novelists of the interwar years.

An unstable hero: the later twentieth-century Arthur in Wales

There are many reasons why the Arthurian legend did not retain its dominant position in Welsh culture after the Great War. The official status of Arthurian poetry as a subject for the Eisteddfod may have proved stifling for its development. More importantly, Arthur had emerged in Wales as a symbol of national self-confidence; but post-war Wales had little to celebrate: its economy was devastated by the slump in coal and steel prices, agriculture was ravaged by the depression and unemployment by 1930 was at 27 percent (rising to 60 percent in some areas). Meanwhile, the earlier totems of communal identity – Nonconformism, Liberalism and, in large parts of the country, Cymraeg – were declining in importance. Moreover, interest in the myth was almost wholly restricted (outside of scholarship) to writing in Cymraeg. The burgeoning English-language literature of the early twentieth century never took to Arthur in the same way as Welsh-speaking poets had done. In the industrial south there was much less need of Arthur: here, social realism was a more suitable cultural form than Romantic medievalism. Even in the Cymraeg-speaking heartland there was
a movement away from T. Gwynn Jones’s Romanticism in favour of a more realistic response to contemporary society.

For many, nationalism was no longer the province of dreaming bards, but had become the province of harder-headed campaigners, such as Saunders Lewis, who as well as being a more material poet than Jones was also the founder of Plaid Cymru, the nationalist party of Wales. In his most famous work, ‘Y Dilyw’ (‘The Deluge’), Lewis openly derided Jones’s Romantic vision of Afallon, juxtaposing it with the brutal materialism of contemporary warfare. Taking Jones’s most famous line – ‘Draw dros y don mae bro dirion’ (‘Across the waves is a tender land’) – Lewis twisted it into a new, uglier form: ‘A thros y don daw sŵn tanciau ‘n crynhoi’ (‘And across the waves comes the sound of tanks gathering’). Yet the Romantic energies which fuelled the earlier Arthurian poetry were not entirely expelled by Lewis and other post-war writers. Rather these energies were fed into another national redeemer figure – Owain Glyndŵr, the fifteenth-century leader of Wales’s last national rebellion against English colonialism – who as both prince and social bandit was much better equipped to deal with the political vagaries of post-war Wales.

The work of R.S. Thomas symbolises the position of Arthur in Wales after the literary revival. Deeply unromantic, Thomas’s image of Wales could not be further from the utopian vision of T. Gwynn Jones’s Ynys Afallon. In several of his poems Arthur appears as a symbol of a mythological past which wholly oppresses the contemporary Welsh. Thomas frequently wrote of how the people of Wales were ‘bred on legends’; how they possessed no sense of the present, choosing instead to live in a past which is ‘brittle with relics.’ As a signifier of ‘a dead culture’, Arthur

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* In post-war Wales, Arthur was often a ‘safe’ political figure to invoke, but Glyndŵr has consistently been seen as ‘trwbwl’, bringing with him ‘an aura of rebellion and danger.’ (Henken, National Redeemer, 192-4). Glyndŵr, a far more political figure than Arthur, proved a much better inspiration for the Welsh nationalist movement of the twentieth century.
functions in post-Second World War Wales in a manner similar to how the Grail functioned in England during the 1920s and 30s. Like the English Grail, the Arthurian story in Thomas’s retelling has become twisted, mean and sterile in its modern setting – such as in ‘Border Blues’ (1958), in which Thomas transposed the story of ‘Culhwch ac Olwen’ into a contemporary rural community on the border with England:

Are there none to marry?
There is still an Olwen teasing a smile
Of bright flowers out of the grass,
Olwen in nylons. Quick, quick,
Marry her someone. But Arthur leers
And turns again to the cramped kitchen
Where the old mother sits with her sons and daughters
At the round table. Ysbaddaden Penkawr’s
Cunning was childish measured with her.

The border setting of this poem is crucial to Thomas’s portrayal: the decrepit Arthur, once the champion of Celtic resistance to the Saxon invasion, now jostles with ‘the ladies from the council houses: / Blue eyes and Birmingham yellow / Hair, and the ritual murder of vowels’. Arthur, his myth useless to the twentieth century, is just one of the ‘sham ghosts’ of the brittle, unhealthy past full of ‘dead heroes and dead saints’.

‘Border Blues’ rejects Arthur as a viable myth for contemporary Wales; but another poem, ‘A Welshman to any Tourist’ (1955), presents Arthur as choosing to reject the modern Welsh:

The hills are fine, of course, [...] And packed with caverns,
One being Arthur’s dormitory;
He and his knights are the bright ore
That seams our history,
But shame has kept them late in bed.
There is no return from *Ynys Afallon* in these lines – such a romantic conception could never exist in Thomas's verse. And although Arthur and his knights are here configured as the 'bright ore' in the nation's history (rather than the dull portrait of 'Border Blues'), 'A Welshman to any Tourist' maintains the impossibility of the Arthurian legend as a viable historic or mythic model for the second half of the twentieth century – the Wales that has 'nothing vast to offer you', as the opening line bleakly puts it.

Thomas's poetry is unusual in that his verses articulate the uselessness of the Arthurian legend, whereas this uselessness is usually manifest in ignoring Arthur altogether. But then, Thomas was Wales's bleakest poet, whose prolific output was, paradoxically, often based on the themes of sterility and the unproductive. Perhaps it was not a poet, but a prose writer, who was best able to communicate the position of Arthur in the second half of the twentieth century. Glyn Jones's *The Island of Apples* (1965) is amongst the richest Arthurian works to appear in Britain since the Second World War; certainly, it is the best of his own novels. Like much of Jones's work, *The Island of Apples* is a story about children and is in many ways also a children's book.

The novel begins with Dewi, the book's adolescent narrator, discovering the near-drowned figure of Karl Anthony floating down the river. With initials corresponding to King Arthur and with an entry that would not be out of place in a medieval romance, even a Grail romance, Karl's entry into Dewi's life symbolises a shift from the mundane reality of semi-urban, petit-bourgeois life into a world of chivalry, adventure and escape. Despite the fact that the novel is structured around a series of deaths (those of Dewi's father, mother, headmaster and finally, perhaps, 

*Jones was presumably thinking of the entry of the sword in the stone which heralds the arrival of Galahad in Malory's 'The Noble Tale of the Sankgreal'.*
Karl), the tone of the book is lively, while its narrative is constructed out a series of
tall stories: some told by Karl concerning his adventures abroad, others acted out
among the streets and farms of Ystrad valley. Karl offers Dewi an exciting
adolescence – their adventures (particularly those concerning Growler, the boys’
headmaster) frequently centre on the defeat of the adult world. Yet Karl himself is
never quite an adolescent, never quite real. Blond, tall and well-dressed, wearing a red
satin sash across his waist, complemented by a pair of silver earrings and a golden,
snake-handled dagger, Karl is at once a knight of romance, a dandy and a gypsy. He is
also a child of Europe, having lived in France, Slovenia, Venice, Amsterdam,
Germany, ‘or perhaps it was Austria, or Poland, or the Balkans’ – Dewi, as ever in his
descriptions of Karl, is unsure.98

The Arthurian symbolism of the novel was not always integral to the work. At
the planning stage Karl was originally known by the rather less romantic name of
‘Roger’ and the Arthurian title was also a late development: early possibilities being
‘Black and Purple’ (the colours of the local school) and ‘Goodbye Brewery Square’
(where Dewi lives).99 But the finished work calls clear attention to an Arthurian
heritage. Aside from Karl’s initials, the title of the novel refers to Avalon, which had
been identified as the Island of Apples since at least William of Malmesbury’s De
Regum Gestis Anglorum (c. 1125).100 The novel’s epigraph – ‘Ynys Afallon ei hun sy
telly’ (‘The Island of Afallon is thus’) – is taken from T. Gwynn Jones’s ‘Ymadawiad
Arthur’. And then there is that other figure of Arthurian romance present in the novel:
Myrddin Tŷ-Coch, the odd-job boy who works for Dewi’s aunt in Abérgarthen (here
clearly Carmarthen).

Jones presumably knew of Myrddin’s associations with Carmarthen: the name
itself is said (erroneously) to derive from the place name Caer-fyrddin (Carmarthen),
while Geoffrey of Monmouth has Vortigern discover the illegitimate ‘Merlinus’
outside Carmarthen’s town wall.\textsuperscript{101} Myrddin is also linked to the Island of Apples in
the early Welsh poem ‘Yr Afalleneu’ (‘The Apple Trees’), where he appears as a man
driven mad by the misfortunes of war. Jones’s Myrddin retains his demented character
in\textit{ The Island of Apples}, where it is coupled with the element of licentiousness that he
had acquired over centuries. While Karl is largely uninterested in women, Myrddin is
‘always on about girls and babies and that’.\textsuperscript{102} In Dewi’s mind, this fascination is
explicitly related to Myrddin’s ‘base’ nature – especially his frequent associated with
excrement:

I could see Myrddin the odd-job boy wheeling a loaded muck-barrow out of
the stable across to the dung-heap in the corner. About sixteen Myrddin was, I
think, he was very strong and half daft, and filthy now through forking horse-
muck, his boots and his khaki trousers covered with old mud and dung.\textsuperscript{103}

There is nothing romantic about Myrddin: he exists in complete antithesis to the
chivalric Karl. In Dewi’s presentation of him as ‘strong and half daft’ he resembles
the crazed Myrddin of ‘Yr Afalleneu’. Even his mysterious birth is reduced to a
bestial event:

He told me years ago he was a bastard, before I was sure what a bastard was
[...] Born in a cowshed, he’d been, he said, his mother gave birth to him the
same minute as the cow dropped her calf in the next stall.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{*} There is little by way of female presence in this novel. Women, chiefly in the form of mothers and
aunties, are generally little more than obstacles to Dewi’s adventures. Karl does at one point refer to a
fiancée – a foreign princess, whose family he once rescued from revolution. For Karl, his engagement
to a beautiful girl is but a romantic motif, included to cap a story of cunning adventure. It is also
possible that Karl’s mentioning of an even limited romantic attachment is an attempt to preclude any
reading of Karl and Dewi’s relationship as homosexual (the four or five year age gap between the boys
perhaps being of additional authorial concern).

\textsuperscript{†} Myrddin remains a ‘filthy’ presence throughout the novel. Later, when Dewi is about to escape with
Karl, Myrddin tells him another story of his birth – this time his mother ‘dropped’ him while she was
cleaning a fanlight in a Carmarthen pub.
Dewi rejects Myrddin as a companion, while continually rejoicing in his friendship with Karl. Yet both Arthurian characters possess similar traits – they are about the same age (four or five years older than Dewi), share a penchant for tall stories, are radically at variance with their surroundings and both choose to isolate themselves from their communities. And while Karl brings a certain romanticism to his and Dewi’s exploits, their relationship is still associated (though less obtrusively conveyed) with the same sense of dirt which surrounds Myrddin. When both Dewi’s mother and father have died and he is sent to live with Karl at ‘Academy House’ his aunt asks him how he is faring:

I said it was great in Academy House – but I didn’t tell her anything about the sort of indoor camping life we had organised by now up there under the roof – living by ourselves and hardly ever seeing the Powells; making nearly all our own food, over our ankles sometimes by the bosh in scraps and potato peelings; fighting the dizzy flies that were so thick they made the room look like the air above a gnatty brook; [...] waking up every morning at one time dotted all over with masses of red flea-marks until we bought special powder for the bedclothes.²⁰⁵

There is something disturbing here – the fleas, the isolation, the dirt; later in the novel Dewi mentions with equal indifference a ‘swollen ankle-pad of a boil in the middle of my cheek’ and a ‘cake-like’ sore which covers his stomach.²⁰⁶ His life with Karl is described with such enthusiasm that Dewi’s narration hardly reveals the extent of the squalor they live in. Again, Karl is providing Dewi with an escapist fantasy – a chivalric gloss to the grim reality of their existence.

Contributing to the sense of fantasy is Dewi’s narration, which is always vague and elusive where it regards Karl: ‘Rees called him a boy, but I thought he was a man’; ‘[h]e looked thin, and high, and not real, about two or three feet taller than Growler. He seemed to belong lovely in the firelight and he gave me a feeling of glory just to look at him’.²⁰⁷ ‘He had some sort of foreign accent, he sounded like a
Frenchman, or a North-Walian, or a German perhaps, but not guttural at all. So elusive are Dewi’s descriptions that Karl may be nothing more than a romantic figment of Dewi’s imagination, a psychological consolation for all the losses he suffers in the course of the novel (losses which Dewi’s narration never dwells on, or for which he never expresses grief). This sense of escapism is brought to its most heightened state in the conclusion to the novel – a denouement which owes a particular debt to ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’.*

As Dewi and Karl run away from Ystrad, fleeing from the ensuing police (who suspect Karl of the murder of Growler, the headmaster), they steal a yacht, ‘as lovely and graceful and light as a great snowy sea-bird, called Tir na n’Og’. The boat’s name alludes to both T. Gwynn Jones’s conception of Afallon, as well as his later poem of the same title and the Irish legend. Like Bedwyr, Dewi stands upon the shore staring out into the estuary as Karl brings the yacht closer. Dewi, again like Bedwyr, expresses his sense of dependence on Karl, not because of some feudal bond, but because of an adolescent’s intimacy:

Without Karl I didn’t feel as though I lived at all, not even existed, all my thoughts were of him, I couldn’t imagine my life if I were not able to turn to him for strength and courage.\(^\text{110}\)

As Karl draws closer to the shore, Dewi sees that he is pursued by another boat, ‘a small black steamer’, its darkness contrasting with the Tir na n’Og, painted ‘dove grey and white’. The yacht, through Karl’s mismanagement (his first in the novel), loses its mast. Seeing his friend in trouble, Dewi swims out to the boat. But it is too late; Karl is thrown into the sea, and the current drags him out:

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* Glyn Jones read Welsh.
when the lightening stopped, I caught sight of Karl floating rapidly on the current, his body rising and falling on the surface of the water as the flood carried him on towards the sea. Soon he would be past me, and gone for ever into the darkness. […]

‘Karl, Karl! Don’t leave me. Karl! Karl!’

Dewi has already told the reader that Karl has already died once, in Spain; miraculously recovering after the death certificate had been signed. Yet after Karl is swept into the sea, there is little opportunity to believe that he will come again – at least not to Dewi, who remains bereft and screaming, too young to be told to ‘be a man, suffer the waiting’, as Bedwyr was told in ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’.

Like the Arthurian myth, Karl cannot be claimed by Dewi – or Wales, for that matter – for long. Throughout the novel he remained apart from his Welsh surroundings: he was a child of Europe who found Ystrad utterly oppressive. That the novel is concerned with and wholly narrated from the perspective of an adolescent boy is fitting for a novel that draws its symbolism from the Welsh Arthurian tradition. Although the novel’s epigraph (‘The Island of Afallon is thus’) may, in the context of the novel, refer to the experience of Dewi’s romantic adolescence, the fact that it is taken from the first and most escapist verse of T. Gwynn Jones’s poem – ignoring the later political and spiritual ramifications of the song that Sir Bedwyr listens to – is itself of importance. Like the epigraph, Karl only ever offers Dewi a brief time of romantic escapism. Although he embodied myth, told tales and created legends, he was never able to offer Dewi a way out of adolescence.

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In many ways Karl symbolises the Welsh Arthurian tradition: at once elusive and escapist, its dominant form seems perpetually adolescent. For there is a recurring pattern in Wales’s relationship with the Arthurian story in which interest in the story
is rarely sustained over a long period of time. Rather, Welsh Arthurian literary production can be characterised by a series of fits and starts – short, brief developments, culminating in a few notable texts before interest in the legend quickly dies out. As David Jones described it in 1942, 'the tradition of Arthur is a subterranean one; it emerges to have significance, sometimes here, now there.' The legend was of intermittent interest in the centuries before Geoffrey's *Historia*; and again around the middle of the thirteenth century. It excited certain London-Welsh scholars at the turn of the nineteenth century, but over forty years passed until the five Welsh Arthurian romances were finally published – and then they were edited by a remarkable Englishwoman, Charlotte Guest. The Arthurian revival of the early twentieth century is another instance of the 'boom and bust' nature of Wales’s literary relationship with the Arthurian myth – Wales’s political and cultural make-up being too historically fragile to support and develop a legend which other nations (and chiefly England) had effectively manipulated as a myth of permanence and imperial greatness.

As such, both T. Gwynn Jones’s ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’, with its promise of revival, and Glyn Jones’s *The Island of Apples*, with its sense of the collapse of hope and romance, conform to the traditional position of Arthur in Wales. Although they are, in their own ways, remarkable texts, neither could have hoped to have inspired a long-lasting tradition – much less an English-style paradigm. Instead, as is so often the way with Arthurian literary production within the British Isles, the Welsh literature of the twentieth century flowed into the English tradition, enriching it with a few choice Celtic flavours. But whereas in previous centuries there was a certain sense of appropriation about this movement (at least it has been perceived in this way
by later critics), the Arthurian literature of the 1930s and 40s was a distinctly Anglo-Welsh product. This British Arthur is discussed in the next chapter.
Above (fig. 15), Glasscock’s 1933 ‘The Hall of King Arthur’. The figure above the entrance shows the boy Arthur pulling the sword from the stone. Below left (fig. 16), looking towards the ruins of Tintagel Castle. Below right (fig. 17), King Arthur’s Granite Throne, the centrepiece of Glasscock’s Halls of Chivalry.
Above (fig. 18), an anonymous engraving (1861) showing the pre-excavated remains of Britain’s most complete Roman amphitheatre, which John Churchyard in 1587 claimed was ‘a deepe and large round pееce of groud [that] shewes yet where Arthur sate’. Below left (fig. 19), the ‘Tennyson Window’, at the Hanbury Arms, where the poet laureate apparently enjoyed the attractive prospect of the Usk coursing its way through the meadows of Caerleon. Below right (fig. 20), photograph (c. 1900) of the Hanbury Arms and Usk.
This sketch illustrates a passage from Malory in which Lancelot is abducted by four queens. Lancelot, however, lies dreaming of his love, Queen Guinevere, who appears as a swan (bottom right of picture). Lancelot wears a German helmet of the type Jones knew from the 1914–18 war.
Above (fig. 22), the frontispiece to Charles Williams’s *Taliessin through Logres* (1938), showing the religious-geography of Taliessin-cycle’s poetry.

Below (fig. 23), four illustrations for T.H. White’s *The Witch in the Wood* (1939). From left to right: Sir Palomides, Four knights at Bedegraine, Queen Morgause and the castle at Orkney.
Clockwise from top: Fig. 24, advertising poster for the film version of Lerner and Loewe's *Camelot* (1967). Fig. 25, the French release of MGM’s *The Knights of the Round Table* (1953), starring Ava Gardner, as an imperious Guinevere, and Robert Taylor as Lancelot. Fig. 26, Vanessa Redgrave as Guenever in *Camelot* (1967). Fig 27, Julie Andrews and Richard Burton as Guenever and Arthur in the stage production of *Camelot*. Fig 28, poster for Disney’s *The Sword in the Stone* (1963).
Chapter Five

‘The dread Pendragon: Britain’s King of Kings’: towards an Anglo-Celtic conception of the Arthurian story

The writers discussed in this chapter – Ernest Rhys, John Masefield, David Jones and Charles Williams – were ambitious. Unlike many of the authors already considered, they were not content merely to rewrite certain sections of the Arthurian legend, such as the Grail story, or the Coming or the Passing of Arthur. Instead, these writers – notably all poets – sought to recast the entire Arthurian story. They also saw the Arthurian legend as somehow ‘essential’ to Britain’s cultural and political identity. Unlike many Grail writers, who presented the Grail as pertinent only to England (Butts), Cornwall (Hawker) or Wales (Machen), Rhys, Masefield, Jones and Williams were all concerned with remaking the legend into a unified, Anglo-Celtic myth.

There are three identifiable reasons why these writers chose to reconfigure the Arthurian story as an Anglo-Celtic construct. First, with the exception of Ernest Rhys, the work of most of these poets was undertaken between the two world wars. In this period, Britain, like Malory’s Lancelot in the ‘Tale of the Sankgreal’, seemed to be suffering from an ‘instability of purpose’:\textsuperscript{1} unable to identify its role in global affairs,
its statesmen's colonial policies seemingly unaware that the world had moved on from 1914, its domestic policies similarly ignorant, or unwilling, to consider the needs of a discontented populace. For Masefield, Williams and Jones, the Arthurian story was a means of establishing a new British identity. They ignored, or reacted violently to, Tennyson's *Idylls*: bypassing the nineteenth-century bourgeois epic just at the moment when the Great Slump of 1929-33, the rise of fascism and the economic advances of Stalinist communism seemed to be signalling the decisive fall of Liberalism. Instead, works such as *Midsummer Night and Other Tales in Verse* (Masefield, 1927), *In Parenthesis* (Jones, 1937) and *Taliessin through Logres* (Williams, 1938) were seeking to build newly-forged links with the feudal past, whether literarily, politically or religiously. In addition, both David Jones and Charles Williams held highly conservative views: their construction of a continuum with a largely mythic feudal past aligns them politically with other Catholic or Anglo-Catholic intellectuals of the period, such as T.S. Eliot (who was an influence on both Jones and Williams), who advocated a return to an 'organic' model of social, hierarchal cohesiveness, in which class differences were recognised but accepted as 'natural'.

Second, Anglo-Celtic identity seems to have been personally significant for these writers. Rhys and Jones were Anglo-Welsh; both were born in London to

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*David Jones's and Charles Williams's political views contrast sharply with those of John Masefield who, although of well-established bourgeois stock and who later became a somewhat slavish Poet Laureate, always identified himself as 'common man', refusing a knighthood on several occasions and who became, under his wife's influence, a supporter of women's suffrage. Masefield had also been a pacifist in the years before 1914; during the war he served with the Red Cross in the Dardanelles, as well as writing *Gallipoli* (1916), a government-commissioned work which nevertheless gave 'graphic insight into the life of the common soldier, in both its horror and heroism' (Gervais, 'Masefield, John Edward', *Oxford DNB*). The older Ernest Rhys, apart from a brief youthful flirtation with Fabianism, seems to have possessed no strong political affiliations.

† Of course, such conservative authoritarian social models were not only the province of Anglo-American, or Anglo-Celtic, reactionary critics. They were institutionally enacted in several Catholic European states, notably: István Bethlen's Hungary (1921-31), before it embraced German Fascism; the Portugal of Oliveira Salazar's *Estado Nova* ('New State'; 1933-74), and the Austria of Engelbert Dollfuß and Kurt Schuschnigg (1933-38), before German annexation in 1938. See Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*, 113-4.
English-born mothers and Welsh fathers. Their parents taught them only English, though in later life both learnt Cymraeg as part of their self-elected Welsh inheritance. Their Arthurian works reveal many of the complexities and contradictions in their national identities. But, while Rhys's prolific outpourings were essentially hampered by his self-contradictory allegiances, Jones yoked the complications of his English-Welsh identity into a series of powerful modernist texts. Masefield and Williams, however, were English-born; and their reasons for adopting Celtic materials in their Arthurian works are more elusive. While both had links with Wales (Masefield hailed from the English side of the Welsh Marches; Williams's surname suggests a Welsh inheritance), their fusion of English and Celtic sources lay in motives more personal, aesthetic and (in Williams's case) religious.

The final cause of the Anglo-Celtic nature of these writers' major works lay in contemporary Arthurian scholarship. Not only were Rhys, Jones and Williams scholars in their own right (while Masefield's papers contain lecture notes on Malory), but their Anglo-Celtic works are heavily indebted to contemporary academic debates concerning the Celtic origins of medieval Arthurian romance. These debates, which sometimes descended into personal arguments between opposed critics, are the defining feature of academic literature of the period, as has already been seen in Grail scholarship in chapter three.

* Another Arthurian writer, John Cowper Powys (see chapter three), shared similar allegiances to both Wales and England. However, his three Arthurian works — A Glastonbury Romance (1932), Morwyn (1937) and Porius (1951) — represent a shift from a British to a decidedly Welsh (or historic Celtic) viewpoint, rather than continuing to explore a concept of an Anglo-Celtic Matter of Britain.
† Though none, interestingly, attended university. All could be described as emerging from upper-working or lower-middle class families who could not afford, or would not expect at this time, to send their sons into further education.
‡ Approximately, the Celtic debate can be said to have begun in 1891, with the publication of John Rhys's Arthurian Studies, and concluded in 1959, with the publication of Roger Sherman Loomis's edited collection of essays, Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages, which is discussed in the following chapter.
These poets also proved to be perceptive and original readers of Malory (another branch of scholarship which made advances in this period – see below), while the *Morte Darthur* provided the counterpoint to early Welsh romances and Irish legends. All rejected a Tennysonian reading of the fifteenth-century romance: Rhys, who twice edited Malory, read the *Morte* with a definite Welsh bias; Williams understood the text exclusively in light of a highly personal mythology of the Grail; while Masefield and Jones saw Malory’s Arthuriad not only as a great work of literature, but as a literary monument that was directly relevant to the twentieth century – understanding the *Morte Darthur*, written in a time of civil strife, as a means of articulating their own experiences of the Great War.

The resulting work by these Anglo-Celtic poets was very different from that produced in Ireland, Scotland, Cornwall and Wales. It rejected insularity, regionalism or local nationalism in favour of a more expansive national identity, or identities. But neither was it like the English Arthurian literature still being produced (in ever-decreasing quantities) by those relics of the pre-war years, still essentially repackaging the *Idylls* in ever-less suitable forms. But before examining their material, it will be helpful to examine the scholarship which so influenced their work.

‘The spell of pure romance’: Scholarship and the Anglo-Celtic Arthur

The work of W.P. Ker, considered by some to be the ‘most considerable mind to engage in academic studies in English Literature in Great Britain’, embodies the transition between nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship. The brilliant burst of editing and criticism of Arthurian literature by amateur scholars in the Romantic period, including (but not limited to) Sharon Turner, Joseph Ritson, Robert Southey

*The Scots and Irish were largely left out of this Anglo-Celtic reconfiguration of the Arthurian story, despite the fact that the heroic tales and mythology of Ireland assumed great importance through the work of Rhŷs, Nutt and Loomis (as discussed below).*
(in England), William Owen Pughe and Iolo Morganwg (in Wales), Walter Scott and James Pinkerton (in Scotland), had been replaced by lesser critics of the Victorian Age, with only Charlotte Guest and Matthew Arnold resembling their forbears. At the conclusion of the nineteenth century, British Arthurian scholarship was mainly the prerogative of such men as George Saintsbury and Edward Strachey – learned, erudite and unquestionably dilettante, whose opinions of Malory were discussed in the first chapter. While Ker never wrote a work exclusively on the Arthurian legend, *Epic and Romance* (1898), *The Dark Ages* (1904) and *Medieval English Literature* (1912) each contained insights into the Arthurian legend.

Ker was a Scotsman, though he spent his academic life entirely in Cardiff, London and Oxford, and his scholarly work rejects the Anglocentricity of most of his contemporaries. He continually expressed what he thought to be the indebtedness of English culture to Celtic sources, whether in the form of direct literary transmission, Irish monks bringing Latin to Saxon England, or through the influence of that most cited, yet least knowable entity: the ‘Celtic Spirit’. While working almost exclusively from translations, Ker was eager to praise early Welsh literature. He stated, for instance, that the dialogue recorded in the *Mabinogion* was so good that it was not until Malory that English literature caught up. He believed that the three Welsh romances (*Geraint*, *Peredur* and *Owain*) were undoubtedly Celtic in origin, being inflected by (rather than derived from) French romance. Ker also believed that the aesthetic pleasure of Chrétien’s romances ‘was due to the Welsh’ originals, which

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* Abroad, things were better: M.W. MacCallum in Australia was perhaps the most interesting of English-language scholars (though the incomparable German scholar H. Oskar Sommer wrote his most influential work in English), Gaston Paris and M. Loth in France were producing accounts of Chrétien’s sources, while Sommer, Wendelin Foerster and Heinrich Zimmer in Germany attested to the brilliance of German education. Ker, although a polyglot, was firmly British in his erudition. His Arthurian successors, however, would follow the continental critics closely.
were so novel to twelfth-century France that its romancers were 'generally content if they could get the matter in the right order.'

A general picture of the development of Arthurian literature emerges from Ker's work: the genesis of the Arthurian story was Welsh; its transmission to twelfth-century France was conducted by the bards of Wales, or else through the literary dissemination of Welsh texts; the French romancers, particularly Chrétien, adapted them, adding 'strength' and 'beauty' as they did so; until the later prose romancers added many layers of 'chivalric conventional ornament'. 'In these prose romances', Ker believed, 'and even more in Malory's English rendering of his “French book”, is to be heard the indescribable plaintive melody, the sigh of the wind over the enchanted ground, the spell of pure Romance.' Paradoxically, Ker's idea of 'pure romance' is essentially a hybrid genre: a mixture of the 'Celtic Spirit', French aesthetic judgement and the mastery of a fifteenth-century English prose writer.

Ker was the last major Arthurian scholar to be unaffected by the schism which would characterise British (and international) academic discussions of the legend for the next half century. As with the earlier disagreements concerning the origins of the Holy Grail, this much larger debate concerned the extent to which Arthurian literature more generally was indebted to Celtic influence. Again, on the one side there were the Celticists, who can be placed into two generations: the first comprising figures such as John Rhŷs, Alfred Nutt and Jessie Weston; the second made up of critics – most prominently American critics – such as A.C.L. Brown, William A. Nitze and, above all, Roger Sherman Loomis, who described himself as the most 'pertinacious – and some might say pugnacious – champion of the theory.' These writers held, in various forms, that the genesis of Arthurian romance was almost entirely the product of Celtic legend, which was transmitted either through Welsh bards or, as became the
dominant view, through Breton conteurs. Their interest in the legend rarely extended much later than Chrétien, possibly stretching to the early thirteenth-century Vulgate cycle. Malory was rarely approached, except to be labelled as ‘quaint’, ‘clumsy and fumbling’. Similarly, the Celticists thought little of Geoffrey’s Historia (published twice in 1929), as it played no part, so they claimed, in the genesis of Arthurian romance. For although the text was translated, reducted, abridged and transmitted across Europe, the Celticists implied that it was unimportant.

Yet the field of the Celticists was actually quite diverse. John Rhŷs’s Studies in the Arthurian Legend (1891) was the first introduction into English of the Celtic origins debate which had been raging on the continent for some time. Rhŷs’s inaugural work was intended ‘to make Welsh literature help shed light on the Arthurian legend’, and shows a definite bias towards Welsh sources, as does the work of W. Lewis Jones, Alfred Nutt and Jessie L. Weston. Although only Welsh manuscripts contain pre-Galfridian Arthurian literature, many other scholars concentrated on Irish or Breton folklore. Indeed, for many scholars, the origins of Arthurian literature lay in a common oral tradition that stretched across the whole Celtic fringe of Western Europe.

The second group in this schismatic divide was not constituted of an identifiable group with a unified approach to Arthurian criticism, like the Celticists. Rather, they were united only in their opposition to, and often dismissal of, the ‘Celtomaniacs’. They include such eminent figures as E.K. Chambers and Eugène Vinaver, in England, and J.D. Bruce, Gordon Hall Gerould and J.S.P. Tatlock, in America. Again the field is diverse: Chambers, Tatlock and Gerould expounded the theory that Geoffrey’s Historia was the most influential of Arthurian works – its

* Rhŷs’s Studies in the Arthurian Legend also introduced the views of Gaston Paris, France’s pre-eminent Celticist, into English-language scholarship, as well as summarising the contrasting, largely anti-Celticist, views of the German scholars, Heinrich Zimmer and Wendelin Foerster.
production in the late 1130s having a direct impact on the growth of French romance later that century. Chambes claimed that ‘[n]o work of imagination, save the \textit{Aeneid}, has done more to shape the legend of a people’ than that written by the ‘learned and unscrupulous old canon of St George’s in Oxford’. Vinaver, although his scholarship covered the entire œuvre of Arthurian romance, is now chiefly remembered for his editing of the Winchester MS and claiming that the \textit{Morte} is not a single text, but a compilation of eight wholly separate romances. His work represented the culmination of early Malory studies which began with G.L. Kittredge (who initiated the question of the author’s identity in 1897), and included H. Oskar Sommer, Vida D. Scudder, E.K. Chambers and R.H. Wilson. However, it was J.D. Bruce who was the most ardent of the anti-Celticists. He believed the finds of the Celticists to ‘have been greatly exaggerated’; described the work of John Rhys as ‘fantastic to the last degree’, and stated that Jessie Weston’s postulation of a twelfth-century Gawain-saga (see below) was the result of her suffering from ‘a Gawain complex’. While he certainly acknowledged Arthurian literature’s indebtedness to the Welsh tradition, Bruce was the prime exponent of the theory that where French romance was not indebted to the \textit{Historia}, its narrative and meaning were largely the product of Chrétien’s imagination. His \textit{Evolution of Arthurian Romance} (1922) was the primary text book of pre-Malorian Arthurian literature until it was superseded by Loomis’s 1959 collection \textit{Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages}.

The criticisms of certain anti-Celticists can be seen to emerge from the Celticists’ perceived lack of reverence for assured masterpieces of Arthurian literature. The search for sources, few of which were readily apparent, was an unnecessary deviation for scholars such as Chambers and Bruce. Even Loomis noted

\footnote{In many ways Vinaver’s division of \textit{Le Morte Darthur} into eight separate romances divided post-World War Two scholarship to the same extent as the Celtic-origins theory did in the pre-war years.}
that the Celticists indulged in 'flight[s] from the masterpiece[s].' For the anti-
Celticists, an objective critical methodology – rooted in a belief in the sanctity of the
text as the only way to analyse Arthurian literature – meant that they could never
reconcile themselves to the far more radical and essentially extra-textual approaches
of Weston and Loomis.

Indeed, much of the criticism made of the Celticists arose out of the
unconventionality of their scholarship. The work of Weston and Loomis barely
correlates to the then-dominant forms of critical discourse. Their literary/mythic
associations, dynamised by the anthropology of James Frazer, span centuries and
cultures. They commonly jump from a French prose romance in the thirteenth century
to a Welsh mnemonic triad from the ninth century, the meaning of which has been
forgotten; or else from a Breton lay, 'reconstructed' in the nineteenth century, to an
Italian sculpture made in 1099. These jumps across time and culture are often made
by way of a Mithraic or Gnostic ritual, an Eleusinian Mystery, or evidence from the
Rig-veda. Their work was constructed out of multilingual learning which spanned
centuries – even millennia. To their conservative contemporaries their methods
seemed to consist of no logical rationale, their radical associations seemingly based in
no recognisable sense of cause and effect.

Loomis himself felt it was necessary in 1958 to admit that much of his work of
the 20s and 30s was fundamentally flawed. He also turned to his fellow Celticists in
a censorious mood. In particular he criticised his 'good friend', A.C.L. Brown, for his
conjectural approach in *The Origin of the Grail Legend* (1943), quoting from that
work:

It is nowhere said [in Chrétien's *Lancelot*] that Arthur is prisoner in a
Dolorous Tower; but if we are to suppose that he is not truly at Camelot but is
lying wounded in an enchanted palace at the outskirts of the land of the dead
and is subject to attacks by giants from a Dolorous Tower, it will explain the puzzles of the romance.\textsuperscript{29}

Brown rejected Chrétien’s text in order to thrust forward a theory that the romance cannot begin to support. Brown ignored what the text says in order to claim that the romance was comprised of Irish and Welsh journeys to Fairyland, coupled with Aeneas’s descent into Hades. His work is full of such conjectures and inventions, and was roundly denounced in the reviews. And although an extreme example, Brown’s \textit{The Origins of the Grail Legend} was indicative of a body of work that was often (in Loomis’s own words) built ‘on the sands of guesswork; vague resemblances, and pure imagination.’\textsuperscript{30}

Why did the Celticists hold these views? Certainly they believed that they were correct in placing the Celtic traditions at the starting point of the Arthurian story, but their methodologies showed only the difficulty in proving Celtic pre-eminence. Other reasons for the Celticists’ adherence to origin theories in Irish, Welsh or Breton culture can often be seen in personal, as much as intellectual, situations. Weston’s love of Wagner drew her to Bayreuth, where she first met Nutt, who encouraged her to write on the Arthurian romances.\textsuperscript{31} Loomis, while studying at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar in the early twentieth century, was tutored by John Rhŷs. In such affection did he hold his old tutor that, many years later, he claimed that it was ‘embarrassing to

\textsuperscript{*} Occasionally, the speculative and conjectural approaches of the Celticists were employed by non-Celtic scholars. One notable example was C.B. Lewis, whose \textit{Classical Mythology and Arthurian Romance} (1932) took the vaguely anthropologist approach of the Celticists, but turned to Classical Greece and Rome, rather than to Wales, Ireland or Brittany, for the sources of Chrétien’s romances. Vinaver’s review (\textit{Medium Ėvum}, October, 1934: 204-9) speaks of the methodological flaws in many such works:

\begin{quote}
Whenever the ‘source’ does not fit in with the text under discussion he imagines that the story was altered by some unknown intermediary. In this way anything can be derived from anything, as long as the critic can rely on his imagination to supply all the links. (207)
\end{quote}

Vinaver summed up by stating that those, like himself, who ‘recognize the paramount importance of the story of the classical tradition in medieval France will deplore the fact that Mr. Lewis has taken upon himself the defence of such a good cause. He has certainly done it much more harm than good.’ (209)
call to attention to defects' in Rhŷs's work. Of course, he did anyway. The willingness to believe in the ease of transmission may also have been affected by the Celticists' peculiarly European (or, in Loomis's case, transatlantic) education and scholarship. Weston was a consummate continentalist: she lived in Paris, was educated across Europe (medieval studies in France, music instruction in Germany, art classes at Crystal Palace) and her scholarship is a travelogue of Europe's finest libraries. Nutt was the son of a German immigrant, similarly educated in London and France, and later serving his business apprenticeship in Leipzig, Berlin and Paris. Rhŷs, too, travelled extensively, studying in Oxford, Paris, Heidelberg, Leipzig and Göttingen, as well as completing several lecture tours of America. And Loomis was an American who came to know Europe – indeed the world – before the Great War. Born in Yokohama, Japan, of missionary parents, his studies at graduate level were taken at Oxford, coupled with extensive travels throughout Europe in search of medieval sculpture and illuminations. Is there any wonder that these scholars – their studies aided by good incomes and modern transport – came to believe so assuredly in Welsh bards (usually Bleheris) or Breton conteurs travelling to Anglo-Norman courts, thence to France, even to monasteries, libraries, and palaces? 

There was also a definite sense of nationalism in the works of British Celticist scholars. John Rhŷs possessed an obvious 'nationalistic commitment' to Wales in his writings on the Arthurian legend, as well as in his sponsorship of the Cymraeg revival, in which he emphasised the importance of the Arthurian story – manifested in T. Gwynn Jones’s ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ (see chapter four). But nationalist concerns were also evident in the first generation of English scholars who studied early Celtic literature. Alfred Nutt, one of the earliest Celticists, was certainly patriotically

* Like Weston with German opera, Loomis came to study the Arthurian legend through a passion for art history.
motivated in his promotion of the importance of Celtic materials in the origins of the Arthurian story. In a Presidential Address to the Folk-lore Society of England (which he founded), Nutt claimed that the ‘Celtic Spirit’ which had informed the Arthurian legend was ‘not yet dried up’. Yet this ‘fairy creed, this ancient source of inspiration, of symbolic interpretation of man’s relation to nature’ was not to be found in modern Irish or Welsh literature. Rather, this spirit, ‘wholly unaffected by classical culture’, resided in ‘English literature, with its mixture of Teutonic and Celtic blood.’ Non-British scholars certainly realised the patriotic motives of Nutt’s Celtic scholarship. For instance, Elise Bensel, a Dutch scholar writing in the 1920s, claimed that Nutt’s work was founded on ‘some sort of national feeling and not on the basis of scientific investigation’.

The work of Nutt’s protégée, Jessie Weston, was similarly imbued with ‘national feeling’, which was not just manifest in her wartime anti-German propaganda. Before Weston became known primarily as a Grail scholar, much of her work was concerned with the hypothetical ‘Geste of Syr Gawayne’, purportedly written by the Welsh figure ‘Bleheris’ (a figure mentioned in Chretien, Wauchier and Giraldus Cambresis). Bleheris’s ‘grand conte’, Weston held, contained the narratives of many later romances, including the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chrétien’s twelfth-century *Perceval*. Most importantly, this Geste predated the emergence of French romance, therefore making Arthurian romance an originally British, rather than French, affair. The fact that Bleheris was (as she fully admitted) a Welshman did little to alter Weston’s perception of Gawain, Bleheris’s

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* At the time of writing (1897), Nutt’s view of the English and English culture as hybridised flew in the face of most Victorian historiography and literary scholarship. Many English historians of the nineteenth century had been concerned with the notion of English (Teutonic) racial superiority. They conceived of the Saxon invasion as total annihilation of the existing British inhabitants of England. Interracial hybridisation was anathema, ‘being expressed in terms of dilution, contamination and mongrelisation’. (Higham, *King Arthur*, 256). But Nutt presented the English and especially English culture as essentially formed of a mixture of the Celt and the German.
protagonist, as the ‘typical English hero.’ Without comment from Weston, the Welsh ‘Gawain-epic’ became an English ‘Geste’.42

Bar one or two Celticists, critics generally found Weston’s hypothesis untenable.43 Bruce, predictably, damned it.44 But Weston’s idea was appealing not only to scholars but to contemporary poets and authors also. In 1907 Weston called upon modern authors to take up the story of Gawain. For if readers would reject ‘Malory’s libel’ and ignore Tennyson’s *Idylls* (which Weston disliked for their French influences),

Then, perhaps, we may have a demand for his real story, and it may be possible once more to rejoice the hearts of our English folk with a restored modern rendering of the *Geste o f Syr Gawoyne*, even as Bleheris told it well nigh a thousand years ago.45

Gawain, however, failed to ignite the interest of contemporary writers. In fact, though the English romances relating to him, including *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, had been available since 1839, no author took Gawain as their protagonist until the 1960s (see chapter six).46 Indeed, when Weston was working on her theory of ‘The Geste of Syr Gawayne’ – chiefly between 1897 and 1907 – the Tennysonian paradigm was at its zenith and few authors did anything but replicate the *Idylls*. Nonetheless the British nationalism that Nutt and Weston fed into the scholarship of this time is reproduced by the Anglo-Celtic writers who took up the Arthurian story in the interwar period – particularly David Jones and John Masefield.*

*   *   *   *   *

Although Rhys, Masefield, Jones and Williams would each cite the work of professional Arthurian scholars in their retellings of the Arthurian legend, the

* The second generation of Celticists, being chiefly American, were decidedly less political in British terms.
influence of the Celticists cannot be measured in terms of the quantity of literary or
mythic source material they provided. Rather, their influence can be discerned in the
fact that they produced an intellectual environment in which Celtic literature was
raised to the level of the canonical English Arthuriads – essentially, those of Malory
and Tennyson. This proved to be their lasting and greatest achievement.

The schism between the Celticists and those who were opposed to their
thinking and methods was never resolved. The debate over the origins of the legend
died out (often with the scholars),* or was replaced by Vinaver’s hypothesis
concerning *Le Morte Darthur* as an eight-book compilation. In 1959 Loomis
published his most important work, *Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages*, which
was not an attempt to synthesis the dying embers of the debate, but instead presented
the views of both Celticists and non-Celticists (as well as many newer debates and
critical views unconcerned with the origins debate) in one volume. That work is
discussed in the next chapter; the focus of this chapter turns to how the creative
writers made use of the critical schism, as Eliot, Butts, Woolf and others had utilised
the scholarly debates of the Grail in the 20s and 30s.

**Early Anglo-Celtic writing: Ernest Rhys and John Masefield**

Ernest Rhys was one of the most prolific authors of Arthurian literature in the
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He twice edited the *Morte Darthur* (1886
and 1892); wrote a long narrative account of ‘The Story of Balin and Balan’ (1897);
included five Welsh-inspired Arthurian poems in his *Welsh Ballads* (1898); published
twenty-four lyrics based on Malory in *Lays of the Round Table* (1905); and also wrote
three plays: *Gwenevere* (1905), *Enid* (1908) and *The Masque of the Grail* (also

* By the start of the Second World War only a few stalwarts remained – and those chiefly in America –
notably R.S. Loomis and A.C.L. Brown. Jessie Weston, Alfred Nutt and John Rhys had by this time
passed away, their learned tomes already being relegated to dusty shelves.
Yet despite its quantity, Rhys's Arthurian work never established him as a major poet. Instead, Rhys is chiefly remembered as an editor, being particularly famed for his overseeing of J.M. Dent's 'Everyman's Library' series.

Nonetheless, Rhys was the first Anglo-Welsh Arthurian writer of the modern period. He was born in Islington in 1859, the son of a Welsh father and an English mother. Like many expatriate Welshmen of the time, his father had Anglicised his Welsh surname to Rees, though his son (like the Cardiganshire-born John Rhŷs) reverted to the original spelling as an adult. His parents spoke to him only in English, though he later claimed to have learnt Welsh 'on the sly' from their Carmarthenshire maid - his furtive description indicating the poor esteem in which Cymraeg was held by aspirational Welsh petit-bourgeois. His youth was spent in west Wales and in the north of England, where for ten years he worked as a mining engineer. In 1886 Rhys, then twenty-seven, left Newcastle for London, determined to become a full-time writer. His first 'break' occurred when 'two prosperous-looking men in top hats' arrived at his rooms to ask Rhys whether he would edit a series of prose writers for the northern publishing company named Walter Scott. With rent overdue and with few publications to support him, Rhys, who had no intentions of pursuing a career as an editor, accepted. He selected Le Morte Darthur as his first undertaking and chose 'Camelot' as the title of the series.

The choice of Malory was important, for the Arthurian story represented for Rhys a means of articulating the complexities of his Anglo-Welsh identity. Growing up in Carmarthen, 'Merlin's Town', he heard 'wild traditions' of the seer, whilst playing in 'Merlin's Grave' (presumably a disused lead mine) or 'Merlin's Oak' on 'Merlin's Hill'. His first literary introduction to the legend occurred in his

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*In his second volume of memoirs, Wales England Wed (1940), Rhys claimed that the publishers had only asked him to edit their series because they had confused him with another Rhŷs - the already eminent John Rhŷs - the Arthurian scholar and Professor of Celtic at Oxford (86-7).
grandfather’s bookshop where he read a ‘curious’ chapbook called *The Prophecies of Merlin.* In Newcastle he discovered Malory and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ‘whose pages became almost a part of myself’, he later wrote. In his scholarship, Rhys tried to bring together these two separate Arthurs – one English, the other Welsh. In his 1886 edition of Malory, Rhys prefaced the text with a lengthy discussion of the early Welsh traditions. In his second edition of 1892 Rhys addressed the authorship question and (following H. Oskar Sommer’s scholarship) stated that the tradition that Malory ‘was a Welshman is so agreeable to one’s feelings about him as a worker in half-English, half-Welsh romance, that it is hard, for a Welshman at any rate, to refuse it credit.’ A year earlier, John Rhys had similarly given enthusiastic support to Malory’s ‘Welsh’ origins.

It is worth noting that Ernest Rhys did not categorically state that Malory was a Welshman, only that it was hard for a Welshman not to credit the theory. Indeed Rhys, though his work continually expresses the desire to write an Arthurian epic to reflect his Anglo-Welsh sentiments, was never truly able to synthesise the English Malorian and Welsh *Mabinogion* traditions – a situation that is best reflected in his

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* In his critical apparatus for his 1889-91 edition of the *Morte* Sommer had included a quotation from John Bale’s sixteenth-century *Scriptorium Illustriam Maioris Britanniae*, which had mentioned that Malory was ‘*Britannus natione*’, which may mean Welsh or, more probably, British (see Bale, in *Parins, Malory: The Critical Heritage*, 54-5). Bale’s notion of ‘*Britannus natione*’, as well as his assertion that ‘Mailoria’ is a Welsh place name (presumably Maelor in north-east Wales), had been enough to convince the author of the entry on Caxton in the 1748 *Biographia Britannica* that ‘Malory was a Welshman’, and probably ‘a Welsh priest’ (vol. II, 1245).

† Kittredge’s article ‘Who Was Sir Thomas Malory?’ (1896) conclusively disproved Malory’s Welsh-origins hypothesis. Vinaver, in his book-length study *Malory* (1929), describes the hypothesis as ‘untenable’ (126), as has, more recently. Richard R. Griffith, in ‘The Authorship Question Reconsidered’, in *Aspects of Malory* (1981). Both Vinaver and Griffith, however, have noted a Welsh bias to parts of the *Morte*: ‘to do justice to the Welsh elements in the *Morte Darthur*, it is important to note some facts which, inconclusive though they are, may suggest a distant connexion between our author and Wales. [...] Comparison of the *Morte Darthur* with its French sources has shown me that of all the countries of the legendary England which he describes Malory is most partial to Wales. He often introduces Welsh knights against his source which he otherwise follows very carefully’ (Vinaver, *Malory*, 126-7). After citing several of these examples, Vinaver stated that Malory’s alterations ‘are few and personal; they reflect his own outlook and his own interpretations of the stories. If, therefore, he insists on introducing Wales and Welsh knights contrary to his French sources it is for some yet undiscovered reason’ (127). Griffith has noted more Welsh changes to Malory’s sources, which he sees as indicative of Malory coming from the Welsh-English border (164).
two collections of Arthurian verse, *Welsh Ballads* (1897) and *Lays of the Round Table* (1905).

Many of Rhys's *Lays* are little more than versified passages of the *Morte*. Some are allusive, such as 'True Love' and 'The Flower and the Leaf', which are based on Malory's dithyramb to May and lovers; or 'The Ring of True Love', a love lyric founded on the *Morte*’s tale of Sir Gareth. Some are retellings of lesser known parts of the *Morte Darthur*, such as ‘Alice La Belle Pilgrim’ (taken from Malory’s account of the Alixandre L’Orphelin story), or were inspired by a certain event or character in the *Morte*, such as ‘The Song of Dagonet’ and ‘The Sermon of the Gentlewoman’. What emerges from the *Lays* is not a coherent cycle of Malory-based Arthurian lyrics, but a series of imitations, written with affection and familiarity.

Unfortunately Rhys was not a poet to compare with Malory as a writer of prose. Take for instance the following passage from Malory and its corresponding verse ‘Arthur’s Grave’, from the *Lays*:

Yet som men say in many parts of Inglonde that Kynge Arthure ys nat dede, but had by the wyll of Oure Lorde Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall com agayne, and he shall wynne the Holy Crosse.

Yet I woll nat say that hit shall be so; but rather I wolde sey, here in thys worlde he chaunged hys lyff. And many men say that there ys wrytten upon the tumbe thys:

\[\textit{HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS}. \]^{57}

Some men do say King Arthur is not dead,
But by the will of our Lord Jesu sleeps,
    Yet to awake, deathless, and reassure us:
And therefore is it, that grave where he is laid
This legend hath, that still his kingdom keeps:
\[\textit{Arthurus Rex Quondam, Rexque Futurus}. \]^{58}

The purpose of Rhys’s verse is elusive. Malory’s treatment of the death of Arthur is not one of his rhetorically ‘great’ passages: he appears to be more interested in the
fate of Lancelot and Guinevere than of Arthur, of whose end he treats briefly; and the idea of ‘Arthur’s Grave’, which occupied modern poets since Thomas Warton in the eighteenth century, is much better encapsulated in the early Welsh tradition – or even in Tennyson – than in the Morte. Yet Malory’s passage contains two notable points: the Latin leonine hexameter* (the rhythm and the internal rhyme structure of which Rhys destroys through the removal of the first two words); and Malory’s elusive, suggestive, ‘here in thys worlde he chaunged his ly ff, which Rhys fails to deal with at all. But if Rhys’s omissions are somewhat inept, his additions are possibly worse. He removes Malory’s mention of the belief that Arthur would return to ‘wynne the Holy Crosse’ and replaces it with Arthur’s intention ‘to awake, deathless, and reassure us’. To ‘reassure us’ is much weaker than the original. Additionally, it is unclear who is the ‘us’ meant to signify – perhaps the modern-day Welsh? By the time this poem was published T. Gwynn Jones had already won the Chair at the Eisteddfod for his ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ (1902), which had promised the Welsh much more than mere reassurance. The ‘us’ also seems inadequate for the contemporary English, whom Tennyson had shown sixty years earlier to have no need of Arthur’s return (‘lest one good custom should corrupt the world’). Perhaps the ‘us’ was the Anglo-Celtic, the British, who, for their political differences, could be offered nothing more concrete than reassurance.

If Rhys’s Malorian Lays are not successful due to reasons both aesthetic and cultural, his earlier collection of Arthurian poems in Welsh Ballads (1898) demonstrate similar failings, though from a Welsh, rather than English perspective.

‘King Arthur’s Sleep’ is a typical ballad of that collection. The poem’s origins lay in a

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* An internally rhyming six-stress form popular in Latin poetry of the Middle Ages, often used as a mnemonic device, or as a one-line proverb. Malory’s leonine hexameter was probably not of his own invention, being also present in the conclusion to the Alliterative Morte Arthure. It was presumably a well-known tag throughout the period.
legend of Arthur’s return concerning a young man travelling to Bala in North Wales. During his journey ‘Davie’ discovers a tomb wherein the undead Arthur sleeps. The King does not awaken and Davie is told that the day of Arthur’s return is still ‘far distant’. Instead, Rhys’s poem concludes with the narrator stating that ‘long I sought / For King Arthur’s Hall, – and seeking, / Yet must wander, finding nought. / Yet we want the day of waking!’ It is a speech that symbolises Rhys’s quest to produce an Arthurian epic. Never does Rhys consider what Arthur’s awakening might entail. That the king lies in Wales suggests that his arising will be significant only for the Welsh, yet the verses never attach any significance to Arthur’s return – whether cultural, political or even narratorial. Again the contrast with Jones’s ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ (written four years hence) is obvious. Ultimately Rhys was too Welsh in his cultural sympathies to accord with the English Tennysonian reading of the Arthurian story; but was too English to assume the Welsh nationalism of contemporaries such as T. Gwynn Jones.*

Rhys, whose most famous poem begins ‘Wales England wed, so I was bred’, could never have articulated the complicated nationalist politics of the Arthurian story effectively. He saw himself primarily as a transmitter of Welsh culture into England, and he was the only prominent Welsh member of the ‘Celtic Twilight’ movement, which was much better represented by monoglot English speakers such as W.B. Yeats in Ireland and William Sharp in Scotland, than polyglot Anglo-Welshmen. Late in life Rhys wrote:

Yeats’ imagination of Ireland set me wondering whether I could to give to Wales, country of the Druids and the Mabinogion, her new deliverance. But I was complicated in ways he was not. A Londoner born, as well as a Welshman

* Rhys’s plays similarly move between the Welsh and English traditions. The largely sympathetic J. Kimberley Roberts has written in his study of Rhys that, like the poems, ‘his intentions’ in these plays ‘seem much more interesting that his achievements’ (Ernest Rhys, 41).
in exile, I suffered from the mixed sympathies that are bound to affect a man of mixed race.\(^6\)

But Wales was to have no literary Dublin, certainly not one based among the London Welsh.

* * * * *

Rhys, apart from being a poet, editor and translator, was also a supporter of many younger poets. One with whom he was particularly impressed was John Masefield, another prolific author of Arthurian literature. He produced two plays (*Tristan and Isolt*, 1927; *‘When Good King Arthur’*, c. 1922-1932), an historical novel (*Badon Parchments*, 1947) and over fifty poems and prose fragments.\(^6\) His most important Arthurian work is *Midsummer Night and Other Tales in Verse* (1927), a collection of twenty-two poems, written in ballad form, which roughly chronicle the events of Arthur’s life.

Masefield, who became the longest serving Poet Laureate (1930-67) after Tennyson, was born in Ledbury, Herefordshire, near the Welsh border and Rhys, at least, considered him as an Anglo-Welsh poet.\(^*\) Yet other than his birthplace’s proximity to Wales, Masefield seems to have had no notable Welsh connections, though much of his writing – and most importantly, his Arthurian writing – shows clear affinities with early Welsh literature and displays a concern with an idea of Britishness more generally. His interest in the Arthurian story probably began in childhood: Herefordshire has several links to the legend and Masefield’s classic children’s novel, *The Midnight Folk* (1927), which includes an Arthurian scene, is set in a fictional county similar to his own.\(^6\) Masefield’s literary interest in the legend began while he was living in New York at the end of the nineteenth century, where he

\(^*\) Rhys wrote that Masefield’s name ‘almost suggested a coupling of the Welsh word “maes” and its English equivalent “a field”’ (*Wales England Wed*, 160).
had spent several years living as a ‘hobo’ after abandoning his career in the Merchant Navy. It was towards the end of this period that Masefield entered a New York bookshop – Pratt’s on Sixth Avenue – and purchased the first volume of Malory’s Morte Darthur. He later wrote in his memoir, So Long to Learn (1952):

I was at once enchanted by Malory […] This was a story that gave a great deal of significance to many parts of England. This was (as I supposed) our contribution to epic, and a mine from which poets could take their fables forever. Certainly it was something about which my ignorance had to be lessened. I soon added to my books a complete Malory, and a copy of the Mabinogion.68

The Mabinogion was to be a counterpoint to the English Malory, and Masefield’s understanding of the Arthurian tradition developed into a distinctly Anglo-Celtic conception – a ‘fully British tradition’ as he later described it.69 It was an understanding that was informed, no doubt, by the fact that the edition of Malory he purchased in Pratt’s Bookstore was none other than that by Ernest Rhys. Next Masefield read Thomas Love Peacock’s The Misfortunes of Elphin (1829), another consummately Anglo-Celtic work of Arthuriana, which presumably was the inspiration for his first work on the legend, the non-extant ‘Tale of Elphin’.70 Only after completing this work did he produce the Tennysonian ‘The Ballad of Sir Bors’ (1913; discussed in chapter one).

* * *

Like Rhys’s Wales England Wed, Masefield’s memoir, So Long to Learn, contains many references to the Arthurian legend – both poets perceiving their personal identities as somehow predicated in the legends of the mythic British King. For both writers the legend – and Malory in particular – marked turning points in their lives. Rhys’s editing of the Morte was his first commission, while Masefield’s discovery of Malory symbolised the discovery of his poetic vocation. Masefield commemorated his discovery of Malory in verse, as well as prose. In ‘My Library, Volume One’ he wrote:

What spirit guided me to Volume One,  
The Story of King Arthur? So it fell  
That summer morning on Sixth Avenue  
I had gone shopping better than I knew,  
Returning friend to Bors and Lionel,  
Cousin to Tristan and Romance’s son. (ll. 9-14; Dodd’s edition. 196).

Throughout his life Masefield was reported to have kept a copy of the Morte by his bedside table (Dodds, Introduction, 3).
The poems of *Midsummer Night* draw on an eclectic range of sources, including Classical and Northern mythology, historical research, Malory and early Welsh material, as well as his own imagination. In these ballads he designed the foundations of an epic that was filled with analogues to British history. ‘Badon Hill’, for instance, reworks the traditional Welsh account of Arthur’s battle against the Saxons, first mentioned by Nennius. The Saxons, or ‘pirates’ as Masefield calls them, are led by ‘Loki the Dragon Killer’, of Northern mythology, who with ‘[f]ive thousand raiders in a hundred ships’ plans ‘to put Britain in eclipse’. Observing the fleet of long ships at anchor, Arthur, described as a ‘cub of hell’ by the invaders (though he may as well be called Sir Francis Drake), sends in fireships, which destroy the fleet and set the Saxons to flight. Thus seeing their opponents in disarray, the Britons then attack and repulse the invasion. ‘All Britons know the stories that are told / Of Arthur’s battle’, writes Masefield – indeed, though they tend to associate the tale with the defeat of the Spanish Armada off Gravelines, rather than with Arthur.

In the following poem, ‘The Sailing of Hell Race’, Masefield adapts the early Welsh poem, ‘Preiddau Annwn’ (‘The Spoils of Annwn’). Here Arthur has secured his realm against invasion and desires new adventures. They sail west ‘[t]o seas where never a ship had broken foam’ until they reach a ‘granite coast’, a ‘dockyard of the dead’. What has up until now been a reasonably close adaptation of the Welsh original becomes overlaid with Dantean tones – for past this desolate harbour lies Hell itself, marked by a warning to those who would pass:

Return, before the key turns in the locks,
Return, and do not dare
Death beyond death, the Cities of Despair.
Arthur and his warriors pass through three cities: one of lust and avarice, another of unthinking war, where '[b]abies starved and women maddened; men slew', and a final city of death and despair. As in the Welsh original, Arthur is unable to contend with the last of these devilries and he flees Annwn with only a remnant of his host.

Like many of the poems in the *Midsummer Night* sequence, 'The Sailing of Hell Race' is directly concerned with the horror of war. In the opinion of his friend Robert Graves, Masefield had suffered greatly during the war. Although a pacifist, he served with the British Red Cross and undertook propagandist work for the Government, including a series of lectures in America to help explain the British war effort; he also produced an account of the disastrous Gallipoli campaign, which gave 'a graphic insight into the life of the common soldier, in both its horror and its heroism'. The poems of *Midsummer Night* reflect the anxieties and experiences of a man torn between pacifism and propaganda and offer a remarkably violent retelling of the Arthurian story.

Exactly half of the twenty-two poems in the collection are directly concerned with war or violence. In some, such as 'The Fight on the Wall', Masefield presented violence through a simple ballad form that conveyed a sense of immediacy which Tennyson and his imitators had lacked:

Lancelot, closing, gripped him gamely
And struck him stark

And swung him as a child before him

* These are 'The Begetting of Arthur' (Uther's battles against pirates; his later slaying); 'The Taking of Morgause' (abduction); 'The Begetting of Mordred' (Morgause attempts to espy Arthur's battle plans, and when this fails she seduces him, begetting Mordred in the process, which will cause the final downfall of the kingdom); 'Badon Hill' (Arthur's famed victory over the Northern 'pirates'); 'The Fight on the Hill' (Lancelot's battle with Arthur's knights after his affair with Gwenivere is discovered - a particularly violent poem); 'The Breaking of the Links' (ends with the invasion of Britain); 'Arthur in the Ruins' (the king debates whether to pursue Mordred to the death); 'The Fight at Camlan' (Arthur's final battle); 'The Fight on the Beach' (the king's death and slaying of Mordred, his son); 'The Old Tale of the Begetting of Arthur' (Uther's slaying of Ygraine's husband); 'The Old Tale of the Breaking of the Links' (Lancelot's bloody rescue of the doomed Gwenivere).
As guard to Kurslin’s axe,
Which struck Sir Lovel fair and tore him
As cards tear flax.

Lovel fell back and burst upon his slayer
But Kurslin thrust him clear.\textsuperscript{79}

In other poems Masefield combined his ballad forms with a rough iambic pentameter
in order to depict larger battle scenes, such as the fight at Camlan between the Celtic
confederacy and the invading Saxons:

Owain’s horse was sped.
He snatched Breuse’s javelin as the stallion fell,
He speared Breuse through beneath the shoulder stay,
Addersfang cracked his helmet like a shell;
He grappled Addersfang as Breuse fell dead.\textsuperscript{80}

Masefield’s verse never possessed the stateliness of Tennyson’s Arthurian epic. He
strove always to write for what he deemed the ‘common man’ (‘Not the ruler for me,
but the ranker’ as he put it in ‘A Consecration’).\textsuperscript{81} Nonetheless, Masefield’s poems are
not all ‘smote, smash, swing and thrust’: at times he was able to write dramatic,
character-driven verse, as in ‘The Fight on the Beach’, wherein Arthur, his kingdom
ruined, offers Mordred one last opportunity of peace, only to be rejected:

‘Bastard,’ they called me; but the bastard’s nerve
Came nearer Kingdom’s conquest that they dreamt.
I fail; my one endeavour is my last.

I spit upon your fatherhood and you.\textsuperscript{82}

‘Thirty years’ anguish […] made by your idle lust’, are Mordred’s final words, as he
lies dying from his father’s final act.\textsuperscript{83} War and the desolation of war hang heavy in
these poems.\textsuperscript{84}
Midsummer Night is also preoccupied with the causes of the kingdom’s downfall. Some poems are simple narrative accounts, such as ‘The Breaking of the Links’, which tells of the disintegration of the fellowship of the Round Table; others are post-Camlan ‘confessions’, in which Arthur and members of his court admit their responsibilities and failings to the state. In the sequence’s title poem, a modern-day narrator stumbles upon the sleeping Arthur and his court. Unlike Rhys, who presented the same scene in ‘King Arthur’s Sleep’, Masefield has his court awaken; but, again, they plan no return. Instead, a series of speeches follow in which the members of the fellowship claim responsibility for the downfall of the Round Table. Arthur blames himself for incestuously fathering Mordred; Gwenivere blames her affair with ‘Lancelot the Bright’, which in this version produces a son, Lacheu (who in the Welsh tradition was Arthur’s son), who was killed by pirates. Lancelot, the heir to the kingdom, being Arthur’s cousin, also repents of his affair. Gwenivach, Gwenivere’s sister and Mordred’s lover, admits that she too conspired against the queen: ‘Ready to stab her at the slightest chance / Stab to the life. / I stabbed her to the heart in her estate; / Disaster was my blow’s inheritance.’ Mordred speaks last and tells them that his

was the hand that smote the royal seat,
Mine was the moving darkness that made cloud;
You were but nerves; I, Mordred, was the spine.

This bleak poem ends with the court, largely repentant, returning to sleep. In another work of this year, the children’s classic, The Midnight Folk (1927), Masefield presented another version of the post-Camlan court. Here Kay Harker, the novel’s child protagonist, visits Arthur, who now lives in Fairyland, where he meets Lancelot who tells him that he and Guinevere ‘are re-making what we undid’; even Vivien, that
villainous arch-temptress, is now engaged in giving out toys to ‘all the friendless little children’. In this children’s tale, the repentance of Arthur, Lancelot and Gwenivere in ‘Midsummer Night’, has turned to redemption.

The first poem in the *Midsummer Night* sequence is less forgiving of the mistakes of rulers. In ‘The Begetting of Arthur’ Uther, of Roman descent, attempts to form a union between the native British kings to fight off the Saxons. The most powerful of these chieftains, Merchyon of Cornwall, refuses to join this Celtic alliance, saying ‘I will not mingle in remote affairs, / I can mind mine, let others look to theirs […] Your schemes are childish and your fears are tales’. Masefield then alters Malory’s description of begetting of Arthur in a manner typical of Victorian writers: Uther does not rape Ygem, but rather the unmarried lovers elope. They spend one night together in the forest before they are discovered by Merchyon, Ygem’s father, who stabs Uther while he sleeps (the whole passage is similar to Mark’s discovery of Tristram and Isolde) and the pregnant Ygem is taken back to Tintagel.

A post-Empire theme runs throughout this poem. Rome has collapsed; the broken communities refuse to unite effectively and remain distrustful of each other, while fearing the rise of a new power to replace the old. Merchyon, both pragmatic and craven, dreams of a return to the Roman age of civilisation:

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perhaps the Romans plan
To recommence their empire, for in truth
Taxes and tribute and conscripted youth
Are playthings dear to Rome.
But you, my Roman [meaning Uther], come to the wrong man.
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Merchyon’s self-delusion as to the actual political situation (no one else believes in Rome’s return) and the cynical belief in his own power reflects the misplaced belief held by conservatives and imperialists in interwar Britain that the country would
return to its pre-1914 eminence. For Merchyon and post-war conservatives alike, the dream of Empire still held strong, though as a political and economic institution it was virtually bankrupt. Perhaps it was because of his critique of these views that Masefield was the first writer, apart from Welsh or Cornish nationalists (often working in regional languages), who treated the Celtic Arthurian story with any political seriousness. As he would demonstrate in *Badon Parchments* (1947), Masefield realised the almost unique position the Arthurian story held in the British literary canon as containing the germs of a post-empire narrative — a narrative that would become a means of articulating Britain’s place in the second half of the twentieth century.*

The bleakness of Masefield’s collection, however, is offset by the final poem in the sequence, ‘Fulfilment’, a post-Arthurian coda, in which a northern pirate, Cwichelm, is engaged in a long and bloody struggle with Sir Constans, a lingering member of the Romano-Britons, whom the pirates have driven into the ‘western wastes’. One night, lost and ‘half-drowned’, Cwichelm arrives at the house of Constans, who, being obliged by Celtic customs of courtesy, allows him refuge. During the night Cwichelm is told in a dream that he must take Constans’s son and kill him, for otherwise their ‘bloods will mingle.’ This fear of racial hybridisation (common enough in nineteenth-century historiography and which would become increasingly pertinent in 1930s Europe) causes Cwichelm to abduct the Celtic child, later giving him to one of his soldiers, saying ‘Go, hack the little bastard limb from limb’. However, in a classic fairytale motif, the soldier relents and the child grows

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*Masefield’s *Badon Parchments* (1947) appears to have been instrumental in reconfiguring the Arthurian story into a historical novel. This subgenre would achieve immense popularity through writers such as Rosemary Sutcliff and Mary Stewart — see the following chapter. Much of Masefield’s novel is concerned with the Celtic federation’s indecisiveness, along with petty interests, appeasement and commitment to outdated tactics, when faced with the Saxon threat. Its relevance to Britain in the context of the Second World War is even more explicit than *Midsummer Night’s* basis in the Great War.
up a foundling. Twenty years later, Cwichelm discovers the truth and again orders
him to be killed; but again his plans are thwarted and the ‘foundling’ marries
Cwichelm’s daughter. Hybridisation is complete. This poem, indeed Masefield’s own
whole Arthurian oeuvre, is not only Anglo-Celtic; it is a work fundamentally opposed
to notions of racial exclusivity within the British mainland.*

For Masefield, the return of Arthur meant the building of a ‘lasting beauty left
unbuilt / Because of all our follies and our guilt.’ In *Midsummer Night* Masefield
attempted to configure the Arthurian story as the essential myth of a united Britain:
the ‘fibres of the country’s soul’, as Arthur says in the title poem. Written in the
aftermath of the bloodiest conflict the world had yet known, it was a story that posited
a cultural identity for contemporary Britain, as well as offering its leaders some timely
precedents.

‘That landscape spoke “with a grimly voice”’: David Jones’s *In Parenthesis*
Like Masefield, David Jones was concerned with forging a British identity out of
post-Great War society, but their situations were very different. Masefield was an
Englishman who adopted Welsh literature, Jones was an Anglo-Welshman who
understood the Arthurian legend as part of his national heritage; Masefield was a self­
consciously popular poet, Jones was – equally consciously – a modernist; after his
Laureateship was granted, Masefield was rarely acclaimed by his contemporaries;
Jones received commendations from Eliot, Auden, Yeats, Stravinsky and many
others. Moreover, Masefield’s *Midsummer Night* is an attempt at an Arthurian epic

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* In Masefield’s mixture of Teutonic, Celtic, Classical and Malorian literature there is no mention of
Irish myths, which occupied many of the scholarly works of the Celtcist scholars. In contrast, in ‘The
Taking of Morgause’, Masefield’s interest is exclusively on the Scottish figures Lot and Morgause. The
latter appears in several other poems in the sequence, most notably ‘The Begetting of Mordred’. In *The
Once and Future King*, T.H. White would also be interested in the ‘Orkney faction’, as he called them,
though for distinctly different ideological purposes (as discussed in the next chapter).
which is preoccupied with the First World War; Jones’s *In Parenthesis* (1937) is ‘a book about War’ which is concerned with the Arthurian story.  

Jones (1895-1974) professed himself to be ‘a Londoner, of Welsh and English parentage, of Protestant upbringing, of Catholic subscription’. Like Ernest Rhys, a fellow member of the *Cymry Llundain*, it was from his father that he took his partly Welsh identity. He was raised an ‘English monoglot’, though acquired a knowledge of *Cymraeg* in adult life. In 1923 he converted to Catholicism under the auspices of Eric Gill, in whose Catholic-Marxist community he lived for much of the 1920s and 30s. Until the publication of *In Parenthesis* in 1937, Jones was chiefly known as a visual artist. Influenced by Futurism and religious iconography, Jones’s work became increasingly idiosyncratic and his paintings and drawings of Arthurian subjects are perhaps the most innovative and beautiful to be produced in the last century (fig. 21)  

All of his literary works were heavily influenced by his experience in the Great War: he served as a private with the London-Welsh Battalion (the 15\(^{th}\)) of the Royal Welch Fusiliers (a particularly literary regiment, which – at officer level – included Siegfried Sassoon and Robert Graves).

Like Sassoon’s subversion of Galahad, the medieval romanticism of T.E. Lawrence and the bourgeois individualism at the ideological centre of R.G. Collingwood’s historical *dux bellorum*, the version of the Arthurian legend which emerges from Jones’s *In Parenthesis* would be unthinkable without the Great War. Jones’s interest in and use of the Arthurian story (which he understood as historical, Celtic and Malorian) was located in the self-destruction of Arthur’s kingdom, in the idea of fellowship, which he saw as a mythic parallel of his own experiences as a private soldier in France, and as means of articulating the identity of a united Britain. *In Parenthesis*, Jones’s major work and the only one to be completed to his
satisfaction, has been regarded by many to be the greatest literary work the war produced in English, and one of the major artistic works of the twentieth century.

*In Parenthesis* is divided into seven parts, each covering a month of the War: from December 1915, when the London-Welsh Battalion prepare to leave for overseas duty, to July 1, 1916, the first day of the battle of the Somme, when ‘B’ Company, the focal point of the text, begin their attack on Mametz wood. Many of the Company’s troops are killed in this advance, though John Ball, a fictionalised portrait of the author, is only wounded in the thigh (as, historically, was Jones and, mythologically, the Fisher King). The text’s focus is not so much on the atrocities of war – though there are some powerful descriptions – but on the comradeship of the soldiers, which Jones articulated through Cockney-Welsh dialogue and the mythic parallels which Jones found to be evident during his experiences. The two most important of these mythic analogues are the *Gododdin*, a sixth-century account of a raid by 300 northern Celts on the Saxons of Deira, of which only three survive; the other is that of Arthur.

The allusions to the Arthurian story are various, made ‘both superficially and more subtly.’ Some are seemingly incidental: one soldier is ironically known as ‘Dai de la Cote male taile’, because of his oversized greatcoat; another is called Lance-Corporal Aneirin Merddyyn Lewis. Some quotations from Malory are made simply for the purpose of describing life behind the trenches, such as the opening of Part 4: ‘So thus he [John Ball] sorrowed till it was day and heard the foules sing, then somewhat he was comforted.’ Other references have greater significance. The whole battlefield is configured as the Waste Land – whether ‘King Pellam’s Launde’ of Malory or Eliot’s twentieth-century dead land, where a new Dolorous Stroke has
ravaged the kingdom.* Jones thought that Malory described the landscape and the situation best: it spoke ‘with a grimly voice’. Similarly Mametz wood is configured as the Forest Perilous, where Merlin has lived, crazed after the battle of Arderydd, and in which Lancelot ‘ran want-wit in a shirt for the queen’s unreason’. Other references are ennobling, most notably in the climactic seventh part when John Ball’s comrades are shot down and killed, the troops falling into the earth like others who have ‘fructif[ied] the land’: Tristram, Lamorack, Alisand le Orphelin, Beaumains, Balin and Balan and Peredur. They die in a second Camlan, one in which ‘[p]roperly organized chemists can let make more riving power than ever Twrch Trwyth’, the raving giant boar which nearly destroys Celtic Britain in Culhwch ac Olwen.†

Whereas Ernest Rhys had seen himself as divided as both English and Welsh – a man of ‘mixed races’; Jones professed to be whole: a Briton. The Arthurian legend was of vital importance to his identity as ‘there is no other tradition at all equally the common property of all the inhabitants of Britain’. One of the greatest sections of In Parenthesis is Dai Greatcoat’s speech in part four, wherein he mythologises the Welsh’s martial past – whether fighting for his own people’s freedom in glorious defeats, or embattled in other nations’ wars. It begins:

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* The poem contains many references to Malory’s and Eliot’s Waste Land. One of the most notable references to Eliot’s poem occurs in Part 3 of the text, which parodies the conclusion to the conversation of the two Cockney ladies of ‘A Game of Chess’ (‘Goodnight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight. / Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight. / Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night’, II. 169-71). Jones, with his customary concern with the London-Welsh identity of ‘B’ Company, writes:

Good night Parrot
Good night Bess.
Good night good night – buck up – he gets nasty later on.
Good night, bon swores ‘walads, Nos dawch. Jac-y-dandi
Night Night. (29)

† Jones, In Parenthesis, 155. Jones probably knew that Twrch Trwyth was a symbol of great destructiveness for medieval Welsh writers. Guest’s notes on the boar, contained in the Mabinogion (275-7), contain the numerous references to Twrch Trwyth in Welsh literature, including this description by Lewis Glyn Cothi: ‘He would destroy the towns and wrath, wounds, and violence; he would tear down all the towers like the Twrch Trwyth.’
This Dai adjusts his slipping straps, wraps close his misfit outsize greatcoat – he articulates his English with an alien care.

My fathers were with the Black Prince of Wales [...] I was with Abel when his brother found him, under the green tree.
I built a shit-house for Artaxerxes.
I was the spear in Balin’s hand
That made waste King Pellam’s land.109

He was present at Badon Hill; witnessed Arthur, ‘The Bear of the Island’,* break the land ‘in his huge pride, and / over-reach of his imperium; saw the ‘repulsive lips’ of ‘Lord Agravaine’ urge Arthur’s court to doom, he fought at Camlan and was ‘the adder in the little bush / whose hibernation-end / undid, / unmade victorious toil.’110

This eternal Welshman also marched with Roland in Charlemagne’s wars, was present at the defeat of the Gododdin and was even ‘in Michael’s trench when bright Lucifer bulged his / primal salient out.’111 The theme of this section, Jones’s note informs the reader, is ‘the repeated spoliation of the Island by means of foreign entanglement and expeditionary forces across the channel’.112 History provides its own examples; the Arthurian story has plenty of instances: Arthur losing almost all his company in ‘Preiddeu Annwn’; or in Malory, where the king is forced to follow the urging of Agravaine, and then of Gawain, who force him to pursue Lancelot to France, which enables Mordred to usurp the throne and destroy the kingdom. The Welsh tradition has many other recurrences of this motif.† The present Great War is another equally destructive and pointless expeditionary war, which will spoil the land once more.

* There is a Welsh folk connection between Arthur and Arth (bear). Most scholars and writers reject this connection in favour of the Latin Artorius.
† On this point Jones writes: ‘reflecting, no doubt, the re-disposition of troops in the late Roman age, to support the claims of rival candidates to the Purple, and to stem the increasing barbarian presence at different frontiers’ (In Parenthesis, n. 37 (K), 209).
Jones's use of the Arthurian legend, then, is concerned with the land and its people, not just its kings and princes, or its nineteenth-century inheritors, the bourgeoisie. Unlike Collingwood and Lawrence, Jones's use of the myth is never concerned with the individual. Like Masefield's poetry, *In Parenthesis* is concerned with the comradeship of the private soldiers, rather than officers and the chivalry of the gentleman-class. This is particularly noticeable in the longest Arthurian section: the beginning of Part 6, in which the troops of 'B' Company prepare for the major offensive at Mametz wood. The title of the part, along with one of its epigraphs, is taken from Malory, connoting the military carnage which will ensue in Part 7. In an accompanying note, Jones asserts that the opening section of the final book of Malory, the 'Morte Darthur' itself, in which Mordred and Agravaine plot the downfall of Lancelot and thus the entire kingdom, was of importance to the composition of Part 6. It begins with Private Saunders returning from Headquarter Company, where he has heard of the order to attack Mametz wood the following day:

He gave them the latest as he had heard tell of the devising of this battle ... and in what manner it should be. He said that there was a hell of a stink at Division — so he heard from the Liaison Officer's groom — as to the ruling of this battle [...] how it was going to be a first clarst bollocks and murthering of Christen men and reckoned [...] for now, he says [...] is this noble fellowship wholly misciefed.†

Although this passage consciously imitates the narrative and language of the opening of the *Morte*, the 'mischiefed' destruction of the fellowship is not concerned with the officers of H.Q. — the 'blubbin' general and other 'proper crawler[s].†

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† These are: 'Pavilions and Captains of Hundreds' (title); 'And bade him to be ready and stiff him and garnish him...and laid a mighty siege about...and threw many great engines...and short great guns...and great purveyance were made on both parties' (epigraph) (134, 135).

† Cf. Malory: "'Alas," sayde Sir Gawaine and Sir Gareth [of their brothers' plotting], "now ys thys realme holy destroyed and myscheved, and the noble felyshyp of the Rounde Table shall be disparbeled." (*Morte*, 647).
Rather, Jones uses Malory to signify and mythologise the fellowship of the ranks: ‘[f]or such breakings away and dissolving of comradeship and token of division are of great anguish when men sense how they stand so perilous and transitory in this world.’\textsuperscript{116} This is a poem about War, common soldiers and ‘of ordinary things […] Of how they would meet and in what good places afterwards. Of the dissimilar merits of Welshness and Cockneys […] Of how you really couldn’t very well carry more than one book at a time in your pack […] Of whether they three would be together for the Duration, and how you hoped so very much indeed.’\textsuperscript{117} In comparison, the officers stand apart, defined not by their idealised notions of chivalry (compare Sassoon’s \textit{Sherston} trilogy) but by their inhumanity. Rarely are their voices ‘heard’ in the poem;\textsuperscript{*} and, on the rare occasions where they are, their characterisation borders on the grotesque. On the morning of the attack on Mametz wood they appear ‘at leisure and well-dressed and all at ease’, ‘as if thriving on the nitrous air’ and talk ‘of the admirable salads of Mrs. Curtis-Smythe’.\textsuperscript{118} All the time the soldiers lie on the lope of the trenches awaiting the order to attack – ‘the comrade next to you screamed so after […] it was impossible to catch anymore the burthen of this white-man talk.’\textsuperscript{119} The officers’ notion of gentlemanly disinterestedness, learned at public schools, is so abhorrent that John Ball perceives them as racially different: the reference to Kipling’s ‘white-man’s burden’ having obvious connotations. With such alienation between soldier and officer, no wonder Private Watcyn, when being told of his

\textsuperscript{*} In many ways this difficult work (it is neither verse, nor prose, Jones simply referred to it as ‘this writing’) ought to be considered written for oral performance. Many of Jones’s notes refer to pronunciation: ‘[p]ronounce all French place-names as in English’ (n. 5, 192); ‘[i]n such words of Welsh derivation as I have used the accent falls on the penultimate syllable’ (n. 6, 192); ‘5.9’ is to be read ‘five nine, not five point nine’, as this is what was said ‘in the ranks’ (n. 39, 211).
promotion to corporal due to bravery, deliberately gets drunk and fails to attend to parade in order to be reduced back to private.⁴¹²⁰

Paul Fussell’s claim that *In Parenthesis* is a fundamentally dishonest book which glorifies war through associating it with the chivalry of medieval romance seems wide of the mark.⁴¹ The Arthurian legend operates as a myth of comradeship which is relevant exclusively to ‘the ranker’ and not the ‘ruler’ (to use Masefield’s words). Otherwise it is a symbol of destruction (Camlan; the stupidity of Agravaine / contemporary officers) or, more creatively, the means of articulating the ‘British’ identity of Jones and his comrades. Similarly, Jones’s use of the Arthurian story contrasts sharply with the right-wing ideology that some critics have perceived as apparent in his writings. Elizabeth Ward claimed in 1983 that his poetry has underlying affinities with fascism – particularly in Jones’s view of history, which was partly derived from Spengler – though other scholars have disputed this.⁴¹²² He was a naturally conservative man; and, despite working-class origins, thought of himself as ‘chivalric and royalist’.⁴¹²³ He opposed socialism: when discharged by the army in 1918 he considered joining the international brigades fighting for the counter-revolutionaries in the Russian Civil War (1919-22).⁴¹²⁴ After his conversion to Catholicism, he, like many Catholic-conservatives, sided with Franco.⁴¹²⁵ He was also sympathetic to Hitler’s attempt to rejuvenate post-war Germany, though he did find its barbarism repugnant.⁴¹ He saw the story of Charlemagne (whom he parallels with

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* Descriptions of officers are uniformly derogatory in *In Parenthesis*: ‘A bleeding brass hat’; ‘The bastard’ll have us all blown up – softly, and consider his plenary powers, it’s that cissy from Brigade, the one wat powders’ (40); when the Brigadier is shot, one soldier says ‘It’s only right he should be up with the boys the fire-eating old bastard’ (173).

† ‘God, he’s [Hitler is] nearly right, but this hate thing mars the whole thing’ (Jones, letter to Grisewood, 1938, quoted in Dilworth, ‘David Jones and Fascism’, 152). See also a largely appreciative critique of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (which he compares to the thoughts and politics of several ‘sincere and idealistic’ Catholic intellectuals) and Nazi Germany’s imperialism written for *The Tablet* (1939). While this has never been published in full – Grisewood thought it too controversial to be included in *Epoch and Artist* – Dilworth, in ‘David Jones and Fascism’, has quoted substantial portions of it, including this apologia: ‘What it boils down to is that there is much in both Fascist and Nazi
Arthur throughout his work) as having particular relevance to contemporary society, perceiving him as a Franco-German saviour of Christian civilisation and wrote of Europe’s ‘bewildered’ state that ‘[i]t is, conceivably, for a baptized Führership that we may yet have cause to pray.’

Nonetheless, Jones’s use of the Arthurian legend seems to be effectively separated from his right-wing politics. Indeed, *In Parenthesis* is one of the very few Arthurian texts of any century to be focused on the lower-classes – its symbolism and motifs fully aligned to working-class experience. While Jones’s politics certainly seem to be informed by those uneasy parallels between fascism and much Catholic writing in the 1920s and 30s, it is to another writer that we must turn in order to witness the role Catholic-conservatism (or ‘clerical fascism’) would play in shaping Arthurian literature of the 1930s: Charles Williams.

**Charles Williams’s Taliessin-cycle: restoring the Grail**

Charles Williams’s major Arthurian work, the unfinished Taliessin-cycle, two parts of which were published as *Taliessin through Logres* (1938) and *Region of the Summer Stars* (1944), is perhaps the most acclaimed retelling of the legend since Tennyson’s *Idylls*. Richard Barber has described the cycle as ‘one of the great works of Arthurian literature’; C.S. Lewis claimed that it was ‘among the two or three most valuable books of verse published in the century’; John Heath Stubbs claimed that Williams was as original and as modern as T.S. Eliot; and David Llewellyn Dodds has described his two volumes as ‘the major imaginative work about the Grail of the twentieth century – certainly in English, probably in any language’. While Rhys had produced two lyric-cycles on the legend, Masefield, a sequence of narrative revolutions that demand our understanding and sympathy. They represent, for all their alarming characteristics, an heroic attempt to cope with certain admitted corruptions in our civilization. Even the terrible aspects of these regimes, the brutality and suppression of individual freedom, must at least be considered in relation to the nature and malignancy of the particular conditions and evils that those regimes set out to correct’ (149).
ballads, and Jones had tried to reconfigure the myth’s symbolic meaning, Williams attempted to do all three. His Taliessin-cycle is a series of thirty-four poems – some lyrics, some narratorial, some symbolic – which retold the entire story of Arthur from the establishment of his kingdom to its tragic denouement. Although the work is unfinished it is still possible to understand the major features of his Arthuriad, due the ‘scheme’ for the sequence Williams published in the ‘Preface’ to Region, along with C.S. Lewis’s subsequent ordering of the poems (based on Williams’s intentions).*

Like Rhys and Jones, Williams was born in London. Of all the works discussed in this chapter, the Taliessin-cycle is the least directly concerned in the establishment of a British, or Anglo-Celtic identity. Nonetheless, Malory and the Mabinogion are the largest influences upon his work and Williams was very familiar with the work of the Celticists, especially Brown, Nitze and Weston (though he dismissed their arguments concerned with the non-Christian origins of the legend).†²⁹


† The Celtic-origins hypothesis of the Grail is clearly alluded to in one poem of the cycle: ‘The Meditation of Mordred’. Here Mordred, already challenging his father’s supremacy, says:

My father dwelled on the thought of the Grail for his luck,
but I can manage without such fairy mechanism.
If it does prove to be, which is no likely thought,
I will send my own dozen knights to pull it is.

My cooks would be glad of such a cauldron of Ceridwen (ll. 37-41).

Mordred, though, is wrong. In the supra-Christian ideology of the Taliessin-cycle all images are fundamentally Christian. Those who see the Grail as some Celtic vessel of enchantment or, like Mordred, as some ‘domestic appliance’ are of limited understanding.
His interest in Arthur seems to have begun around 1913 when he first read A.E. Waite’s *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal* (1909). Soon after, Williams began to keep a ‘commonplace book’ in which he recorded hundreds of notes on the Arthurian legend, many of which made their way into his cycle. Waite’s Grail study also drew Williams into occult mysticism: he was already an impassioned member of the Anglo-Catholic Church and in 1917 he joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (other members included fellow-Arthurian writers Waite and Arthur Machen, as well as W.B. Yeats and Aleister Crowley) and continued to be fascinated by occult religion and magic throughout his life.

The major feature of the Taliessin-cycle is its attempt to establish the centricity of the Grail quest in the larger story of Arthur, to make the achievement of the Grail ‘the central matter of the Matter of Britain’. As discussed in chapter three, the Grail had become increasingly detached from the larger Arthurian story since Tennyson had relegated its importance in the *Idylls*. In the twentieth century the Grail became more estranged from the Arthurian corpus and many works had set the sacred vessel in the contemporary world, with little or no reference to Arthur. Williams himself wrote one such novel in 1930, *War in Heaven*, in which the Grail comes into the possession of a demonic publisher who threatens the world with destruction. In contrast, writers producing contemporary Arthurian literature never included the Grail in their works. Masefield and David Jones never wrote on it; neither did James Bridie in Scotland, nor T. Gwynn Jones in Wales. As shown in chapter four, only Cornish writers of this period sought to make the Grail central to their accounts of Arthur. Nonetheless, Williams, as a devout Christian with a penchant for rituals both Catholic and occult, believed that the Grail ought to be at the centre of any retelling of the Arthurian story.
In the ‘Preface’ to Region Williams outlined ‘the general argument of the series’ as ‘the expectation of the return of Our Lord by means of the Grail and of the establishment of the kingdom of Logres (or Britain) to this end by the powers of Empire and Broceliande’. Here, Logres is not just the Britain of Arthur, but ‘Britain regarded as a province of the Empire with its centre at Byzantium’. This Empire is not political: it represents, geographically, Christendom and, symbolically, the workings of Christ in the world. Logres is spiritual Britain; or rather, it is Britain’s destiny to become Logres. It is this spiritual Britain which Arthur, as an authoritarian leader, establishes in the cycle. Broceliande, on the other hand, is a ‘sea-forest’ which lies outside the Empire, beyond Logres, and its role is as a spiritual store-house for Christian Britain (as in T. Gwynn Jones’s *Ynys Afalllon*). Following the collapse of Logres, due to the degeneracy of its court and the unsuitability of Arthur as king, it is Broceliande which prepares the way for Britain’s partial salvation: the achievement of the Grail. Within this narrative and symbolic structure Williams subsumes the entire Arthurian story: every event and character in the traditional story is reconfigured as a cause for either the downfall of Logres, or its salvation with the Grail. In this way, although Malory and the *Mabinogion* are the text’s major sources, it is the Didot *Perceval* (c. 1200-10) that most closely forms an analogue for the Taliessin-cycle. For, like Robert de Boron’s amplification of Chrétien’s *Percival*, Williams’s *Arthuriad* encompasses Eurasia and temporally covers the Fall of Man to the onset of the Dark Ages.

Another analogue for the Taliessin-cycle is the *Queste del Saint Graal* (c. 1225), which Williams knew in a translation published by Dent. It is often stated by Williams’s admirers that his *Arthuriad* is an intensely religious work, which is wholly estranged from political considerations. This is something of a false reading. For in
the same way that the *Queste* relentlessly pursues the supersession of the medieval ideology of the *chevalièrie seculiere* with *la celestiale* – replacing the dynastic and courtly politics of Geoffrey and Chrétien with the politics of monastic imperial expansion\(^\text{139}\) – Williams’s Taliessin-cycle attempts to assert the dominance of Christian ‘metaphysics’ over the humanist *Idylls*, a work which Williams came to dislike.\(^*\) This Christian ‘metaphysics’, while no doubt reflecting the author’s devout religious beliefs, is also deeply reactionary and bears resemblance to the ‘clerical fascism’ that was apparent in several European states and which was advocated by numerous Catholic and Anglo-Catholic intellectuals in Britain.\(^\text{140}\) It can be discerned in the Taliessin-cycle in several ways.

First there is the nature of the Empire, which is not only geographical but political. Williams elucidated the meaning of the Empire in several works, including an illustration by Lynton Lamb (a book designer at Oxford University Press, where Williams worked as an editor), used as the frontispiece of the first volume of the Taliessin-cycle. The image (fig. 22) is that of a reclining female figure, with each province corresponding to various parts her body: Logres is the head and Camelot (‘London-in-Logres’) its mouth; Gaul is the breasts of the body; Italy represents the hands celebrating Mass; Jerusalem is the womb; Byzantium is the navel – the centre of the Empire.\(^\text{141}\) In his notebook Williams defined the Empire as ‘(a) all Creation [...] (b) Unfallen Man; (c) a proper social order (d) the true physical body.’\(^\text{142}\) When

\(^*\) Williams found most versions of the legend ‘unsatisfactory’ (‘Malory and the Grail-Legend’, *Image of the City*, 187). Malory, he believed, had ‘never quite fulfilled the hints of profound meaning which are scattered through him’, and did not ‘seem to trouble to work out the possibilities of relation’ of the ‘many hints in his images’ (Arthurian Torso, 97; ‘Note’ to Taliessin, 96-7). But it was Tennyson whom Williams turned to most often in a critical mood. He found the *Idylls* too domestic and modern – too much ‘like Pickwick’ he is reported to have said in conversation (Arthurian Torso, 94) – and while they contained great verse, he felt they lacked ‘an adequate metaphysic’, the Victorian replacing the Christian basis of the legend with a devotion to ‘conduct’. He continued: ‘Conduct without any adequate end, duty without interior and eternal significance, morals without metaphysics – these are the guardian angels of the Victorian chivalry and of the King. [...] The weakness therefore of the Victorian age, as of the *Idylls*, is in its concern with conduct but its failure artistically to suggest and adequate significance in conduct’ (‘Preface’, Victorian Book of Verse, v-vi).
all of Europe is working in unison the body is whole. But the body rarely does work
in this way, for there is an antithesis to the Christian Empire: the infernal region of
P'o-Lu, the tentacles of which can be seen on the bottom right of Lamb’s illustration.
From here originates the disorder that challenges and almost overcomes the Byzantine
Empire. The forces of P'o-Lu are manifest in the various forms of barbarianism which
overpower the Empire at the end of the sequence: Mordred’s rebellion, the invasion of
Attila the Hun and the threat of Islam, among others. Williams described these forces
of destruction as ‘the beastliest and chilliest in blasphemy’. One does not have to be
a disciple of Edward Said to perceive in Williams’s work a dichotomy between the
West and its alarming Eastern ‘Other’. Indeed, Williams seems to have considered the
world’s political geography as divided between Christendom and barbarism, which
for this poet constituted atheism, communism, Asia, the antipodes, Attila the Hun,
Islam and marital infidelity as one large negative force.

Williams’s ‘Vision of the Empire’ connotes a world of Christian order
opposed to barbaric, Eastern disorder. Many of the poems in the Taliessin-cycle are
given over to describing how Logres ought to be ordered as a Christian theocracy, the
most important of which are ‘The Calling of Arthur’ and ‘Sir Bors to Elayne: on the
King’s coins’. The first begins with Merlin meeting Arthur and telling the would-be
king that it is his duty to establish Logres, to make way for the coming of the Grail.
To do this he must overthrow the lord of London, King Cradlemas (a redaction of the
eleven kings Malory’s Arthur must conquer). Cradlemas is not a barbarian, ‘but the
last feeble, fragile, and sinister representative of [Pagan] Roman civilization.’ Like
Nero, he wears an emerald for a monocle and covers his aged face with a mask
‘gilded with a maiden’s motionless smile’. Feeble and effeminate (the latter
perhaps a signifier for homosexuality), he is a useless autocrat: he sits amidst
cushions, peering ‘at the pedlars of wealth that stand plausibly by’, while his subjects
die in ‘[t]he waste of snow’ that ‘covers the waste of thorn’.\textsuperscript{146} For them he feels a
useless, hypocritical pity, being forced to polish his monocle, which becomes ‘misty
with tears for the poor’.\textsuperscript{147} His people, however, are discontent; symbolically, they put
down their ‘mallet and scythe’ and take up the ‘hammer and sickle’.\textsuperscript{148} Into this
unstable, revolutionary fervour Arthur steps: he marches into London, pulls off
Cradlemas’s female mask and slays him ‘in his litter’.\textsuperscript{149} In doing so he established
within Logres ‘a proper social order’, which Williams defined as masculine, Christian
and violent. It has the additional function of putting down a far more radical, notably
communist revolt.

Williams’s portrait of Cradlemas may owe something to caricatures of
contemporary British politicians.\textsuperscript{*} What is certain is that many on the Catholic right
felt that Britain was in need of a radical shift away from the uncertain policies of
various interwar governments. Many prayed – as David Jones had – for a ‘baptised
fühlership’. T.S. Eliot – like Williams, an Anglo-Catholic – is perhaps the best known
of these right-wing Christian intellectuals. He saw contemporary society as ‘worm-
eaten with Liberalism’ and wished to see it return to traditional forms of ‘control and
balance’, which for him could only derive from religion.\textsuperscript{150} He advocated a return to
‘a largely rural society run by a few “great families” and a small elite of theological
intellectuals much like himself.\textsuperscript{151} Most strangely of all, he called for ‘the revival and

\* Although it may be inconsequential, it is worth noting that the infirm, short-sighted and monocle-
wearing Cradlemas bears similarity to the three Prime Ministers of the interwar period: Stanley
Baldwin (P.M. 1923-4, 1924-9, 1935-7) was notoriously myopic, which caused much amusement for
foreign journalists (‘Sinking Stanley’, \textit{Time}, November 10, 1930: 17); Ramsay Macdonald (P.M. 1924,
1929-31, 1931-5) became increasingly infirm in his last premiership of a coalition government; and the
early career of Neville Chamberlain (P.M. 1937-41) was dwarfed by the political reputations of his
father and brother, Joseph and Austen Chamberlain. Both were famed as industrialist-patricians, who
rose high in the Tory party, and both wore monocles. Chamberlain also happened to be the most
centralist of conservative Prime Ministers: several of the Acts of Parliament he forced through
improved conditions for the working-classes and paved the way for the establishment of the Welfare
State of the 1940s. These Acts made him unpopular with Conservatives. It is possible that this ‘concern
for the poor’ correlates to Cradlemas’s pity for his subjects.
expansion of monastic teaching orders', the function of which would be to resist the all-encroaching barbarism. Although such a conservative idyll would require a lot of ‘discipline, inconvenience and discomfort’ for those not privileged enough to be either rich or intellectual, Eliot assured his readers that it was the best of all options as ‘here or hereafter the alternative to hell is purgatory’.

In one editorial for the Criterion, the conservative literary magazine he edited for many years, Eliot claimed that ‘politics had become too important to be left to politicians’ and wrote that it was time that ‘intelligent men’ like himself became ‘amateur economists’. Williams turned Eliot’s ideas into poetry in ‘On the King’s Coins’. The poem begins in the early years of Arthur’s reign. The king has been ordering his kingdom, creating ‘organization’, ‘law’, ‘ration and rule’. He has also, reviving the Roman custom, established a mint on the Thames and strikes his own coins, stamped with images of his own head and dragons, the symbol of his dynasty. ‘Kay, the king’s steward, wise in economics’ praises the monetary system whereby the expanse of trade creates a realm of commerce much wider than that established by warfare. Because of money, streams have been bridged, mountains tunnelled, roads established. A classic liberal, he says of the coins:

The poor have choice of purchase, the rich of rents, and events move now in a smoother control than the swords of lords or the orisons of nuns. Money is the medium of exchange.

But others are ‘darkened’ by the rise of the coins. Stating that they are idolatrous, Taliessin says to Arthur: ‘We have taught our images to be free; are we glad? / are we

* In fact the poets were friends and shared a mutual liking for the other’s work. Literary borrowing is apparent too: the most obvious example being Burnt Norton’s ‘still point of the world’s turning’ (I. 62), which Eliot admitted taking from Williams’s 1932 novel, The Greater Trumps (Carpenter, The Inklings, 97-8).

† Perhaps Williams saw Kay’s name as suggestive of the most famed liberal economist of the day – J.M. Keynes.
gad to have brought convenient heresy to Logres?*158 Bors too, another of Arthur's Round Table, rejects liberal Camelot, saying 'man only earns, and pays, / the house outside the City burns but the house within is enslaved. / What without coinage or with coinage can be saved?'159

Williams is here telescoping the transition from feudal to capitalist economy. But neither Bors's nor Taliessins's criticisms are grounded in their perception of social evils; rather they deplore Arthur's 'organization' for diverging from the historical-spiritual role of Logres as a mythic theocracy. Rejecting Arthur's Logres, Bors flees Camelot to return to his wife, seeing in her 'the sole figure of the organic salvation of our good'.160 And who is this 'organic' good – a lady who distributes bread to the poor, an act which re-enacts the Eucharist, symbolising the interaction of the heavenly and the spiritual (the abiding concern of the Taliessin-cycle). While of course the images of the bread and the coins are primarily symbolic of Logres's shift from the religious to a more secular state, the poem as a whole still smacks of the idealistic notions of conservative intellectuals who desired a return to an imagined 'organic', feudal society.

'On the King's Coins' is also typical of another feature of interest: the position of women within this mythic theocracy. Between 'The Crowning of Arthur', which marks the beginning of his reign, and 'The Coming of Galahad', which marks the beginning of the Grail quest, there is a central set of poems which are predominantly concerned with love and lovers. Usually these poems are focused on one knight of the Round Table and his lady – not unlike Tennyson's Idylls. Each represents symbolically a different form of love: Bors and Elayne reflect the idealised contentment of married love, while Taliessin and Blanchefleur reflect chaste love: he

* It may be relevant to note that the subtitle of Eliot's After Strange Gods was A Primer in Modern Heresy.
is the king’s poet, she a nun. Then there is Palomides’s worship of Iseult, which represents the working of the Christian faith on earth. This Muslim knight arrives at King Mark’s perceiving the world (in Williams’s Christian ideology) imperfectly: he understands the world through mathematics (‘Gospels trigonometrical’; ‘the measurement of man / that Euclid and Archimedes showed’). He then sees Iseult’s outstretched hand:

_Blessed (I sang) the Cornish queen;_
_for till to-day no eyes have seen_
_how curves of golden life define_
_straightness of a perfect line,_
_till the queen’s blessed arm became_
a rigid bar of golden flame_
_where well might Archimedes prove_
_the doctrine of Euclidean love,_
_and draw his demonstrations right_
_against the unmathematical night_
of ignorance and indolence!\[161\]

Because of his his passion for Iseult, Palomedes increasingly debases his chivalry: becoming hateful, dishonest and committing unlawful violence. Yet eventually, through his degradation, Palomedes comes to accept Christian Grace and is Baptised, finally finding contentment, not in the ‘triple angles, triple sides’, which Williams sees as the Islamic intellect, nor in the ‘blissful nakedness’ of Iseult’s arm, but in the Christian faith.

The role of women in Williams’s work is Beatrician. They are objects of contemplation, worshiped by Taliessin, Bors and Palomedes in order to experience transcendent or revelatory visions. They are never given a voice, but are instead narrated by their lovers. The same is even true of the figures who represent the inverse of the Beatrician ideal: Morgause and Guinevere, who lead their lovers – and the kingdom – into destruction. Lamorack says of his lover, Morgause (who, like
Guinevere, is not only another man’s wife, but a queen – and therefore his superior, too): ‘the queen’s hewn eyelids bruised my bones’; ‘her hand discharged catastrophe; I was thrown / before it.’ \(^{162}\) And though there are no poems devoted to Lancelot and Guinevere (though Williams, had he lived, would presumably have included them), several focus primarily on him: how he is ‘bewildered by the smell of adoration, / [and] roars round Guinevere’s lordly body’, how he descends into madness and lycanthropy. \(^{163}\) Whatever Guinevere – like Elayne, Iseult, Blachefleur and Morgause – feels or thinks remains silent in patriarchal Logres.*

The other major aspect of Williams’s cycle is Taliessin, who is the poet’s major character interpolation (rarely had the sixth-century Welsh bard been associated with Arthur up until this point) and represents the poet’s chief indebtedness to Welsh traditions.† He is the major focal point of Williams’s ideal religious order and social governance – Arthur’s reign, while authoritative, masculine and Christian in ‘The Calling of Arthur’, descends into economic liberalism and personal arrogance in the later poems. He asks, in ‘The Crowning of Arthur’, is ‘[t]he king for the kingdom, or the kingdom made for the king?’ \(^{164}\) Taliessin, as a poet-theologian-governor, knows that Logres is made for the exaltation of Christ.

Williams drew Taliessin from several sources, including the episode from the *Hanes Taliesin* included in Guest’s translation of the *Mabinogion*.‡ This prose and

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* Williams’s major source for the various Beatrician ideals was, of course, Dante. At the same time he was writing *Region of the Summer Stars* Williams was also working on a study of the *Divine Comedy* (c. 1308-21): *The Figure of Beatrice* (1943). This work elucidates much of the symbolic significance of the poems of love in the Taliessin-cycle.

† There are some incidental features also taken from Welsh sources – such as the battle at Mount Badon (Nennius) and the fact that Arthur has a son (‘The Coming of Galahad’, *Taliessin*, ll. 19-21), who is unnamed in the cycle, but is called Llacheu in the Welsh tradition. Llacheu never made it into the French, and therefore English, versions of the legend.

‡ The unusual spelling of ‘Taliessin’ (it is usually spelt with only one ‘s’) probably derived from Tennyson’s ‘The Holy Grail’ (1869), in which the bard is mentioned as Arthur’s greatest poet: ‘Taliessin is our fullest throat of song’ (l. 300). Tennyson himself probably took this spelling from William Skene (1868), who presumably altered the spelling of Taliesin when translating *The Book of*
verse narrative, familiar enough to English readers, does not associate Taliesin with King Arthur, save to mention that both figures lived at the same time. More knowledge of Taliesin could have been gleaned from the work of John Rhŷs, J. Gwenogvryn Evans and John Morris Jones – though again none of these editions seem particularly concerned with Taliesin’s folkloric association with Arthur. Most important of all was the Welsh Romantic scholar and poet Iolo Morganwg, who in the eighteenth century recorded many traditions about Taliesin, including some which described him as Arthur’s chief poet. Iolo’s findings bear similarity to Williams’s portrait of the great Celtic bard:

_Taliesin Ben Beirdd a wnaeth Eglwys Llanhenwg yng Nhaerliôn [sic] ar Wysg, er cóf am ei Dâd a elwid Henwg Sant a fu yn Rhyfain gyda Chystenin Fenigaid yn crychu Garmon Sant a Blieddan Sant; ymys Prydain i wellhau Crêd ag adnewyddu Bedyd y llywyn Prydain.

[There is a Welsh proverb about Taliesin Ben Beirdd a wnaeth Eglwys Llanhenwg in Caerleon on Usk, in memory of his father, who was called Henw Sant and who had been in Rome with Constantine the Blessed to send St Garman and St Blieddan to Britain to strengthen the Faith and to renew Baptism in Britain.]

_Ac Urien ai dygodd Lys Arthur ynghaerliôn ar Wysg, lle gaelwyd arn gampau, a gwybodau, a chyferddonau gywllt ag y gwneud ef yn farchog am dafodawn o'r ford gronn. A Thaliesin yn Ben Beirdd y Ford gronn.

[And Urien took him to the court of Arthur in Caerleon on Usk, where he was seen to have feats, knowledge, and charms so good that he was made a knight and arbiter of the round table. And Taliesin was Chief Bard of the Round table.]

_Taliesin_ into English in order to keep the voiced ‘s’ sound of Welsh pronunciation, rather than have English readers saying the unvoiced ‘Taliezin’.

_Taliesin_ scholarship, though obviously a much smaller area, was no less controversial a subject in the first third of the twentieth century than contemporary debates concerning the Arthurian legend. J. Gwenogvryn Evans, who published both a diplomatic edition of poems attributed to Taliesin (1910), as well as English translations (1915), was as vitriolic as (though, alas, less accurate than) Joseph Ritson in the nineteenth century. He pre-empted refutations of his thesis that Taliesin, far from existing in the sixth-century, was a Welsh poet working in the twelfth century by stating that ‘A critic may dispute my rendering, but it does not follow that he is right because he differs from me, or cannot in 7 months see what it has taken me 7 years to “grip”’ (Poems from the Book of Taliesin, xiii, n.10). John Morris Jones, Evans’s most prolific critic (a review article for Y Cymmrodor ran to several hundred pages and required a special issue of its magazine), remarked at the end of his huge refutation of Evans’s thesis that ‘that all this trash should be printed in the best ink on the finest paper […] is sad indeed’ (Taliesin, 1918).
It is likely that Williams knew these traditions from translations made by Iolo’s son – also called Taliesin – in the mid-nineteenth century. These were republished in 1931 (before Williams began the cycle) in *The Shrine of Wisdom*, a journal dedicated to ‘philosophical, religious and mystical works of universal significance’ which may have appealed to Williams.\(^{168}\)

Following its sources loosely, ‘The Calling of Taliessin’ chronicles the bard’s mysterious birth and growing up among the Welsh tribes. Although ‘Druid-sprung’, the pagan Taliessin, already a great poet, hears rumours of Christianity and travels to Byzantium to learn more.\(^{169}\) Leaving Wales, he encounters Merlin and Brisen, who are here the twin children of Nimue, who is not the Tennysonian *femme fatale* but an embodiment of Nature. Merlin is to found Camelot; Brisen, with foreknowledge of the city’s downfall is to prepare Carbonek for the Grail questers; Taliessin is to travel to Byzantium, the heart of the Empire, where he learns of Logres’s historic Christian mission.\(^{170}\) When he returns to British shores, Cradlemas is already dead and Logres is nearly complete.\(^{171}\) Taliessin becomes the ‘king’s poet’ and assumes his traditional role (from the *Hanes Taliesin*) of a mythic bard who reveals mystical visions (‘Taliessin’s Song of the Unicorn’), becomes the country’s historical recorder (‘Taliessin on the Death of Virgil’) and competes with Logres’s other poets (‘Taliessin in the School of the Poets’).

But Taliessin is more than a poet and he supersedes the role assigned to him in Welsh tradition. He takes up Merlin’s role as prophet and politician: he advises on policy (‘On the King’s Coins’), challenges the authority of Arthur’s lesser knights (‘The Ascent of the Spear’), and establishes a social-religious order in opposition to that of the Round Table (‘The Founding of the Company’). The bard also takes a practical role in the formation of Logres. At the battle of Mount Badon he is
appointed chief of Arthur's cavalry and his military intervention proves vital. Not unusually, Taliessin suffers a vision mid-battle: of Virgil, 'barbaric centuries away', struggling for a phrase for his Aeneid ('sought for the word, sought for his thought, / sought for the invention of the City by the phrase'). When, in the vision, Virgil finds the phrase Taliessin moves his troops into battle ('he saw the hexameter spring / and the king's sword swing'). Virgil, the poet of Roman civilization, has imposed order on the chaos of thought and language; Taliessin, the poet of Arthurian and Christian civilization, wins the battle which will bring order to Logres. Like Virgil, Taliessin is the poet of the City (Rome/Camelot); but unlike Virgil, he has a role in its physical foundation, not just idealisation.

Thus, Taliessin conforms to the exalted position Iolo Morganwg claimed the bard possessed in Celtic Britain: 'the rib-cage of the body politic, remembrancers, a collective memory honed for historical action.' Of more social significance than the English poet, the Celtic bard was instrumental to the community, embodying – in English terms – Shelley's dictum that 'poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' In the figure of Taliessin, Williams combined the Republican zeal of Iolo with the radical romanticism of Shelley's poet, but in doing so he altered their ideological positions into a reactionary Catholic ideal: transforming 'the bard of liberty' into a poet-governor, a mythic version of Eliot's Christian intellectuals who would order Europe into sound, obedient, disciplined Church-centric states. Taliessin is, in short, a heroic embodiment of interwar Anglo-Catholic intellectuals, like Eliot and Williams, inflated to heroic proportions. The two volumes of this panacea for all of Europe were published either side of the bloodiest conflict in world history.
Conclusion

The writers discussed in this chapter all understood the Arthurian story as essential to the identity of the British people. For each, the Matter of Britain was a myth of unity, not of ethnic faction, as it had been in the work of other authors, whether English, Scottish, Irish, Welsh or Cornish. This injection of Anglo-Celticism – largely brought about by scholars such as Weston, Loomis and Rhŷs – rejuvenated the Arthurian story at a time when English writers such as Evelyn Waugh were satirising it as a Victorian anachronism. Yet, despite the fact that this newly-formed, inclusive Britishness was Arthurian literature’s dominant trend from the mid 1920s to the early 1940s, the Anglo-Celtic Arthur did not produce a paradigmatic account of the legend.

Partly this was a result of the form that the Anglo-Celtic Arthur took in these years. Traditionally, large-scale Arthurian works had been narrative accounts, whether in prose or poetry; yet those of Ernest Rhys and Charles Williams were essentially lyrical, while David Jones’s interest in the legend was largely confined to a series of allusions placed amid his highly complex modernist writing. Collectively, their work presented no narrative frame in which other writers could produce sub-paradigmatic work. Only John Masefield’s *Midsummer Night* possessed such a structure. Yet Masefield was in many ways too old-fashioned a poet to inspire younger writers. Frequently describing himself as a Victorian born into an unsuitably modern world, his brand of narrative verse was hardly a popular medium after the Great War. Far from being recognised as an innovator of a new type of Arthurian literature, Masefield was an example of the old order, whom more stylistically radical writers were reacting against.

Yet if Masefield seemed too out of date for contemporary writers to imitate, Rhys, Jones and Williams were antiquated in other ways. Rhys, simply, belonged to
another era; his poetry of the pre-war school of the Celtic Twilight had little, if any, attraction for modern writers. In contrast, the early Welsh literature which captivated the modernist David Jones was unknown to most of his readers, who had little opportunity to respond to his ingenious manipulation of myths and texts. While, for instance, it required only an educated reader to understand T.S. Eliot's fascination with Dante, or Joyce's preoccupation with the *Odyssey*, it required a Celtic scholar to penetrate Jones's use of *Y Gododdin* - hardly a text that was discussed in polite English literary circles. The work of T.S. Eliot also stands in contrast to that of Charles Williams. While both poets based their later work on their Christian, Anglo-Catholic beliefs, Eliot's *The Four Quartets* appealed to many readers, whereas few general readers have found sympathy with the Taliessin-cycle's mixture of patriarchy, extreme conservatism and ascetic religiosity.*

But Jones and Williams were unlikely to inspire large numbers of imitators for other reasons. Like so much Grail literature produced after the Great War, Jones's and Williams's Arthurian writings are characterised by their difficulty - a difficulty born of their awkward ideological positions. Along with Rhys and Masefield, they had inherited a Tennysonian tradition which was Anglocentric, bourgeois, imperial and largely humanist. All four writers were desperate to make the Matter of Britain anew - to fit it for a new age. Because of reasons of mixed national allegiances, class, history and religion, they rejected the earlier narrative of Anglo-imperialism (or, in a Welsh context, Celtic resistance) in favour of an inclusive Britishness, which was forged out of an Anglo-Celtic literary tradition which they largely invented (Taliessin

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* Even J.R.R. Tolkien, a fellow Inkling and conservative Christian, declared himself to be 'wholly unsympathetic to Williams's mind.' He claimed to find his work 'alien, and sometimes very distasteful, occasionally ridiculous.' While he himself remained 'entirely unmoved', he stated that C.S. Lewis 'was bowled over.' But Lewis, Tolkien wrote, 'was a very impressionable man'. Indeed, Lewis was perhaps Williams's only literary successor, his Merlin-based science-fiction novel, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), was clearly indebted to the mythological system of the Taliessin-cycle. This novel is briefly discussed in the following chapter. See Tolkien, *Letters*, 361-2.
and Shakespeare; John Ball and the *Mabinogion*). Whereas Rhys and Masefield employed popular poetic forms (lyric and ballad) to articulate their Anglo-Celtic identities, Jones and Williams moved into more difficult forms of writing. Their texts, like their politics and self-identities, were necessarily complex and could not be made to fit into the traditional pattern of English or Welsh literary production. Neither, as this chapter has shown, could they be placed in that most nebulous and uneasy of rubrics, ‘British’.

In contrast, the earlier manifestations of the Arthurian legend in England have almost always, despite consistently serving the ideological interests of the socio-economic elite, been popular and populist. This partly explains, along with political considerations, why medieval England seems never to have adopted Chrétien’s sophisticated romances and why its translations from the French have always been simplifications of their sources. The complexity of Jones’s and Williams’s writings simply does not fit into the larger English Arthurian tradition.

The one major Arthurian text produced in the interwar period which certainly did fall into this tradition was T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King*. Notably, not only was White’s Arthuriad partly written for children, it was also produced (unlike the work of Rhys, Masefield, Jones and Williams) as a series of novels - a medium that in the twentieth century has proved far more popular than narrative verse and is certainly a much more populist form of literature than modernist poetry. Indeed, White’s work has proved immensely popular among readers and is one of the most influential (yet still not paradigmatic) accounts of the legend produced in the last century. It has also largely eclipsed the work of the Anglo-Celtic writers in most contemporary scholars’ accounts of the modern Arthurian literature. Yet, written across the same period as Williams’s Taliessin-cycle, White’s work, while greatly
differing in form and style, demonstrates many characteristics of the Anglo-Welsh
trend in Arthurian literary production in the interwar period. It was only when the
series of novels was revised in 1958 did it become another Anglocentric version of the
Matter of Britain. It is this work which forms the basis for the conclusion to this
study.
Chapter Six

‘The faith that made us rulers’: T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King* and the post-imperial Arthur

T.H. White was little interested in the transformation of the Arthurian story from a nineteenth-century English epic into a twentieth-century Anglo-Celtic product. He described medieval Welsh accounts of Arthur (as well as the French romances) as ‘tedious’, seems to have paid little attention to twentieth-century advances in scholarship (particularly the Celticists) and his own work is almost wholly uninfluenced by contemporary Arthurian writers.¹ His own retelling of the Arthurian legend – which became known as *The Once and Future King* – was an attempt to re-Anglicise the legend, to shed it of its recently-acquired Celtic elements. He relied heavily on Malory, whom he read with a distinctly nineteenth-century understanding, being more familiar with Edward Strachey than Eugène Vinaver; yet in his psychological realism and character-driven narrative technique he produced a firmly twentieth-century Arthurian novel – indeed it was one of the first Arthurian novels produced in Britain. The resulting work is, suitably for a book which is filled with Bolsheviks, anarchists and fascists, port-drinking pipe-smoking Etonians and peasants
who run around 'like red Indians', one of the most anachronistic retellings of the Arthurian story made in the twentieth century. From a distance it reads like the Morte Darthur rewritten by P.G. Wodehouse; on closer inspection it appears to be the work of a self-consciously nostalgic Tory, whose use of the Arthurian legend was, at turns, wildly inventive, utterly flawed, and both respectful and irreverent. It also proved to be the most popular version of the Matter of Britain written over the last hundred years.

‘This is an anachronism [...] a beastly anachronism’: T.H. White’s The Once and Future King and the Arthurian tradition

T.H. White was the child of a colonial family. He was born in Bombay in 1906, the son of a District Superintendent in the Indian police force; his mother was the daughter of an Indian Circuit Judge. His relationship with his parents – who were alcoholic, hysterical and over-possessive – was traumatic and left White psychologically damaged. Aged five he was sent ‘home’ to England, to live with his maternal grandparents, enjoying a happy existence for some years. At Cheltenham College he was enrolled in the military side, seemingly destined to enter either the army or some form of colonial administration. But he did not and instead went up to Cambridge in 1925, taking ‘a tearing First Class with Distinction’ in English Literature. In this he was unlike the other major writers of Arthurian literature of this period – Ernest Rhys, John Masefield, David Jones and Charles Williams – whose learning was largely autodidactic. On leaving university he took up several teaching jobs, including one at the progressive public school at Stowe, where he became – while very young – head of English. He left the school in 1935 in order to dedicate his time to writing (he was already the author of numerous novels, poems and books on
country sports).³ Two years later he began the first volume of what would eventually become The Once and Future King.

White wrote extraordinarily quickly, completing the five volumes of his Arthuriad in less than five years.⁴ Nonetheless the publishing history of his Arthuriad is complex. The first volume, The Sword in the Stone, was published in 1938 while White was living in a cottage near Stowe School.⁴ The rest of the sequence was written in Ireland, where White lived throughout the Second World War. The Witch in the Wood was published in 1939;⁵ The Ill-Made Knight the year after.⁶ He then began work on The Candle in the Wind, which was based on a play he had written in 1938, but which had been rejected by Noel Coward.⁷ This and the final novel in the sequence, The Book of Merlyn, were sent to his London publisher, Collins, in November 1941. Neither was published. White had wanted the five books to appear in one volume, but this was hardly practical in terms of wartime paper shortages. Besides, The Book of Merlyn held little appeal for Collins as it was more of an inexpert political treatise on the causes of war than a traditional novel.⁸ And so, for seventeen years White’s Arthuriad remained complete, but unpublished in its whole form. It was not until 1958 that The Once and Future King appeared.⁸ But it was released as a tetralogy – The Book of Merlyn was omitted and the remaining text much revised: several key scenes from the Merlyn were introduced into the first volume; and The Witch in the Wood, now renamed The Queen of Air and Darkness,

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³ He once claimed to have written a novel, Darkness at Pemberley (1932), in three weeks (Brewer, T.H. White, 6).
⁴ White replied to Collins’s refusal to print the entire The Once and Future King in a letter written in late 1941: ‘I do not fully understand the paper shortage. If you had been intending to publish, say, ten books besides, could you not make up the paper shortage by publishing only nine others? You publish too much rubbish anyway’ (Warner, T.H. White, 187).
was similarly overhauled and shortened. It was not until 1977 (thirteen years after White’s death) that *Merlyn* appeared – White having never revised it.*9

The first book in the sequence, *The Sword in the Stone*, begins with the young Arthur, known as Wart, and his foster-brother, Kay, growing up in the castle of the Forest Sauvage under the guardianship of Sir Ector and the tutorship of Merlyn. The former is a benevolent patriarch of a feudal society who provides the foundling Wart with a happy home, while Merlyn directs the young Arthur to a series of adventures: there are encounters with a witch, a giant and Robin Hood (known here as Robin Wood), as well as several episodes where Wart is transformed into various animals: a perch, hawk, snake and badger (several of these scenes, as discussed in the next section, were omitted in the 1958 edition, being replaced with material from *Merlyn*). Seven years pass in this blissful state until it is announced that the king, Uther Pendragon, has died. Following the traditional sword-in-the-stone motif, Wart – now renamed Arthur – is elevated from squire to the King of England. He is told that Uther was his father, though Merlyn does not inform Arthur that his mother is Igraine, which precipitates the incestuous disaster in the following novel.

The next volume, *The Witch in the Wood*, is concerned with the less-pleasant adolescence of Gawaine and his brothers, the sons of King Lot and Queen Morgause of Orkney. The novel also follows the Arthur’s fortunes in his initial wars against the Gaels, who rebel against his authority. Merlyn remains Arthur’s tutor and political advisor, though his role diminishes in the course of the novel, as Arthur formulates his own idea on how to harness Might to the service of Right through the foundation of the Order of the Round Table. The novel ends after the battle of Bedegraine, where

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* In 1996 another edition of *The Once and Future King* appeared which claimed to be the ‘complete edition’. This contained the 1958 text of *The Once and Future King* followed by *The Book of Merlyn*. However, the latter is not part of this sequence. Rather, *The Book of Merlyn* represents White’s first attempt at completing his Arthuriad, whereas the 1958 text (*The Once and Future King* proper) is complete in its own right – and therefore without the *Merlyn*. 
Arthur breaks the resistance of the eleven British kings. On the night of his victory celebrations, a ‘black-haired, blue-eyed beauty’, many years older than the king, comes to Arthur’s room:

Perhaps it was because Arthur was always a simple fellow, who took people at their own valuation easily. Perhaps it was because he had never known a mother of his own, so that the role of mother love, as she stood with her children behind her, took him between wind and water.10

Whatever the cause, Arthur begets Mordred upon Morgause, his half-sister. And though he is ignorant of their familial tie, ‘it seems, in tragedy, that innocence is not enough.’11

The next volume, *The Ill-Made Knight*, begins with another set of *enfances* – those of Lancelot. Whereas Arthur’s had been idyllic and adventurous, those of the Orkneys traumatic and violent, Lancelot’s education is disciplined and relentless as he trains to become the greatest knight in the world, ‘a sort of Bradman, top of the batting averages.’12 Most of the narrative which follows is a redaction of Malory: Lancelot’s coming to Camelot, his early quests, his affair with Guenever, the begetting of Galahad and his subsequent madness, as well as the later tales of the poisoned apple, the knight of the cart and the healing of Sir Urre [sic]. Time passes more quickly in this novel: by the end Lancelot and Arthur are white-haired and many of the original knights are dead, their places filled by younger men ‘for whom Arthur was not the crusader of a future day, but the accepted conqueror of a past one.’13

Needing to reinvigorate the Round Table, Arthur and Lancelot together devise the Quest for the Holy Grail,* which is recounted in a series of flashbacks as the knights return to Camelot. But the Grail is ‘a short-lived beauty’ and offers little redemption

*The Grail Quest as Arthur’s and Lancelot’s desire is wholly of White’s invention.*
as Camelot slides – like Tennyson’s \textit{Idylls} – into cynicism: ‘it had the fruits of civilization, \textit{savoir-livre}, gossip, fashion, malice and the broad mind of scandal.’\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{The Candle in the Wind} is the conclusion to the 1958 \textit{Once and Future King} (it had not been previously published). It opens with Mordred plotting the destruction of Arthur’s England, the king now ‘a lonely old gentleman who had worn his crown for half a lifetime in the teeth of fate.’\textsuperscript{15} Early in the novel Mordred discovers the affair between Lancelot and Guenever and the novel moves quickly to its conclusion, following Malory closely. The novel ends with Arthur, on the eve of the battle of Camlan, ‘[l]ooking back on his life and despairing.’\textsuperscript{16} But then a page enters – a young Tom Malory of Newbold Revel. The king commands him to record the greatness of the Round Table and its mission to transform Might into the vessel of Right. And so the text ends with Arthur, now prepared for the destruction of Camlan, drawing himself up ‘to meet the future with a peaceful heart.’\textsuperscript{17}

This then is the conclusion to \textit{The Once of the Future King}. Yet White’s original attempt to conclude his Arthuriad, \textit{The Book of Merlyn}, is an intriguing text which takes Arthur away from the field of Camlan and back to Merlyn (who had disappeared with Nimuë early in the third volume) and the animals of \textit{The Sword in the Stone}. Together the assembly try to find an antidote to war.\textsuperscript{18} White also recounts the battle of Camlan and briefly charts the death of Lancelot and Guenever. The book ends with a call to pray for both ‘Thomas Malory, Knight, and his humble disciple, who now voluntarily lays aside his books to fight for his kind.’\textsuperscript{19} But, as a matter of fact, the ‘humble disciple’ never did enlist and remained in Ireland until the war’s conclusion.

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White’s Arthuriad – whether in its original or revised form – was very different from contemporary retellings of the legend. It is a remarkably personal version of the story: White’s call for readers to pray for his soul (he was agnostic) is typical of the book’s self-contradictoriness as a whole. Wart’s carefree yet loving childhood is largely a consolation for his own traumatic youth, while Merlyn represents ‘an ideal old age’. Morgause in *The Witch in the Wood* was largely based on his own mother (‘a poor old witch by now’, he wrote in a letter to David Garnett). And the text contains several references to the painful experience of being a son to an unloving mother, as well as a revenge fantasy, wherein the queen is murdered by her jealous son, Agravaine, when he discovers her, aged seventy, in bed with Sir Lamorak. Such personal elements are discernable throughout the text: the alcoholism of the ageing knights in *The Candle in the Wind*; Arthur’s constant need for love, as well as his close attachment to animals, especially the goose, Lyó-lyok (originally in *The Book of Merlyn*), for whom he would abandon his kingdom.

Another major contrast between White’s Arthuriad and other contemporary retellings lies in the speed with which it was written (less than five years), while Ernest Rhys, John Masefield, David Jones and Charles Williams had spent most of their careers attempting to refit the Arthurian story into the twentieth century.†

* Apart from the above-quoted cause of Arthur’s incestuous liaison with Morgause (‘[p]erhaps it was because he had never known a mother of his own’, 334), *The Once and Future King* makes several other references to child-parental relationships. In one, White comments on the unrequited love for the mother of Gawaine and his brothers: ‘Indeed, they did love her. Perhaps we all give the best of our heart uncritically – to those who hardly think about us in return.’ (232) In another passage on the young Lancelot, the author remarks: ‘Under the grotesque, magnificent shell [...] there was shame and self-loathing which had been planted there when he was tiny, by something which it is now too late to trace. It is so fatally easy to make young children believe that they are horrible’ (398). There is also the description of Morgause’s beating of her children in *The Witch in the Wood* (but not included in *TOFK*): ‘That evening Queen Morgause beat all four of her sons with the leg of a stool. She stripped them naked and hit at them indiscriminately, almost frothing at the mouth. [...] It was the grinding of her teeth which frightened Agravaine more than anything else’ (185).

† The speed with which White’s tales were written also contrasts with earlier retellings. Tennyson wrote Arthurian verse long before ‘The Lady of Shalott’ was published in 1832. In 1891, a year before his death, he was still adding final lines to the *Idylls* (Ricks, 671). Similarly, although we know little about the production of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, if we accept 1450 as the date of composition for ‘The
most obvious reason for White’s alacrity was his decision to compose in prose, rather than poetry, which was still the chief medium of the Arthurian legend at the time White wrote. As is discussed later, White’s influence proved decisive on post-war literary production.

The prose medium allowed White to bring a novelist’s approach to the Arthurian legend. One of White’s greatest achievements was to turn the traditional Arthurian figures into more psychologically rounded characters. Apart from Arthur and Merlyn, White’s redrawing of Lancelot was particularly influential on later writers. As he did for many of his characters, White made extensive notes on Lancelot in his journal: he was to be ugly, humble, self-critical, fastidious, moral and ‘probably sadistic or he would not have taken such frightful care to be gentle’. Once again, it was a portrait that owed a lot to White’s own personality, as did his postulation that Lancelot might be bisexual:

Can a person be ambi-sexual – bisexual or whatever? His treatment of young boys like Gareth and Cote Male Tale is very tender and his feeling for Arthur profound. Yet I do not want to write a ‘modern’ novel about him. I could only mention this trait, if it is a trait, in the most oblique way.

White made Lancelot’s ‘trait’ apparent at the opening of *The Ill-Made Knight*:

The boy thought that there was something wrong with him. All through his life – even when he was a great man with the world at his feet – he was to feel this gap: something at the bottom of his heart of which he was aware, and ashamed, but which he did not understand. There is no need for us to try to understand it. We do not have to dabble in a place which he preferred to keep secret.

*Weddynge of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnelle*, then Malory, whom the text parodies, must already have achieved fame as an Arthurian writer around twenty years before the *Morte* was completed (1469-70), thus indicating a rough temporal frame for the text’s production (See Introduction, n. 44 for details.). *White seems to have been careful to have configured Lancelot’s homosexuality within a typically Victorian frame of ‘hero-worship’, rather than homoeroticism. Thus White writes that Lancelot ‘was in love with his hero’; ‘in love with Arthur’, ‘with another man’s ideas’; ‘he carried with him in his heart to France the picture of that bright Northern King, at supper, flushed and glorious from his wars’ (*TOFK*, 329-47). And, in contrast with his idealised love for the king, when Lancelot falls in love with
Many of the best Arthurian novelists writing after the Second World War have followed White's lead. Lancelot in Rosemary Sutcliff's trilogy of retellings from Malory, *King Arthur Stories* (1979-81), is repeatedly described as humble and ugly.\textsuperscript{26} Bedwyr in Henry Treece's *The Great Captains* (1953) shows signs of homoerotic jealousy over Arthur's friendship with Mordred.\textsuperscript{27} And Marion Zimmer Bradley, in her *Mists of Avalon* (1982), while rejecting the idea of an ugly Lancelot, reverses the sexual plotting of White's *Ill-Made Knight* and has Lancelot discover his desire for Arthur occur after he sleeps with both his lover, Guinevere, and king.\textsuperscript{28}

Women characters were more problematic. Morgause, based on White's mother, haunted the writing of *The Witch in the Wood*. She is crudely presented throughout the 1939 edition, as in the scene where she bathes in a 'consommé of snails' blood, [...] dead worms, [...] decayed prawns, offal [...] and other ingredients without which no woman can truly be beautiful.'\textsuperscript{29} In the 1958 edition, Morgause is a less central character, which perhaps improves the book, though certainly reduces the 'witch' to a more abstract sinister presence. In contrast, the Guenever of *The Ill-Made Knight* and *The Candle in the Wind* is a much more successful creation, largely thanks to the efforts of Ray Garnett, David Garnett's wife (who is something of a model for Guenever).\textsuperscript{30}

Though it has become commonplace to explore Tennyson's *Idylls* – particularly Arthur's speech to his queen in 'Guinevere' – in terms of patriarchy and misogyny, it ought to be noted that the interwar period was possibly worse for its representations of the women of the legend. Usually male writers simply chose to ignore them: rarely are they afforded speaking parts in Williams's Taliessin-cycle,

Guenever, White emphasises that he does so because the queen is 'a real person', not just some representative of a moral standard (*TOFK*, 360).
while Jones’s *In Parenthesis* is entirely devoid of female presence and Masefield’s *Midsummer Night* is so focussed on warfare and politics that it leaves little room for the story’s women. In his focalising on the figure of Guenever, White began to draw attention to the neglected female characters of the legend, and rescued the queen from her position as reviled and sinful adulterer in the Tennysonian paradigm. White perceived Guenever’s ‘central tragedy’ as her childlessness: Arthur and Lancelot, her husband and her lover, both father illegitimate children, but the queen remains ‘an empty vessel, a shore without sea.’ In her childlessness White found a reason why she remained so faithful to her ‘double love’: ‘perhaps she loved Arthur as a father, and Lancelot because of the son she could not have.’ Likewise, *The Ill-Made Knight*, like Martha Kinross’s earlier drama *Tristram and Isoult* (1913), sought to locate Guenever’s role in the destruction of the Round Table as a result of her inability to participate in the legend’s larger narrative of ‘noble achievement[s]’ and ‘feats of arms’:

Guenever could not search for the Grail. She could not vanish into the English forest for a year’s adventure with the spear. It was her part to sit at home, though passionate, though real and hungry in her fierce and tender heart. [...] For her, unless she felt like a little spinning or embroidery, there was no occupation – except Lancelot.

White’s Morgause and Guenever were written through and in spite of the author’s undoubted gynophobia (‘with fear’, he later wrote), but they do make an attempt – however unsubtly and awkwardly – to expand the role of women in the twentieth

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*Cf. Tennyson, ‘Guinevere’ (ll. 419-23):*

Liest there so low, the child of one
I honour’d, happy, dead before thy shame?
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*. 

century’s retellings of the myth. It would prove to be a key theme in the post-war literature.

The novel form was also a medium much better suited than poetry to demonstrate the author’s remarkable, if miscellaneous, knowledge of medieval life. The novels are filled with details of hawking, jousting, armour, archery, hunting and architecture – often garnered through the practical experience of a man who largely eschewed twentieth-century life. Likewise, White’s writing is peppered with technical terms, such as ‘pel-quintain’ (a stake used for tilting at with a lance), ‘manchets’ (a small loaf of bread), ‘pennoncels’ (long triangular flags, usually attached to the tip of a lance) and ‘misericordes’ (dagger). But White’s Arthuriad is far from a historical novel, despite its historical details. It is a deliberately anachronistic work, in which manchets and pennoncels sit alongside ahistorical references to newspapers like the *Humberland Newsman* and the *Morning Post*. Sometimes White explains these anachronisms in brief asides, others are legitimised by the fact that Merlyn is living backwards in time, and so brings into the ‘twelfth century, or whenever it was’, many elements of later history.

Yet White’s Arthuriad is itself a cultural anachronism, in many ways the last of the nineteenth-century retellings of Arthur, for all of its contemporary references. Although his text mentions several contemporary scholars – including Jessie Weston and Alfred Nutt – White’s work consummately ignores almost every literary and scholarly development in the Arthurian legend produced since Tennyson completed his *Idylls*. Thus, while he refers to ‘Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites’, ‘the Romantics’ and Aubrey Beardsley – as well as earlier writers, such as Roger Ascham,

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* An example of this occurs at the start of the novel when Sir Ector and Sir Grummore discuss the possibility of sending Wart and Kay to Eton, while drinking port: ‘It was not really Eton that he mentioned, for the College of Blessed Mary was not founded until 1440, but it was a place of the same sort. Also they were drinking Metheglyn, not Port, but by mentioning the modern wine it is easier to give you the feel’ (*TOFK*, 4).
Geoffrey of Monmouth, Giraldus Cambrensis ('that delightful ass') and Layamon—White makes not one reference to a modern creative writer, save several allusions to himself in the form of 'poor old White'. There is, for instance, no mention of a Westonian Waste Land and the Grail is dealt with briefly and without especial religious or mystical significance: his edition of Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* is strewn with facetious, faintly misogynistic comments such as 'you are a school marm and nought else'; and elsewhere he described the Grail as a 'wretched pot'. Likewise, his Arthuriad is hardly concerned with matters of mythic origins, which had been a dominant concern of Arthurian scholarship since John Rhys published his *Arthurian Studies* in 1891. It pays no heed to Arthur's historical position, which would be one of the dominant themes in post-war literature (and was already the subject of Collingwood's *Roman Britain* of 1936). And Celtic sources, favoured by Rhys, Masefield, Jones and Williams, as well as scholars such as Nutt, Brown and Loomis, are entirely eschewed in favour of Malory and the author's own imagination.

Even the fact that White originally saw the Arthurian story as a tragedy—'a regular greek [sic] doom, comparable to that of Orestes'; 'the Aristolelian and comprehensive tragedy, of sin coming home to roost'—was perhaps based on the fact that he was reading a nineteenth-century edition of the *Morte*—that of Edward Strachey (1868/1891). In his long and detailed introduction Strachey claimed that the *Morte* possessed 'epic unity and harmony, “a beginning middle and an end”' centred on Arthur's doom. Like many of Malory’s nineteenth-century commentators, Strachey saw the *Morte* as England’s national epic. It was these sentiments that White was expressing in his unpublished introduction to the 1958 *Once and Future King*:

> The roots of the Arthurian legend are buried among confused narrative ballads and prose romances in half the European languages, including French, German and Welsh. These tedious roots, which are uniformly contradictory about
almost all the relative facts, were synthesised by the amiable and immortal Sir Thomas Malory into a consistent whole.\textsuperscript{45}

By the time White was writing, no serious Malorian scholar was contemplating Malory as such a writer, or the \textit{Morte Darthur} as an epic tragedy. But White knew nothing of, or cared little for, such advancements – which again separates him from writers like Masefield, Jones and Williams. Perhaps this enforced ignorance was the result of his studying Malory at Cambridge\textsuperscript{*} – certainly his first-class honours had left White with a very high opinion of his abilities as a scholar.\textsuperscript{46} Whatever the cause, White possessed a distinctly nineteenth-century view of the Arthurian story.

It was White’s lack of appreciation for contemporary Arthurian writing that gave him such great freedom when he came to write his own epic. Although the inspiration for the entire sequence was Malory, White’s \textit{enfances} of Arthur were written without any earlier authority. \textit{The Witch in the Wood} is also largely free from Arthurian influence – the book shows no sign that White was familiar with the \textit{enfances} of Gawain, even though they were available at this time.\textsuperscript{47} Nor does \textit{The Ill-Made Knight} show awareness of Lancelot’s upbringing as told in ‘Le Livre de Lancelot du Lac’ (edited by Sommer in 1910 and translated by Lucy Allen Paton in 1929).\textsuperscript{48} Rather, White’s greatest influence when beginning his Arthuriad was Masefield’s tangentially Arthurian \textit{The Midnight Folk} (1927), as he acknowledged in correspondence.\textsuperscript{49} And, like Masefield’s children’s classic, White’s Arthuriad is filled with songs, pastiches, interludes and experimentation – not since Thomas Love

\textsuperscript{*}Malory’s \textit{Morte Darthur} was not highly thought of at that university at Cambridge at this time (Brewer, \textit{T.H. White’s ‘The Once and Future King}, 4). Indeed, the university does not seem to have produced a notable Arthurian scholar throughout the interwar period.
Peacock's *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829) had the Arthurian story been treated so irreverently.*

This greater freedom with regard to literary tradition and convention also enabled White to devise an imaginative temporal time frame for his novel — its narrative taking place, not in the Dark Ages of later historical fiction, but over the entire English Middle Ages, with the Arthurian story overlaid upon real historical events. Uther Pendragon's reign begins in 1066 and ends in 1216; Arthur's reign lasting from 1216 until 'the War of the Roses'. ⁵⁰ Thus Uther is temporally associated with the Norman Conquest, his death with the death of another 'bad monarch', King John. Arthur finds a suitable historical correlative with John's nine-year-old son, Henry III; and his reign assumes the historical events of Edward I and Edward III when he conquers the eleven Celtic kings at the battle of Bedegraine in *The Witch in the Wood*. His campaign against Rome roughly corresponds to the Hundred Years War with France (as Malory's Arthur's campaign against Rome had mirrored that of Henry V's against Charles VI). And Mordred, 'the cold wisp of a man' who usurps the crown and destroys the round Table, is equivalent to Richard III, another of history's 'villains'. ¹⁵¹ Within this framework 'real' history becomes relegated to the position of literature or legend: the text frequently refers to the 'stories of the

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* White's indebtedness to Tennyson ought also to be noted. The *Idylls* seem to be the most obvious source for the growth of cynicism which overtakes Arthur's court in *The Once and Future King* (516 especially). White's depiction of Arthur's idea of chivalry taking root in his knights ('Something of the young man's vision had penetrated to his captains and his soldiers. Something of the new ideal of the Round Table which was to be born in pain, something about doing a hateful and dangerous action for the sake of decency' — 319) may also have been germinated through White's reading of the *Idylls*, wherein each of the knights is 'stamp'd with the image of the King' ('The Holy Grail, I. 27), and in which each knight possesses 'a momentary likeness of the King' ('The Coming of Arthur', ll. 465-6). Also, White's decision to make Gawaine and his brothers particularly attached to their mother, Morgause, may also have found its origins in the Tennyson's 'Gareth and Lynette', especially ll. 1-177.

¹ Notably White's chronology is a literary one: Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) had established the reign of King Richard and King John as being marred by Norman / Saxon struggles; Richard III's infamy is largely the product of Tudor propaganda and Shakespeare's derivative play.
mythological families such as the Plantagenets, Capets and so forth', or to
‘[l]egendary kings like John’ and the ‘so-called Henry IV’.52

This temporal duality – at once English medieval and mythically Arthurian – allowed White to present Arthur as a fully English king. Instead of having to address questions of historical realism, White was able to give full reign to his whimsy; without having to deal with a Celtic chieftain, White was able to produce what is often an anti-Celtic, pro-Empire text from the standpoint of a colonial Arthur. This is, of course, entirely in opposition to almost every narrative and ideological development the Arthurian legend had undergone in the twentieth century: the Welsh romanticism of T. Gwynn Jones, the Cornish ethno-nationalism of Henry Jenner and others, as well as the Anglo-Celtic Arthuriads of Rhys, Masefield and Jones, who sought in the story of Arthur a model of British cohesiveness, not of English dominance. This feature of White’s Once and Future King, along with its larger political position, is discussed in the next section.

‘I never could stand these nationalists’: the politics of White’s Arthuriad

The 1958 edition of The Once and Future King is a far more politicised retelling of the Arthurian legend than that which White published in three volumes in the late 1930s and 40s. It begins with Arthur learning how to be a good king under the tutelage of Merlyn, moves on to show his struggles against rebel feudal lords, before proceeding towards its tragic denouement, his kingdom declining into cynicism and self-destruction. Throughout the novel Arthur’s attempts to establish a just rule are thwarted by those who resist his authority and refuse to be bound to his system of Right, rather than Might. Always chief of these threats is the Celt – first in the form of King Lot and Queen Morgause of Orkney, then Gawaine and his brothers, and finally
Mordred who usurps the crown and draws the country into cataclysmic war.

Everywhere in the 1958 edition, White challenges and dismisses the causes and complaints of the Gaels concerning the English King Arthur; everywhere Arthur's authority is established and reaffirmed.

But it was not always so. When the original three volumes were first published the Celt was very far from the enemy and the political content of the novels was much less apparent. It was only after the third volume — *The Ill-Made Knight* — was published that White began to reconstruct his Arthuriad as a political epic. Up until then White had considered the story of Arthur to be essentially tragic, its eventual disasters originating with Uther's rape of Igraine and Arthur's later incestuous begetting of Mordred upon his half-sister, Morgause. Yet, in the midst of composing the fourth volume, he wrote to his former Cambridge tutor, L.J. Potts, claiming to have discovered that the 'central theme of the *Morte d'Arthur* is to find an antidote to War.' It was only at this point that White's Arthuriad became explicitly concerned with politics and the contemporary war in Europe.

The form of the resulting work, *The Book of Merlyn*, is a Socratic dialogue held between Merlyn and the animal-educators of *The Sword in the Stone*. Here, Arthur is subjected to a long discussion on the politics of animals, garnered from White's intimate, but inexpert, study of natural history. Merlyn states that certain types of ants are 'communists or fascists' (they are indistinguishable in this text); geese are 'anarchists'; squirrels are essentially bourgeois 'bank-balance-holders'; and most animals, in White's opinion (almost always articulated through Merlyn), believe in 'individual property'. Arthur is then given two more lessons of the sort he received as a child, but this time their educational purpose is distinctly political. From the totalitarian society of the ants, with their proto-1984 slogans of 'EVERYTHING
NOT FORBIDDEN IS COMPULSORY’, Arthur learns the value of liberty. From the pacific geese he learns that nationalism is unheard of in the natural world – that geese, because they fly, have no respect for political division. Neither do they have any concept of ‘communal possessions’. Hence, in White’s thinking, they are a species of individualists and they have no need of war – indeed, they cannot even conceive of it.

Like that of the goose, man’s natural state, claims Merlyn, is that of individualism. This is because ‘Capitalism’ is ‘man’s speciality’ in the same way to ‘eat the top of trees’ is the giraffe’s. Taking the politics of the geese as evidence, Merlyn states that individual ownership of property is the key to pacific existence. He argues that war ‘is due to communal property, the very thing which is advocated by nearly all the demagogues who peddle what they call a New Order.’ The nation state, he claims, is the prime cause of war. It ‘is nationalism, the claims of small communities to parts of the indifferent earth as communal property, which is the curse of man.’ He wants to abolish ‘tariff barriers, passports and immigration laws’ in order to convert mankind into ‘a federation of individuals’. Yet, although Merlyn confesses himself to be ‘a staunch conservative’ and a defender of the ‘despised Victorian capitalist’, his views seem very far from traditional conservative thinking. For all his talk of private property and capital, Merlyn’s (and White’s) politics of the individual are firmly in the tradition of British liberal-socialism. Even Merlyn rescinds his earlier declaration of himself as a capitalist to admit that he, ‘like any other sensible person’, is ‘an anarchist’.

*They are not entirely dissimilar from the mythic-nature anarchism of John Cowper Powys’s later socialist novels, especially his historical Arthurian novel, *Porius* (1951). The ideas of William Morris, John Ruskin, Aldous Huxley and, above all, Edward Carpenter seem prevalent through much of White’s work (see below).
At this point *The Book of Merlyn* is positioned within a William Godwin-like mistrust of all forms of government and collective institutions – the nation state more than any other. But this individualist-anarchism is out of place in an Arthurian epic which has been so directly concerned with matters of kingship, English history and power. The entire text seems to be constructed upon the essential contradiction between White’s individualist-anarchist political beliefs and the conservative ideology of his upper-middle class background that he was unable to escape. This contradiction had been apparent even in the much less political *Sword in the Stone*, as in the novel’s description of Sir Ector’s estate:

> Everybody was happy. The Saxons were slaves to their Norman masters if you chose to look at it that way – but, if you chose to look at it another, they were the same farm labourers who get along on too few shillings a week today. [...] They were healthy, free of an air with no factory smoke in it, and, which was most of all to them, their heart’s interest was bound up with their skill in labour. They knew that Sir Ector loved and was proud of them.63

This utopia is filled with Morrisian and Ruskinian ideas of the value of labour, combined with the ‘back to the land’ ethic of the anarchist Edward Carpenter, whose primitive commune Milthorpe, Derbyshire, proved highly influential on later socialists who would reject the effects of nineteenth-century industrialisation (and whose writing may have intrigued White, who similarly abandoned twentieth-century technology in favour of what he called a ‘feral state’). However, the influence of Morris, Ruskin and Carpenter is overlaid with White’s desire to perceive pre-industrial society as governed by paternalistic authority. Sir Ector loves and is ‘proud’ of his serfs, he ‘value[s]’ them more than his ‘cattle’, and everywhere demonstrates his benevolent patriarchy, making ‘presents’ of ‘milk and eggs’, ‘home-brewed beer’ and ‘free’ cottages, as well as providing feasts and overseeing the Boxing Day Hunt, all of which function as occasions of social harmony.64 In *The Sword in the Stone*, the
contradictions between freedom and paternal authority are less important as they are the result of White's desire to provide Wart with a happy, carefree environment, but one provided by a loving parent-protector. Yet in the more abstract political discussions of *The Book of Merlyn*, the contradictions of White's anarchist-conservative position cannot be so easily assuaged.

Indeed, White seems to have realised this and attempted a further conclusion to his Arthuriad. Towards the end of *Merlyn*, he has the aged, despondent Arthur leave the debating chamber and wander into the dark night, climbing a small hill that looks out upon the land:

> It was England that came out slowly, as the late moon rose: his royal realm of Gramarye [...] his homely land. [...] He found that he loved it – more than Guenever, more than Lancelot, more than Lyó-lyok. It was his mother and his daughter. [...] He could tell how the common people would feel about things, about all sorts of things. He was their king. And they were his people.65

Arthur here understands the 'natural bond' between king and subject. In 'his English' he sees a 'vast army of martyrs' willing to die 'for other men's beliefs', who would risk 'utter extinction' in their search for 'Truth'.66 This vision began as an attempt to excise the misanthropy the rest of the book has produced ('[a]ll the beauty of his humans came upon him, instead of their horribleness'),67 but it ends as a confirmation of Englishness – the spirit of nationalism that White had earlier denounced. And, as often occurs in his Arthuriad, at the point of the text's greatest complexity and contradictoriness White's novel lapses into whimsy – as Arthur stares upon his kingdom William Blake's 'Jerusalem' is sung by a flea-ridden hedgehog in a thin Cockney accent.68

Anarchist and conservative; nationalist and antinationalist; a novel which collapses into an unsure political treatise – *The Book of Merlyn* is a confused and
bewildering text. ‘It could have been so good and it is so bad,’ wrote Sylvia Townsend Warner. ‘The fault is not in the choice of theme: abolition of war is an interesting subject [...] the fault lies in the book’s schizophrenia.’ It is not surprising that White omitted this book in the 1958 sequence. Yet White decided to incorporate many of the ideas and several scenes of Merlyn into the finished sequence, and so made The Once and Future King a much more political version of the Arthurian story than it was in the early volumes of the 1930s and 40s.

To begin with, Wart’s education in the first volume of the 1958 edition was greatly altered. Gone were the adventures with Madam Mim, the giant Galapas, the grass snake and Athene; and in their place were Arthur’s experiences with the ants and geese of Merlyn. Whereas in the original Sword in the Stone Wart’s education had been about wisdom and adventure, in the revised version Wart’s schooling is exclusively concerned with justice, power and kingship. From the Pike he learns of autocracy, from the hawks he learns of military order, from the ants he learns of totalitarianism, from the geese he learns of pacifism. And in his final dose of education with the badger, Wart receives a recapitulation of all that he has learnt — emphasising that Might is not always Right. In the second volume of The Once and

* It is not clear if it was White’s or Collins’s decision to omit The Book of Merlyn; the letters are silent on the matter and White never revised the MS, indicating that he was content with the decision even if he did not make it himself. Certainly White seems to have been satisfied with the revision of the book, writing in his journal on April 17, 1957: ‘I believe and hope it is a great book. It sounds presumptuous to say so, but on a great subject, which is the epic of Britain; you have to write downright badly to make a mess of it’ (Warner, T.H. White, 272).

† In comparison, the purpose of the ‘education’ scenes in The Sword in the Stone was much less unified. The episode with Madame Mim (69-86), the black witch, is primarily comedic — in a traditional folkloric motif, Merlyn challenges her to a dual in which they must turn themselves into various animals, vegetables or minerals (Merlyn wins the dual when he transforms himself into microbes of various diseases). From the grass snake he learns myths and legends of the past (172-86); from Athene, he learns of the nature of trees and witnesses the creation of the earth (232-40); the adventure with Merlyn into Galapas the giant’s castle is another amusing interlude (241-58). The visits to the pike and the hawks in the mews are largely the same in both versions of the text (54-65; 115-25). The visit to the badger (265-79) is a much briefer affair, and does not contain any of the anti-war dialogue of TOFK. Wart’s visit to Robin Hood is also very different in the original Sword in the Stone. Instead of the raid on Morgan le Fay’s Fairies (TOFK, 106-18), Robin leads Wart and Kay into a battle with Anthropophagi — the violence of which demonstrates how far pacifism seems to have been from
Future King, Arthur’s campaign against the misuses of Might is given a much larger role than in the original 1939 Witch in the Wood. White also decided to include much more dialogue between Arthur and Merlyn as they discuss the immorality of war, as in chapter eight in which they debate whether it is legitimate to fight a war for the purpose of installing a ‘new way of life’ on people who do not understand that it is in their best interests to adopt it.\textsuperscript{70} Merlyn says that there was such a man he knew in the twentieth century, ‘an Austrian’ who ‘tried to impose his reformation by the sword and plunged the civilized world into misery and chaos.’\textsuperscript{71} With reference to Marx, Merlyn also writes that it is ‘the business of the philosophers to make ideas available, and not to impose them on people.’\textsuperscript{72} Nonetheless, this is precisely what Arthur does with his battles against the Gaels.

Thus The Once and Future King inherited many of the ideas of The Book of Merlyn. But, despite its greater political content, the 1958 book is a far more stable text than are the original volumes White wrote and published in the 30s and 40s. This is largely due to the second major change between the original and 1958 texts – the role of the Celts, who become the central villainous presence in the text. They are ‘the hysterically touchy, sorrowful, flayed defenders of a broken heritage’;\textsuperscript{73} they represent fascism, collude with communists and bring the entire kingdom to the point of destruction. Yet White did not always regard the position of the Celt in his Arthuriad thus and the original Witch in the Wood can be termed Anglo-Celtic in much the same way as Masefield’s Midsummer Night can be. It was written in Doolistown, County Meath, at a time when White considered converting to Catholicism, took lessons in Erse and briefly assumed Irish ancestry (his father was born there). He even began

\textsuperscript{70} White’s original conception of the Arthurian story: ‘All his life up to then [Wart] had been shooting into straw targets which made a noise like Phutt! He had often longed to hear the noise that these gay, true, clean and deadly missiles of the air would make in solid flesh. He heard it’ (161).
addressing David Garnett, who first introduced White to Ireland, as an ‘Anglo-Norman’.74

This new-found Irishness made its way into The Witch in the Wood. It begins, for instance, with three epigraphs: one from Malory and two from the Erse authors White was learning at the time, the eighteenth-century poet Brian Merriman and the contemporary playwright Craoibhin Aoibinn (Douglas Hyde). White did not provide translations for his readers. Most of the book is set in Lothian and Orkney, while Arthur and Merlyn are marginalised characters, occupying only five out of the novel’s thirty-four chapters (in the 1958 edition this is expanded to exactly half of the fourteen). The text also begins with one of several loving descriptions of the Scottish islands, prefaced by an idyllic drawing White made of the castle and the lower village (fig. 23):

The land of Lothian and Orkney lies in the northern latitudes. It is a country of bog and mountain, where the wind whistles all day, and at night the turf fires glow with small flames in a kind of rusty saffron. The nearest neighbours live ten miles apart, and the grouse say ‘Talk,’ and the wild merlins can be seen sweeping over the swelling lands in their pursuit of pipits and larks and the white-bottomed wheat-ears which dodge into gorse bushes. It is all heather and loveliness.75

In comparison to the humorous, idyllic introduction of the 1939 Witch in the Wood, the opening of the 1958 Once and Future King quickly established the Celts as darkly magical, cunning, quick to temper and murderous. It begins with a portrait of Gaelic barbarity: the reader is shown Gawaine and his brothers being raised on tales of ‘English wickedness’, learning to recite the wrongs brought against their race by Arthur’s family – especially Uther’s rape of their ‘granny’. They are crudely nationalistic (crying, for instance, ‘Up Orkney, Right or Wrong’), while promising to
keep the feud between their family and the Pendragons alive ‘forever’. Meanwhile their mother, Morgause, boils a live cat to alleviate her boredom.76

Throughout the 1958 *Once and Future King* White was careful to make the Celt the central agent of the collapse of Arthur’s realm. The author’s journal entry on Morgause is typical of White’s new approach. No longer the hysterical mother-figure of *The Witch in the Wood*, the Morgause of the 1958 book ‘should be quite shallow, cruel, selfish […] One important thing is her Celtic blood. Let her be the worst West-of-Ireland type: the one with cunning bred in her bones.’77 Such racial essentialism is present throughout the finished Arthuriad. White also wanted to make his Gaelic characters appear more alien to Arthur’s English court than they were in the original books – changing, for instance, Gawaine’s Standard English into White’s approximation of Scots dialect:

> What happened? Why, what happened was that I wasted eighteen months searching for adventures, without finding hardly any, and ended up half dead with concussion. (*The Ill-Made Knight*)78

> What happened, is it? Why, what happened was that I wasted eighteen months and mair forbye in seeking footless for adventure – and ended up half deid with what ye name concussion. (*TOFK*)79

And although White’s original draft of *The Candle of the Wind* has remained unpublished, his characterisation of Mordred probably owes a great deal to his increased phobic dislike of the Irish/Celt. He is presented as demonically evil, ‘a creature from Edgar Allan Poe’, with ‘red eyes, homicidal, terrific, seeming to give out actual light.’ He is the ‘scion of desperate races more ancient than Arthur’s, and more subtle.’80 Later, Mordred is clearly identified not only with Richard III, but with twentieth-century fascism too, leading the ‘popular party’, whose aims are ‘some kind of nationalism, with Gaelic autonomy, and a massacre of the Jews’; their emblem is ‘a
scarlet fist clenching a whip.° Building on the monstrosity of his character, the narrator announces that Mordred is

of a race now represented by the Irish Republican Army, rather than Scots Nationalists, who had always murdered landlords and blamed them for being murdered [...] the race that had been expelled by the volcano of history into the four quarters of the globe, where, with a venomous sense of grievance and inferiority, they even nowadays proclaim their ancient megalomania.°

In the same way that Tennyson transformed Vivien’s licentiousness into ‘the evil genius of the Round Table’, so White made Mordred’s Gaelic origins into the prime cause of the country’s collapse.

_The Once and Future King_ is also more careful than the original books to emphasise the Gaels’ role in opposing Arthur’s struggle for Right. Thus in _The Sword in the Stone_, when Arthur pulls the sword from stone the reader was told that ‘[a] few revolted, who were later quelled’; but in the 1958 edition this becomes ‘[a] few Gaelic ones revolted, who were quelled later’. In one of the few directly political moments in the original _Witch in the Wood_, Merlyn defines chivalry as an ideological myth which disguises feudal society’s endemic brutality:

> What is all this chivalry, anyway? It simply means being rich enough to have a castle and a suit of armour [...] Look at all the barns burned, and dead men’s legs sticking out of ponds, and horses with swelled bellies by the roadside, and mills falling down, and money buried, and nobody daring to walk abroad with gold or ornaments on their clothes. That is chivalry nowadays.

In _The Once and Future King_ White inserted the following passage in the middle of Merlyn’s diatribe against chivalry, clearly focusing on the Gaels as the prime cause of disturbance:

> They have rebelled, although you are their feudal sovereign, simply because the throne is insecure. England’s difficulty, we used to say, is Ireland’s
opportunity. This is their chance to pay off racial scores, and to make a bit of money in ransoms.  

Further interpolations are made later, invalidating the legitimacy of the Gaels’ resistance to Arthur. In one scene Merlyn explains to the young King Arthur some of the reasons for the Gaelic wars – Saxon, then Norman, oppression, Uther’s rape of Igraine and the killing of her husband. But Merlyn says that personal reasons or familial vengeance are no justification for war. Neither is colonial resistance:

The point is that the Saxon Conquest did succeed, and so did the Norman Conquest of the Saxons. [...] When a great many years have passed one ought to be ready to accept a status quo [...] the Norman Conquest was a process of welding small units into bigger ones – while the present revolt of the Gaelic confederation is a process of disintegration. They want to smash up what we may call the United Kingdom into a lot of piffling little kingdoms of their own. That is why their reason is not what you might call a good one. [...] I never could stomach these nationalists.

This is not, however, just an advocation of the status quo. Merlyn’s anti-nationalism is firmly situated within the context of English hegemony (‘you are their feudal sovereign’); never does The Once and Future King refer to Arthur as even a British king. Merlyn’s speech against nationalists is a speech against the break up of the English Empire – a declaration of the moral right to continue to subjugate others. Pacifism and non-resistance, it seems, is the only morally legitimate response the colonised may express – especially when the imperial force is English. The Celt is here the signifier for a range of colonised peoples, becoming the focus for a number of racist and cultural slurs. For instance, in the original Witch in the Wood there are several xenophobic jokes and crude illustrations referring to the Saracen knight, Sir Palomides (fig. 23), but in The Once and Future King such colonial humour pertains
only to the Celts. As with his conservatism, White seems here to be unable, or unwilling, to escape his colonial upbringing, his *Once and Future King* being one of the many nostalgic, rather bitter works written in wake of the British Empire’s collapse.

No doubt personal reasons played a part in the change of the Celt’s role in the 1958 version. The Anglo-Celtic *The Witch in the Wood* had been written when White felt himself to be part of an Irish community, whereas the by the end of his time in Ireland the locals suspected him of being an English spy and, after bouts of heavy drinking, the increasingly paranoid author began to lock himself in a hotel room in terror of the IRA. But the larger cause for the Celt’s transformation was the change in White’s politics. After 1945 White began to identify himself as a ‘nostalgic Tory’, who regarded the eighteenth-century squirearchy as the perfect form of government. He also became disheartened by the socialist reforms of the Attlee government, describing post-war Britain as the ‘Farewell state’, and frequently referred to Aneurin Bevan in correspondence as ‘Urinal’ Bevan.

With his political beliefs now stabilised as identifiably conservative, White presumably found his flirtations with individualist-anarchism in *The Book of Merlyn* untenable and largely removed them from the revised *Once and Future King*. Therefore, when White wished to locate the ultimate cause of war in ‘political geography’, as he maintained in the conclusion to the 1958 text, he could no longer rely on his earlier, albeit contradictory, political belief system. But by being able to

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*The scene in which the English King Pellinore, hunts the Questing Beast in Orkney, is typical of the revised Arthuriad: ‘In various parts of the landscape several dozens of bent and distorted Old Ones [another of White’s terms for the Gaels] were intently examining the situation from the concealment of rocks, sandhills, shell-mounds, igloos and so forth – still vainly trying to fathom the subtle secrets of the English’ (303). The humour of the scene, of course, only works if the reader accepts the irony of ‘savages’ laughing at the civilised coloniser. It is a theme common in satiric literary representations of the colonial – most effectively used by Evelyn Waugh in the Africa-set *Black Mischief* (1932) and, with a Welsh setting, *Decline and Fall* (1928).*
situate the downfall of the Arthurian kingdom as the direct result of the destructive
cunning of the Celt, White no longer had to force his political philosophy into
tortuous inconsistencies. In many ways, the Celt became an alternative to the whimsy
which White often reverted to at moments of ideological difficulty. As Alan
Macdonald has written on an essay on *The Witch in the Wood*, ‘[t]he Celt is hostile to
the effete civilization Arthur would call into being; hostile to its ridiculous quests, its
modes of speech, its assumed authority.’ In having such a violently antagonistic
opposition, White was at least able to realise Arthur’s civilising project, along with
‘the blunt morals of the South’, as a hopelessly virtuous, utterly English endeavour,
which failed because of the animosity of the foreigner, rather than because of the lack
of validity of the enterprise’s political centre.

The final strategy of *The Once and Future King* to avoid the contradictoriness
of the text’s complex response to war, violence and injustice is the conclusion’s
recourse to ‘Literature’:

The hope of making it would lie in culture. If people could be persuaded to
read and write, not just to eat and make love, there was still a chance that they
might come to reason.

By passing on the story of Arthur’s mission to transform England into a just state to
the young Tom Malory, White hoped to preserve something of his work’s pacific and
political intentions. It was a move that has proved attractive to some critics (at least
more so than White’s earlier ‘descent’ into anarchism). It is also a move that was
entirely in keeping with White’s education at Cambridge during the late 1920s. For,
although Malory, as previously noted, was not highly regarded at the university at this

*Cf. Stephen Knight’s comment on White’s whimsical asides: ‘these should not be dismissed as sugary
top-dressing. They are typical of that deliberate and defensive unseriousness that is a feature of the self-
conscious English upper-middle class, from whom White came and among whom he found his friends.
Where Twain’s irreverence had a political bite, White’s is no more than a nervous self-protection in
case he is caught being too earnest’ (*Arthurian Literature and Society*, 203-4).
time, White's Arthuriad is nonetheless heavily indebted to critics like T.R. Henn and I.A. Richards (both of whom supplied White with references and read manuscripts of his early novels).  

Like all works of Arthurian literature, White's Arthuriad is as much a reading of the past tradition as it is a new contribution to the canon. And White's critical reading is essentially a hybrid – formed from the belles-lettres of men like Strachey and Saintsbury (and, at Cambridge, Arthur Quiller-Couch and Walter Raleigh) and the leaders of the new 'English Studies', especially the Cambridge critics Richards and F.R. Leavis. While White's writing is filled with the dilettantism of the patrician, imperial class who first formed the study of English at the ancient universities, White's Arthuriad is also, in some ways, a practical criticism of the Morte Darthur. Certainly, White's reading of Malory has affinities with Richards's method: there is the attention to the text, rather than the unnecessary distractions of the sources; the emphasis on psychology, which is not dissimilar to the approach of Richards's Principles of Literary Criticism (1924). There are other preoccupations with the Richards-Leavis axis: the importance of Malory as a canonical English work, emerging out of an 'organic' society, which the author contrasts to the barbarities of industrial capitalism; as well as the idea that literature somehow offers salvation to modern society.

When White's King Arthur passes to Malory the notion of civilisation and justice, he is not just giving him the plot for a good book. He is – also repeating the Cambridge critics' belief in the ability of literature to communicate ideas of moral improvement – suggesting that good literature (and White is thinking of his own work as much as Malory) can somehow combat barbarism. Not only does White's novel articulate a struggle to oppose violence and the right of might, its position as
Literature – a torch to be handed down to future generations of cultivated readers – is White’s final attempt to oppose the forces of brutality. Education is the ultimate means of resisting the twentieth century. As Richards wrote in 1926: literature ‘is capable of saving us; it is a perfectly possible means of overcoming chaos.’ The attraction for this belief in the transformative power of literature as a ‘solution’ to the world’s ills was that White no longer had to contemplate a political one.

Thus when The Once and Future King appeared in 1958 it was a very different text from those early novels and manuscripts White had written in the 1930s and early 40s. The political precariousness of The Book of Merlyn was replaced by the stabilising influence of White’s increasingly conservative politics, which dominate the rewriting of his Arthuriad, while the unchecked destructive forces are located as emerging from the Celtic periphery. Any remaining ideological contradictions are swept away by the conclusion’s recourse to Literature and the improving qualities of education. Yet The Once and Future King and its raw ideological predecessor, The Book of Merlyn, remain searching, large-scale attempts to relate the Arthurian story to the twentieth century, even if these attempts were frustrated because of White’s inability to present a clear alternative to the models of feudalism, nationalism and conservatism he interchangeably rejects and extols. It remains a greatly imaginative work by a writer whose pacifism and individualism were often at variance with his upper-middle-class origins, whose colonialism and inbred English patriotism contradicted his desire to see the day when Arthur could return to ‘Gramarye with a new Round Table which had no corners, just as the world had none – a table without boundaries between the nations who would sit to feast there.’
‘Merlin’s long gone under and there’s no magic any more’: the Post-War Arthur

T.H. White’s Arthuriad has several affinities with the other major retellings of the Arthurian story. Like Geoffrey’s Historia, Malory’s Morte and Tennyson’s Idylls, White’s retelling of the legend transfigured what was predominantly seen at the time of composition as a non-English myth into a major ‘English’ cultural product. Geoffrey had translated the tales of a Brythonic hero into an Anglo-Norman cultural edifice; Malory had refashioned a largely French tradition into a late-medieval English one; while Tennyson had taken a story that most of his contemporary writers had shied away from, thinking it too Celtic, or too French or too archaic, and transformed it into the bourgeois-liberal epic of the Victorian period. White too had taken a legend that had become increasingly Anglo-Celtic and had remade it into an exclusively English commodity. He had also taken its increasingly modernist, difficult poetic basis and turned it into a children’s novel which grew increasingly complex, but which remained simple in its formal construction. And, with regard to the increasingly religious, or at least spiritual, Grail literature, he had once more returned the myth to its secular origins in English culture.

Yet White’s Arthuriad was also very different from those of Geoffrey, Malory and Tennyson. Unlike them White did not attempt to synthesise contemporary Arthurian literature – the Historia had combined Latin historiography, French Charlemagne chansons and Celtic legends in order to produce a new literary monument to its Anglo-Norman patrons; the Morte Darthur had similarly blended French romance with English historiography; and the Idylls had combined the Welsh tales of the Mabinogion with Malory’s Morte Darthur and imbued the sequence with Victorian bourgeois ideology. White, rather, chose to ignore almost every development in the twentieth-century evolution of the Arthurian myth. It was an
anachronism; it was also an arbitrary reading – few subsequent writers would wish to rewrite the story as an animal fantasy and even fewer would wish to turn the myth into a pacifist morality novel. As it was, White’s *The Once and Future King*, while it never approached the paradigmatic status of its forebears, was nevertheless the most widely-read version of the Arthurian story written in the twentieth century.

Its influence might have been greater had White been able to publish the complete five- (or four-) volume edition before 1958. Between the years of its initial and revised publication, White’s Arthuriad chiefly seems to have influenced children’s retellings of the legend – several popular versions were written by Roger Lancelyn Green (1953), Phyllis Briggs (1954), Enid Blyton (1950, 1963), and the cross-over success of later works such as Rosemary Sutcliff’s *Sword at Sunset* (1963) and Mary Stewart’s Merlin Trilogy (1970-83) were also partly inspired by White’s ability to write for adults and children simultaneously.100

Perhaps the earliest works to have direct affinities with *The Once and Future King* are James Bridie’s Arthurian plays, especially ‘Holy Isle’ and ‘Lancelot’ (1944). The first is a marginally Arthurian comic and satiric drama, set among the Orkney Islands of King Lot and Queen Morgause. White’s focalisation on the ‘Orkney faction’ in *The Witch in the Wood* seems to be the most likely source of inspiration for Bridie here – certainly Morgause is cast in a similarly vain, if slightly less malevolent, mode.101 The indebtedness to White’s work is more pronounced in ‘Lancelot’, which deals with the destruction of Arthur’s kingdom. Unlike the earlier Tennysonian dramas, Bridie brought an irreverent humour – very similar to White’s – to the traditional story. White’s influence is particularly noticeable in Bridie’s characterisation, especially with the flawed Lancelot and the strong yet hysterical Guinevere. White’s anachronistic style is also present in the descriptions of Arthur as
an ‘etherised Blimp’ and Merlin as a nineteenth-century Benthamite, who also
dabbles in eugenics.\textsuperscript{102}

White’s influence grew much larger in the late 1950s when \textit{The Once and
Future King} was finally published. The success of White’s multi-volume sequence
proved decisive in persuading later writers to cast their Arthuriads in ever-increasing
length – as demonstrated by the works of Mary Stewart, Stephen R. Lawhead, Fay
Sampson and Vera Chapman, among others.\textsuperscript{103} In 1960 White’s work was turned into
the stage musical \textit{Camelot} (figs. 24, 26, 27) by Alan Jay Lerner and ‘Fritz’ Loewe. As
Walt Disney would not sell the rights to \textit{The Sword in the Stone} (fig. 28), which they
had bought in 1939, \textit{Camelot} dealt only with the latter books of the sequence – the
result being a much more ‘adult’ version of \textit{The Once and Future King} than the
whimsical Disney production.\textsuperscript{*104} Immensely successful, the musical ran for two years
on Broadway, and toured for another two, starring Richard Burton and Julie Andrews
(the sort of woman, Lerner remarked, ‘that makes you wonder how the Britain ever
lost the Empire’).\textsuperscript{1105} In 1967 it was made into a film.\textsuperscript{106} The musical also entered
American folklore in 1963 when another T.H. White – Theodore H. White, a
journalist for \textit{Life} magazine – interviewed Jackie Kennedy a week after the president
had been assassinated. It was this interview which mythologised the Kennedy
administration as America’s Cold War Camelot:

\textsuperscript{*} The Disney production of \textit{The Sword in the Stone}, directed by Wolfgang Reitherman (1963; fig. 28),
is an adaptation of the original version of White’s novel – not the revised 1958 edition – and contains
the episodes with the pike, the flight with Archimedes, Merlyn’s owl, Madam Mim and the tournament
at which Wart draws the sword from the stone. There are, as one would expect, several notable changes
– Kay becomes much older and thuggish and speaks with a Cockney accent (Wart is resolutely
American); and an additional amorous scene with a squirrel takes the place of Arthur’s love for Lyolyok. The film ends, however, more like the conclusion of \textit{The Once and Future King} – Arthur will not
only inspire books: someone, Merlyn tells him, ‘might even make a motion picture about you.’
\textsuperscript{1} Initially Loewe had been reluctant to work on the Arthurian legend, saying to his partner: ‘That king
was a cuckold. Who the hell cares about a cuckold?’ When told that people had cared about the story of
Arthur for a thousand years, the Viennese-born Loewe replied: ‘Well, that’s only because you
Americans and English are such children’ (Alan Jay Lerner, \textit{The Street Where I Live}, 172).
At night, before we’d go to sleep, Jack liked to play some records; and the song he loved most came at the very end of this record. The lines he loved to hear were:

Don’t let it be forgot,
That once there was a spot,
For one brief shining moment
That was known as Camelot.

You must think of him as this little boy, sick so much of the time, reading in bed, reading history, reading the Knights of the Round Table. ¹⁰⁷

But American presidents were not the only world leaders to be memorialised through allusions to the Arthurian legend. Winston Churchill in his History of the English-Speaking Peoples (1956) may have wished to have seen something of himself when he described Arthur as ‘a great British warrior, who kept the light of civilisation burning against all the storms that beat, and behind his sword there sheltered a faithful following of which the memory did not fail.’ This Arthur guarded ‘the Sacred Flame of Christianity and the theme of a world order, sustained by valour, physical strength, and good horses and armour, slaughtered innumerable hosts and foul barbarians and set decent folk an example for all time.’¹⁰⁸ Churchill’s narrative of heroic individualism overlaid with the idea that Arthur was a champion of civilisation was typical of much British historiography at the time. The notion of Arthur as the last embodiment of Roman culture had been discussed as early as 1776 in Edward Gibbons’s Decline and Fall, yet few historians seemed much interested in a historical Arthur until the 1930s.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, it was Arthur’s fictionality which provided the basis for the countless retellings of the king in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Yet White’s Once and Future King was, in many ways the last of the purely-fictional major retellings of the legend. Post-war writers were more concerned with the idea of the historical Arthur – and the key influence was R.G. Collingwood’s Roman Britain (1936).

Collingwood’s Arthur was a Great Man who gathered around him
a group of friends and followers, armed according to the tradition of civilised warfare and proved their invincibility in a dozen campaigns. [...] He was the last of the Romans: the last to understand Roman ideas and use them for the good of the British people.110

Stating that his historicity can ‘hardly be called into question’, Collingwood constructed Arthur as a fifth-century Comes Britanniarum, a cavalry leader of Roman military learning and who (like Gibbon’s Arthur) represented the last flowering of Roman civilisation. ‘The story of Roman Britain’, the historian wrote, ‘ends with him’.111 Collingwood’s Roman Britain remained the dominant account of the Roman period until the 1980s.112 It proved enormously influential on historical novels, the genre which came to dominate Arthurian literary production in the post-war years. Rosemary Sutcliff’s Sword at Sunset (1963) is perhaps the best-known work of this form. Her much-praised novel eschewed the ‘rainbow colours of romance’ in order to reveal the heroically-individual ‘figure of one great man [...] a Romano-British war-leader, to whom, when the Barbarian darkness came flooding in, the last stuttering lights of civilisation seemed worth fighting for.’113 While far from a feminist, Sutcliff brought some much-needed novelistic seriousness to a genre that was becoming

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1 Derived from the battle list of Nennius.

1 Cf. Diana Wallace’s claim that Sutcliff’s and Stewart’s Arthurian novels ‘marked a radical appropriation and reinterpretation of a dominant male narrative’, made possible due to the fact that their fiction relied on historiography, rather than romance – which had historically been ‘a male-authored tradition, used to legitimise male power’. Sutcliff in particular, Wallace states, created ‘a space for the “feminine” within the story, through her sympathetic and psychologically realist treatment of the women characters.’ (The Woman’s Historical Novel, 167-70). Yet Sutcliff in fact seems to provide little of this female space – her narratives are driven by the traditionally male-dynamics of historical romance: violence, honour and glory. A greater ‘feminine’ space was produced by later writers who avoided historical realism in favour of Celtic fantasy. The Mists of Avalon (1982) by the American novelist Marion Zimmer Bradley is the best-known of these works. Her mammoth novel retells the entire Arthurian story – largely that of Malory – entirely from the view of the women of the legend: Igraine, Morgause, Viviane, Niniane and Nimue as well as Gwenhwyfar and Morgaine. Bradley’s work was also one of the first novels to divide the Arthurian world into pagan and Christian Celts. Indeed, the book’s central theme concerns the struggle between the old religions (Druidism, early Christians and worship of the Mother Goddess) and a more narrow-minded Augustinian Christianity. Bradley’s success has led to several similar retellings, the most successful perhaps being Fay Sampson’s racy series of novels, the Daughter of Tintagel sequence, which focuses on Morgan le Fay.
increasingly driven by fantasies of violence and misogyny. Henry Treece's *The Great Captains* (1956), for instance, presents Arthur as a brutal, ruthless savage who frequently inflicts his sadistic fantasies on the novel's female characters: the novel is filled with the violence inflicted on exotic dancers from Byzantium, while Celtic villagers are raped, or otherwise physically or mentally abused; and the climactic scene involves Arthur's unfaithful wife, Lystra, being thrown into Caerleon's amphitheatre, where she is killed after being impaled by a bull in a remarkably violent rape fantasy. The publisher of the 1980 reprint of *The Great Captains* seems to have realised the titillating qualities of Treece's novel and included several semi-pornographic illustrations.*

Treece's novel introduced another element into his story of the *Comes Britanniarum*: the author's bibliography. This became a constant feature of historical Arthurian literature of the 1950s and 60s as novelists attempted to verify the historical and scientific status of their work.¹¹⁴ In Treece's list both Collingwood and Chambers are present, as one would expect, but so is John Rhŷs. In fact, he is the only Celticist present, a fact which illustrates the dramatic decline in the importance of mythic-ritual scholarship after the Second World War. In the 1920s and 30s scarcely a poem or novel seems to have been written without some reference to Jessie L. Weston hidden within the text, but the historical and historiographical Arthur was very different from

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* Historical fiction was not the only genre which became a vehicle for conservative fantasy and expressions of misogyny. C.S. Lewis's science-fiction novel, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), tells of Merlin's return into a post-war world and how he helps a band of Christian technophobes in a struggle with an evil organisation ('NICE') dedicated to reconditioning the human race, through a set of eugenic and technological improvements. Together they utterly destroy the organisation's headquarters, along with most of the local town, but it is apparently a small price to pay for the destruction of scientific progress and atheism (see 740-1, in particular). *That Hideous Strength* is marked by Lewis's dislike of the surge of women in traditionally male professions — a dislike which sometimes reaches the point of hysteria in its depiction of female characters, especially 'Fairy' Hardcastle, chief of NICE's security: 'Her face was square, stern, and pale, and her voice deep. A smudge of lipstick laid on with violent inattention to the real shape of the mouth was her only concession to fashion and she rolled or chewed a long black cheroot, unlit, between her teeth. [...] She had indeed excited in Mark [Studdock, the novel's protagonist] the distaste which a young man feels at the proximity of something rankly, even insolently sexed, and at the same time wholly unattractive' (401, 416).
the king of myth and ritual (though both relied on the idea of the Celtic, whether through the literature of the *Mabinogion* or through historical and, later, archaeological research). Whereas Weston and others had presented a reinvigoration for an age that was declining in religious belief, the historical Arthur presented a materialist myth for a non-spiritual age.

The first post-war historical novel was John Masefield’s *Badon Parchments* (1947). Here, Arthur is – as in the historiography – the only individual strong enough to resist the Saxons and oppose the political stagnation which has overcome the Celtic chieftains. Not of noble blood himself, he is elected *dux bellorum* and his campaign, seemingly foolhardy, is filled with the brief optimism of post-war Britain:

> Any foreigner would have said that the British were spent, and had lost the day. I looked at some of them, and wondered whether after such loss and disaster those men would go up the hill again. But the longer I lived among these people, the less I found I knew them: they do not live by reason, like other men: they have a way of their own, and what their silly way will be no man can foretell. And what folly they will do is not to be believed, and afterwards something deep down in them will come up and somehow there is nothing like it and nothing can stand against it.\[^{115}\]

Masefield’s Arthur is not unlike that of Churchill’s *History of the English Speaking Peoples*. Also like Churchill’s work, *Badon Parchments* is preoccupied with the imminent fall of the British Empire. Yet because Masefield situates Arthur as a fifth-century Briton, rather than a medieval English king, he cannot locate the Arthurian story as an imperial narrative of British greatness and decline – unlike T.H. White. Masefield countered this by having as his narrator a representative of the Byzantine Emperor (Arthur, too, is the Emperor ‘suppliant’), who urges his sovereign at the end of the novel to keep Britain a province of the Empire, for if Byzantium could ‘restore a faith and hope to them, [the Britons] would have charity enough in them to move the world.’\[^{116}\] In Masefield’s hands, therefore, the historical Arthurian story becomes
at once a narrative of Britain’s lesser place in the post-war / post-Roman world, filled as it is with hostile foreigners who would further diminish Britain’s international position, and also a narrative that articulates a desire to maintain the imperial unit.

For Masefield the anxieties felt over the diminishment of world power and the empire resulted in Arthur’s affiliation with Byzantium – a connection which earlier writers had already made. Indeed, the appeal of the Byzantine Empire is one of the more curious aspects of Arthurian literature of this period. Charles Williams in the Taliessin-cycle situates Byzantium as the heart of his Christendom – presumably as an alternative to Rome as the centre of western Christianity. The eponymous hero in John Cowper Powys’s Porius (published in 1951 but written during the war) begins the novel by contemplating whether or not to join Arthur in his struggles against the Saxons before travelling to Byzantium to help the Orthodox emperor and patriarch reopen ‘the ancient Pelagian controversy’ and anathematise the Pope. Again, Byzantium offers an alternative to Catholic Rome, as Pelagius offers an alternative to Augustinian Christianity. For Masefield the appeal of the Byzantine Empire was less spiritual, more political. The stamp of Classical education – and chiefly Rome’s military writers – had been so heavily imprinted on the British ruling caste of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the myth of Rome had become one of the most dominant ideologies of the British Empire. But with the demise of this modern empire writers could either search the past for analogies of imperial decline (Gibbon remains important here) or else they could search the past for new models of imperial endurance – and for Masefield perhaps this was the significance of the Byzantine Empire, which lived on many centuries after Rome’s deterioration. Byzantium, it seems, became the Commonwealth to Rome’s Empire.
The early historical novel was not always a conservative ideological structure. John Cowper Powys used the form to produce his last Arthurian novel, *Porius*, in 1951. This enormous romance is set in one week of the year 499 and concerns the decision of Porius, a Celtic prince, to join Arthur’s cause. The novel also marked a shift in Powys’s politics from state socialism to individual anarchism, as well as his shift from ‘eldritch modernism’. The chief spokesperson for Powys’s political shift is Myrddin, who in one speech says:

Nobody in the world, no body beyond the world, can be trusted with power, unless perhaps it be our mother the earth; but I doubt whether even she can. The Golden Age can never come agains till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to unmake themselves as I did, and leave men and women to themselves! […] But none of them last forever. That’s the hope of the world. The earth lasts and man lasts, and the animals and birds and fishes last, but gods and governments perish.  

As writers Powys and T.H. White could scarcely be further apart, but this passage is nonetheless suggestive of what White’s *Book of Merlyn* could have been like had he been ideologically able to embrace the individualist-anarchism he so often espouses in that book.

But the development of historical fiction was not the only one in the Arthurian story in the post-war years. Indeed, Arthurian cultural production from 1945 has been most obviously characterised by the continued expansion into new evolving cultural mediums: comic books, television series, numerous film adaptations, cartoons, rock music, opera, advertising and the gaming industry. Indeed, in the modern period only the poetic form seems to have suffered a major decline, the taste for narrative verse never having recovered from modernism’s assault. In terms of the novel, apart from

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* Although the historical novel became the dominant form of the popular Arthurian myth in the post war years (*Higham, Mythmaking and History, 2*), it became apparent in the 1980s that it was never going to form a paradigmatic account of the legend.
historical romances, the range of Arthuriads has exploded into various subgenres:

- science fiction (C.S. Lewis’s *That Hideous Strength*, 1945);
- Celtic fantasy (Stephen R. Lawhead’s *Pendragon* sequence, 1987-97);
- feminist retellings (Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *The Mists of Avalon*, 1982);
- spy fiction (John le Carré’s *Karla* trilogy, 1974-9)

Because of the greater speed with which the novel, or multi-volume sequence, can be produced (in comparison to poetic cycles, such as those by Tennyson or Charles Williams), most of the notable retellings of the Arthurian story since the Second World War have been complete accounts of the legend. And seemingly few writers have dealt with isolated incidents in the larger Arthurian story (except in the short story form). There have, however, been two notable exceptions to this generalisation — literature pertaining to the Grail and to Sir Gawain. Grail literature has been as eclectic as the larger Arthurian story. Apart from Christian, Pagan and Ritualist Grails, there have been socialist Grails (Rutland Boughton’s *The Holy Grail* and *Avalon*, 1943), conspiricist Grails (Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*, 2003), satirical Grails (*Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, 1975), even self-help Grails (John Matthews’s *A Guide to the Grail Quest in the Aquarian Age*, 1986). Occasionally some text has reiterated the divergent nature of the Grail, such as Naomi Mitchison’s *To the Chapel Perilous* (1955), in which each knight receives the kind of Grail they wish to see: there is no original *ur*-Grail and Gawain, Peredur, Bors, Lancelot and

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*The three volumes of John le Carré’s ‘Karla Trilogy’ (*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, 1974; *The Honourable Schoolboy*, 1977; *Smiley’s People*, 1979) are symbolical linked by Arthurian symbols. In the first ‘Merlin’ is the false intelligence source fed by the KGB to Britain’s floundering MI6; in the second, Jerry Westerby, the ‘schoolboy’ of the title, is frequently referred to as ‘Galahad’; while British agent, George Smiley’s pursuit of Karla, the head of Soviet intelligence, is repeatedly referred to as his quest for the ‘Black Grail’. Also in the same genre, American novelist Maxey Brooke published ‘Morte d’Espier’ in 1955 (republished in Mike Ashley’s *The Merlin Chronicles*, 1999), in which it is Merlin’s task to uncover the spy who betrayed Arthur’s army in its battles with Sir Brian.*
Galahad all achieve very different objects, each reflecting a twentieth-century, scholarly view of the Grail.\footnotemark

This body of literature has grown directly out of the Grail texts of the 1920s and 30s, with texts like The Da Vinci Code and Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln’s The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail (1982) replicating the creative-scholarly relationship that so informed the earlier Eliot-Weston, Machen-Waite literary productions.\footnotemark  But the work of Brown, Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln also marks a new form of Grail literature which emerged in the 1980s. The earlier twentieth-century Grail texts had used the vessel as a symbol of spiritual drought in a materialist age, or had presented the Grail as a means of rejuvenating such an impoverished present. Grail texts from the 1980s onward reversed this trend: in their versions, the Grail was no spiritual object which could renew the present; instead, the quest for it became a search for blood lines, secret societies, Catholic intrigue and conspiracies surrounding the (fraudulent) divine nature of Jesus. Essentially, The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail and its imitators have sought materialist answers for a material age.

Reasons for the development of a corpus of literature concerned exclusively with Sir Gawain – based exclusively on the fourteenth-century Sir Gawain and the Green Knight – are less obvious. As early as 1907 Jessie Weston had called on scholars and poets to take up the theme of Sir Gawain, in order to please ‘the hearts of our English folk’\footnotemark. Yet despite the publication of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in 1909 and 1925, as well as several book length studies (1897; 1914), creative interest in the legend did not exist until the late 1960s.\footnotemark Since then the performing arts have been particularly receptive to the Gawain story: Nicholas Stuart Gray

\footnotetext{Gawain representing the Celtic school, receives it as a cauldron of plenty and Peredur finds a stone vessel overflowing with gold. Bors understands the Grail in a Westonian sense and receives it accordingly; Lancelot discovers it as a similar object, but is persuaded by the Church that it is not the true Grail. Galahad believes that only he will find the ‘true’ Grail, which for him is a wholly Christian relic. When he discovers such a vessel the Church then privileges Galahad’s Grail over all the others.}

As is so often the way with Arthurian literary production this creative growth was preceded by an intense period of scholarly endeavour. Much of the earlier Gawain scholarship before the 1960s belonged to the ‘Weston-Loomis school of myth criticism’. From 1962, with the publication of Marie Borroff’s study of the stylistic features of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, critics turned increasingly to the text itself, rather than to questions of mythic sources. Borroff’s work was followed by important studies by J.A. Burrow (1965), Larry Benson (1965), Donald Roy Howard and Christian Zacher (1968) and A.C. Spearing (1970), as well as W.R.J. Barron’s critical edition of 1975, which continue to define Gawain-studies to this day. The appeal of the Gawain story for both scholars and creative writers is the complete opposite of the appeal of the Grail. Whereas writers of the 1920s and 30s found the Grail attractive because it was easily divorced from the paradigmatic structure of the larger Arthurian story, the Gawain narrative offers a *return* to such a comfortable tradition. Gawain represents an Anglocentric version of the Arthurian story, free from.
foreign influence (Celtic, French, etcetera). It is a single text – a work of individual
genius – produced in an apparently monocultural environment (Midlands England).
And the scholarly search for external influence (particularly Celtic sources) can be
dismissed as the work of outdated Celticists like Jessie Weston.*

Indeed, whereas post-war Arthurian literature has continued the inter-war
trend of Celtic inflections (particularly, and necessarily, so in the historical novel),
modern Gawain literature (whatever its sources in Welsh or Irish culture) has
remained remarkably ‘English’. Moreover, Gawain literature and Gawain studies have
the other appealing characteristic of being essentially paradigmatic. The tradition is
governed by a central text (*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) and a central critical
approach (the essentially New Criticism approach of Burrow and Benson), which
allow scholars and writers to work within an established critical and
narratorial/thematic field. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in many ways, offers an
escape from the anarchic principles of larger, post-war Arthurian culture.

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Away from England, after the war there was a sharp decline in Arthurian literature
produced in the Celtic countries. Yet what was produced (at least in Cornwall and
Wales – Ireland and Scotland being traditionally unconcerned with the myth) was as/eclectic and as powerful as anything in England. Indeed, it was after the Cornish-
language revival that Kernewek was given perhaps its greatest twentieth-century
literary work: A.S.D. Smith’s *Trystan hag Ysolt*. It was mostly written during the
Second World War, but Smith died before it was completed; but in a sign of pan-
Celtic literary affiliation, it was a Welshman from the Rhondda, D.H. Watkins, who

* There was a growing resistance to the idea of the use of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as a
storehouse for source-hunters throughout the 1950s. ‘[T]oo much concern for sources and analogues
and too little for the meaning and purpose of the romance per se’, was Denver Ewing Baughan’s
summary of earlier Gawain scholarship (‘The Role of Morgan la Fay in *Sir Gawain and the Green
Knight*’, *English Literary History* 17.4 (1950), 241).
completed the work in 1962.\textsuperscript{131} Other works, like Alan M. Kent’s ‘Nativitas Christi’ (2000) have maintained Cornwall’s strong association with the Christian Grail tradition;\textsuperscript{132} while in the popular imagination Arthur’s return is still closely bound up with Cornish independence. A recent newspaper article, written by a member of the Cornish Stannary Parliament, surveyed recent developments in the Cornish separatist movement. The symbol of this rejuvenation, the author claimed, was the successful reintroduction of the Chough which had disappeared from Cornwall in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{133}

A novel on a similar theme was published by Anthony Burgess in 1989. \textit{Any Old Iron} is a satire on Welsh and Israeli nationalism, in which Arthur’s sword, Caledvwlch, is discovered in Cold War Russia and brought to Wales, where ‘The Sons of Arthur’, a Welsh Nationalist terrorist organisation, try to procure it. Earlier, during the Second World War, Reginald Morrow Jones, who will later possess Arthur’s sword, says in response to calls for an independent Wales:

My father heard the same talk in the first war and it got nowhere. You cannot rewind history as if it were a film. The Wales you talk of was not free. It was under the rule of Rome. What was Arthur but a \textit{dux Romanus} taking his orders from Ravenna? […] Such talk as yours is acceptable turned into verse for an Eisteddfod, but there is no political reality in it.\textsuperscript{134}

Eventually, Reginald Morrow Jones throws Caledvwlch into a lake, saying ‘Merlin’s long gone under and there’s no magic any more.’\textsuperscript{135} Several post-war Welsh writers seem to agree with Burgess’s satire on recourse to history for nationalist purposes. R.S. Thomas claimed that Arthur is one of the ghosts of Wales, part of the mythic past which frustrates any sense of future possibilities. Even the romanticism of Glyn Jones’s \textit{The Island of Apples} (1965) presented Arthur as something of an empty, juvenile hero.*

* See chapter four for discussion of these writers.
A fine novel on the Grail story, *The Fisher King*, was published in 1986 by Anthony Powell, another Anglo-Welsh writer (this time from the border gentry). Set on a round-Britain voyage ('what seemed to be a notably Arthurian cruise'), Powell’s novel charts the passengers’ unceasing desire to understand their experiences in terms of myth. Beals, the historical romance novelist (author of *The Wizard on the Heath*, *Nell O’ the Chartists* and others), is particularly intent on perceiving Saul Henderson, a crippled photographer who can no longer take photographs, Barbarina, his companion, a ballerina who no longer dances, and Jilson, the ‘beau chevalier’, in light of the Arthurian legend. Beals moves from the Grail story to Jessie Weston, from T.S. Eliot to medieval romance in his pursuit of meaning. And although the novel is often satiric, its conclusion, set on the island of Thule, with its prehistoric ring of stones (another metaphor for understanding the world), is a despairing image of the world without these consoling myths:

The rain had abated a little, though not altogether. [...] On the far side of the waters, low rounded hills, soft and mysterious, concealed in luminous haze the frontiers of Thule: the edge of the known world; man’s permitted limits; a green-barrièred checkpoint, beyond which the fearful cataract of torrential seas cascaded down into Chaos. 

It is because the Arthurian story supplies so many of these myths and metaphors for understanding the modern world that the Matter of Britain has maintained so important a place in twentieth-century culture.

Like Naomi Mitchison’s *To the Chapel Perilous*, Powell’s *The Fisher King* is less about the Arthurian legend itself and more about twentieth-century responses to it – especially its eclecticism, the numerous ways in which scholars and writers have been able to draw significance from the myth. For what has certainly not emerged since 1945 is any sense that the Matter of Britain would return to a paradigmatic state.
Indeed, modern Arthuriana’s chief characteristic is surely its extreme eclecticism, a characteristic once again defined by scholarship.

The discovery of the Winchester manuscript of the *Morte Darthur* in 1934 and its publication by Eugène Vinaver in 1947 in many ways symbolises post-war cultural production. The enormous scholarly apparatus of Vinaver’s three-volume edition meant that his edition became the most authoritative available, eclipsing the earlier editions by Ernest Rhys, Strachey and Sommer. Famously, Vinaver argued:

> Instead of a ‘single work’ subordinate to an imaginary principle of all-embracing dramatic ‘unity’, what we have before us is a series of works forming a vast and carried panorama of incident and character. What the ‘assemblage’ may lose in harmony it gains in diversity and richness of tone, expressive of the author’s real design.

Unlike the assertions of Saintsbury and Strachey that the *Morte* was a unified, coherent single text (as T.H. White also believed), Vinaver argued that Malory’s part in the evolution of the novel was negligible and that what the fifteenth-century author had produced was eight separate romances. So he gave his edition the title *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*. Many scholars, including R.H. Wilson, R.M. Lumianksy and C.S. Lewis, rejected Vinaver’s hypothesis, which prompted the French scholar to reply in the second edition of the *Works*:

> Why, then, in Malory’s case this passionate attachment to the ‘unity’ of the entire volume? [...] people in various parts of the English-speaking world felt that something precious was being taken away from them [...] an English classic was being destroyed, pulled to pieces by an insensitive critic whose ear was not attuned to the inner harmonies of the text.

Vinaver was being provocative. Nonetheless, this French scholar had challenged the sanctity of Malory’s *Morte Darthur*, which was, after the successive challenges of

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*This included over five hundred pages of notes, commentary and introduction, which synthesised most of the scholarship, criticism and debate produced over the previous fifty years.*
earlier scholars of the twentieth century, the last bastion of conservative, English
textual studies. And while it caused consternation among British and American
critics, it allowed many more creative writers to recreate the Arthurian story – or
stories – in new ways.

Some writers, like Roger Lancelyn Green, understood Vinaver’s theory as a
challenge:

[I]t has recently been shown that Malory himself did not write his Book of
King Arthur as a single narrative, but merely as a collection of quite separate
stories, based on a variety of old French romances. There is a certain
coherence, but no fixed plan.

So now I have endeavoured to make each adventure a part of one fixed
pattern.141

Vinaver’s disruption of the unity of the Morte sanctioned Green to interpolate many
tales not found in his main source. Thus Green borrowed from Collingwood’s theory
of a dux bellorum, Geoffrey’s Historia, Layamon, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,
Le Livre de Lancelot del Lac, Gottfried von Strassburg, the Mabinogion, Chrétien and
other sources and inserted them into a ‘unified’ retelling of the Morte Darthur.

Rosemary Sutcliff’s three-volume retelling of Malory (1979-81) did precisely the
same (using almost exactly the same sources), as did James Riordan’s Tales of King
Arthur (1982) and many other retellings.142 Yet Vinaver’s thesis did not only have an
impact on writers who specifically set out to retell the Morte Darthur. Vinaver’s
influence is perhaps best demonstrated by the number of works which use Malory as
their dominant narrative structure – Marion Zimmer Bradley’s The Mists of Avalon
(1982) or Fay Sampson’s Daughter of Tintagel sequence (1996-2005), for instance –
yet completely overhaul its meaning and reconfigure its ideological significance (in
Bradley and Sampson’s cases, into a feminist discourse). In the period before the
Second World War, of course, creative writers tended to rely on scholars such as
Weston, Loomis and Rhŷs to produce alternative meanings of the Grail, French and Celtic stories before they could retell the Arthurian story. Backed up by Vinaver’s thesis, writers after the war could appropriate whatever they chose and refashion it however they wanted to. Essentially Vinaver had freed the *Morte Darthur* from an interpretation which saw it as an English, patriarchal epic, complete with fixed national qualities and political meanings.

The second major piece of scholarship to emerge after the war was perhaps as reflective of the change in creative writing as it was influential upon it. Loomis’s *Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages* (1959) superseded the earlier major accounts of the legend by John Rhŷs (1891), J.D. Bruce (1922) and E.K. Chambers (1927). But unlike their studies, Loomis’s 1959 book was a collaborative history of the Matter of Britain, containing forty-one essays by numerous scholars with often disparate views, but which had little desire to synthesise them into a homogenous whole. It remains ‘the widest twentieth-century survey of the field’, and it became the major reference work for subsequent scholarship. It included some classic pieces of criticism by Rachel Bromwich on the Welsh Triads, Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson on the historical Arthur, A.O.H. Jarman on the Welsh Myrddin poems, Jean Frappier on the Vulgate Cycle, Vinaver on the Prose Tristan and Loomis, who contributed several articles, on ‘Arthurian Influence on Sport and Spectacle’. And though several of its articles have now been superseded it remains the pivotal work of post-war criticism outside of Malory studies. Moreover, its collaborative basis has been adopted by virtually every other ‘big book’ account of the Arthurian legend since – *Essays on Malory* (1963), *Aspects of Malory* (1981), *Studies in Malory* (1985), the continuing Cambridge *Companion Guide* series (1996, 1997, 2008), as well as the multi-volume

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*Indeed, in the ‘Preface’ to the work Loomis wrote that his intention in publishing *Arthurian Literature of the Middle Ages* was to bring J.D. Bruce’s *Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, a work he described as ‘a pridigious feat of erudition and synthesis’ (v), up to date.*
series of Arthurian studies published by the University of Wales Press and named after Loomis's 1959 collection.\textsuperscript{145} Even creative writing publications have in recent years begun to produce collaborative collections, such as Lawrence Schimel and Martin H. Greenburg's \textit{Camelot Fantastic}\textsuperscript{146} and the five volumes of short stories and miscellanea (including interviews with Arthurian authors, medieval prose romances, poems and scholarship) edited by Mike Ashley in the \textit{Chronicles} sequence (1989-97).\textsuperscript{147}

In short, where the scholarship (and sometimes literature) of the first half of the twentieth century was diverse and often combative, post-Second World War Arthurian writing has been largely characterised by a collaborative, more tolerantly diverse set of interpretations and retellings. Writers in the first half of the century attempted to establish a new dominant means of reading the tradition (approaches which can be variously labelled as Celtic, Ritual, or Classic English Studies). In the second half of the century, despite a plethora of new methodologies (including feminism, Marxism, cultural materialism and others), Arthurian scholarship has generally been less concerned with the production of a single, all-encompassing critical paradigm. Indeed, such an aim now appears to be futile. Also, despite the reactionary tendencies of several conservative critics when encountering new and radical (often politically-charged) approaches, modern Arthurian scholarship has tended to be a far more collegiate affair than the early twentieth century, when Jessie Weston wrote of herself as being 'solemnly warned off ground sacred to scholars of another sex, and dare we say of another nation'.\textsuperscript{148} And though many hostile reviews may still appear in the pages of journals of medieval literature, rarely do they summon the vociferous energy that the self-confessedly 'pugnacious' Loomis could produce in
the 1930s. Yet this increased collegiality in scholarly circles raised a larger question: that, despite the superabundance of writing – both scholarly and creative – on the legend, is the Arthurian myth really as culturally important in post-war Britain as it was in the first half of the century, let alone the Victorian age?

* This is not to dismiss the various scholarly struggles that took place during the late 1970s and 80s when feminism and cultural materialism was beginning to make its mark on medieval literature. Nonetheless, these were struggle which often took place at the level of *viva voca* than on the review pages of medievalist journals.
Conclusion

‘The old order changeth’: towards a new Arthurian legend

It has been the recurring contention of this thesis that the English Arthurian tradition, unlike those of the Celtic nations, has usually operated in a paradigmatic structure, but that in the period since the Great War this structure has all but disappeared. It is worth reflecting, in this conclusion, on some of the reasons why the nature of Arthurian literary production has changed so greatly in the last hundred years.

In earlier centuries the writing of Arthurian literature was a dogmatic enterprise, controlled by the cultural productions of social elites who desired to regulate a myth that they found useful in disseminating ideological and social ideals. Certain texts – Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae, Malory’s Le Morte Darthur and Tennyson’s Idylls of the King – enshrined these ideals in epic retellings of the Arthurian story and proved so successful, as both literary and ideological edifices, that they acquired paradigmatic status. As paradigms, these texts constituted the most authoritative versions of the Arthurian story within their period: in effect each became the Arthurian legend for their readers, audiences and imitators. They dominated subsequent retellings of the legend in such a compelling manner that
almost all literature produced under their auspices can be termed Galfridian, Malorian or Tennysonian. Rarely in literary history have three texts proved as influential.

Yet the literature after the Great War abandoned this hegemonic structure. Instead of reproducing the narrative and ideological precepts of Tennyson’s *Idylls* – as earlier Arthurian authors had done for fifty years – writers and scholars in the twentieth century consciously began to react against Victorian Camelot, which had been English, domestic, bourgeois and patriarchal. Whereas the *Idylls* had been Anglocentric (‘this King is fair / Beyond the race of Britons’), writers from the Celtic nations reasserted native traditions which had diminished greatly during the years of the *Idylls*’ dominance. Moreover, these Celtic Arthurs, particularly in Wales and Cornwall, were imbued with separatist and nationalist ambitions, gradually breaking away from the influence of Tennyson as their tradition evolved. Meanwhile, at the turn of the twentieth century there also developed a trend for Anglo-Celtic retellings of the legend, which sought to relocate the Matter of Britain as a truly British cultural product – this trend culminating with the ballad-cycle of John Masefield’s *Midsummer Night* (1927), David Jones’s *In Parenthesis* (1937) and John Cowper Powys’s novels, *A Glastonbury Romance* (1938) and *Porius* (1951). Indeed, during the 1920s and 30s, the idea of a wholly English Arthurian tradition seemed increasingly impossible.

But the Arthurian story was not only reinvented in terms of nationalist awakenings: the Tennysonian paradigm was eroded in other ways – often being directly challenged by post-Great War writers. The *Idylls* had been a largely humanist expression of the medieval world; but writers such as Charles Williams, Arthur Machen and A.E. Waite tried to ‘restore’ it to what was often a fundamentalist Christian perspective – which found its most extreme instance in Williams’s exotic
Grail sequence, the Taliessin-cycle (1938-44). But the post-war Grail was antithetical to the *Idylls* in other ways. While Tennyson had perceived the destruction of Victorian Camelot as the result of the uncontrolled sexual desires of private individuals, the Grail legend, under Jessie Weston’s influence, was reinvented in the 1920s as a narrative of earthly and spiritual rejuvenation – the ‘original’ significance of which (so Weston claimed) was largely sexual in orientation and was symbolised by the vaginal cup and phallic lance.

Likewise, Tennyson’s Arthuriad had been constructed as a monument to bourgeois liberalism, but writers after 1918 took Arthur into politically much more dangerous territory. David Jones, often thought of as an arch-conservative in politics, appropriated the stories of Malory, Geoffrey and the *Mabinogion* for the working-class troops of the First World War. John Cowper Powys, in a series of Anglo-Welsh novels, transformed the Matter of Britain into a mythic brand of anarchism; while Charles Williams turned the legend’s mythic materials into a type of clerical-fascism, which agreed with T.S. Eliot’s desire for a return to Catholic feudalism. T.H. White, with typical contradiction, took ‘Wart’ both to the ecological left and to the dutiful right, as he struggled with his own fluctuating politics.

Meanwhile, the struggle to emancipate the legend not only from Victorian patriarchy but centuries of male chauvinism, has been an unsure, sporadic affair. Dramatic works such as Graham Hill’s *Guinevere* (1906) and Martha Kinross’s *Tristram and Isoult* (1913) sought to exonerate the adulterous women of the legend, but laboured under the full weight of the Tennysonian tradition, which had heaped blame upon women for many years. Interwar writing seemed little concerned with Guinevere, Vivien and Morgause and even the Arthuriad of T.H. White (1938-58), which contained the most sympathetic account of Guinevere in the period, was written
through a mixture of gynophobia and matricidal anxiety. It was not until the early
1980s that the American author Marion Zimmer Bradley began to offer a sustained
female-centric retelling of the legend. Yet, discontinuous as this less-chauvinistic
trend has been, it has nonetheless managed to extricate itself from the patriarchalism
of the Tennysonian tradition, as has the twentieth-century recreation of Arthur in
many other ways – in its abandonment of moralism (saving where it is religious), the
movement away from narrative verse and the relegation of the legendary-mythic
world of Malory and Tennyson in favour of historical fifth-century realism, science
fiction and fantasy.

However, when writers of the twentieth century – and especially those writers
of the first half of that century – have consciously challenged Tennyson’s *Idylls*, they
have also challenged the very fabric of Arthurian literary production in England.
Indeed, the eclectic corpus of post-1918 literature – consisting of anarchist Merlins,
hybrid Anglo-Welsh myths, working-class legends, fascist and feminist Grails and
post-imperial Celtic chieftains – appears more of a series of subversions of the
Arthurian story than a sequence of retellings. Indeed, to use the Kuhnian phrase,
throughout the twentieth century Arthurian literary production has been in a ‘crisis’
state, in which cultural significance has been unstable and contradictory, while no
recognisable social group has consistently been able to draw ideological support from
it. Despite the fact that Malory remains the basis for many forays into Arthurian
writing, while the *Morte Darthur* retains a position in most undergraduate courses,
Malory’s text has not been repeatedly rewritten by twentieth-century writers in the
way that the *Idylls* were in the nineteenth century, or the *Historia* from the twelfth to
fifteenth. Rather, the *Morte Darthur* and, to a lesser extent, the work of Geoffrey and
Tennyson, remain powerful major texts: influential but not dominant or prototypical.
Similarly, no modern text has claimed a similar paradigmatic status: not *The Mists of Avalon*, or *Sword at Sunset* or even *The Once and Future King*. Indeed, what this thesis has tried to demonstrate is that what certainly did not emerge from the literature of the 1920s onwards was any sign that the Arthurian legend would return to a paradigmatic state. Indeed, in the twentieth century an equivalent Galfridian, Malorian or Tennysonian text, which would encompass an entire world view, was unthinkable, as the Matter of Britain became subject to an evermore expansive set of political and social forces.

Yet even in the past Arthurian writing has not always taken place within a paradigmatic structure. European cultural interest in the legend has never functioned in this way and neither have the Celtic versions of the myth. Ireland was only ever tangentially concerned with Arthur and much of the historiographical interest in late-medieval Scotland was opposed to the appropriation of the legend by English ideologues, eager to fit the Arthurian story for imperialist propaganda. Cornish interest in the legend, meanwhile, was always too localised to require an authoritative tradition to support its continuation; while the Welsh representation of Arthur has been an irregular, spasmodic affair, which has been closely related to the turbulent situation of Welsh political and economic affairs.

Even in England a paradigmatic formation has not always been strictly necessary for Arthurian literary production to take place. There have been two earlier periods of 'crisis' in which the Arthurian story has been written outside of an authoritative tradition. The first occurred in the fifteenth century before Malory, when the stories of Arthur began to be claimed by mercantile and yeoman audiences – when Arthur came to be associated with misrule, ballads and folk-romance; when his authority came to be challenged by lowly carls, imperious hosts and mischievous
hags. The second occurred after the Reformation, when Puritan scholars scorned the legend and writers began to eschew the medieval tales for newly-rediscovered Classicism.

The first crisis was resolved when Malory wrote the *Morte Darthur*, beginning around 1450 and completing it in 1469. Malory restored the Matter of Britain to the social elite who had always patronised it and who derived from it the most profound ideological significance. The second crisis, however, was not resolved for centuries. Instead, the legend disappeared from the interests of high culture and entered the subterranean world of political propaganda and popular culture, where it gradually shed all of its medieval appearance. Even when it did appear in higher, or marginally higher, forms – Dryden’s *King Arthur* (1691) or Fielding’s *Tom Thumb* (1730), for example – it was unrecognisable as Arthurian literature. It was only when Tennyson wrote his *Idylls of the King* in the nineteenth century was this crisis resolved.

The crisis in Arthurian literature since the Great War, however, has differed from those of both the early fifteenth century or the post-Reformation in that it has neither been resolved by a new paradigmatic account of the legend, but nor has interest in the legend diminished. Instead, the Matter of Britain appears to be more popular than ever, with hundreds if not thousands of scholarly and creative interpretations of the myth appearing each year. The stories of the king and his knights are retold in a range of media: from the short story to multi-novel sequence, from opera to computer games. Seemingly infinitely variable, the twentieth- and twenty-first-century Arthurian tradition is constantly renegotiated and contested and appears to be unlikely to form a paradigm in the near future.

Reasons why English Arthurian literature has eschewed its traditional form are multifarious. Certainly the diversity of twentieth-century Arthurs precludes any notion
of a collective, synthesised tradition. Much of the responsibility for this eclecticism rests with contemporary scholarship. The first half of the last century witnessed a profound shift in the creative importance of the scholar. Editors and critics have occupied a crucial role in configuring the Arthurian legend’s cultural and political significance since Thomas Warton in the mid eighteenth century, but, in the period of this study, scholars such as Weston, Bruce, Loomis and Vinaver were as influential as were creative writers like Eliot, Jones, Williams or White. The critics’ frequently hostile debates concerning the original meaning of medieval Arthurian literature could not fail to be impressed on creative writers, who extended their debates to the question of what Arthurian literature ought to be like in the modern world. Pagan, Christian or atheist; conservative, anarchist or fascist; patriarchal or feminist – these irreconcilable differences forced modern Arthuriana into heterogeneity.

Other reasons are also discernable. The political and cultural landscape was perhaps too fragmentary and too unstable to foster the production of a literary monument based on the story of Arthur. Perhaps the war had created a sense of dislocation with the past – and with the Victorian past most of all, however much certain writers may have wished to return to its certainties and confidence. Perhaps no writer possessed the individual genius capable of the Idylls’ achievement – or, for that matter, that of the Historia or the Morte Darturh. While several major writers of the last century did approach the Matter of Britain, many, including Eliot, Joyce and Woolf, only dealt with the story of Arthur tangentially. It is also possible that a paradigmatic structure itself may have simply been unattractive for contemporary writers. Although the post-1918 literary and scholarly corpus has remained largely conservative (perhaps more so after the Second World War), the breakdown in the
paradigmatic model has at least increased the possibility of resisting a tradition that has been characterised by conservatism, patriarchy and conformism.

Another reason for the disassociation between twentieth-century and earlier manifestations of the Arthurian story lies in the diminished position England has occupied in the world since the Great War. In Tennyson’s ‘The Coming of Arthur’ several ‘great Lords of Rome’ stride into the hall of the newly-crowned king, demanding their age-old tribute. Arthur refuses them, saying:

The old order changeth, yielding place to new;  
And we that fight for our fair father Christ,  
Seeing that ye be grown too weak and old  
To drive the Heathen from your Roman wall,  
No tribute will we pay.3

Like Geoffrey before him, Tennyson was locating the moment of his own society’s pre- eminent power as emerging out of the decline of Rome’s imperial fortunes. As Geoffrey had historicised Anglo-Norman colonial and political ascendancy, so did Tennyson mythologise imperial, bourgeois England. Both were inheritors of the Arthurian imperium and both made their contemporary ideological context appear to have emerged out of a literary continuum, thus appropriating the tradition’s cultural and political authority.

Arthur makes his speech to the Romans through the ‘boundless purpose’ of his young reign.4 And though much of the Idylls is concerned with death and destruction, like Arthur Tennyson spoke with the confidence of his own age, class and nation. Indeed, the English Arthurian story was reborn in the nineteenth century out of colonial, industrial and economic dominance – just as the Historia had been produced out of the martial and imperial aggression of Anglo-Norman society. But as Arthur had told the lordly Romans, so did the dying Arthur tell Bedivere after the battle of
Camlan: ‘The old order changeth, yielding place to new’. And after the Great War, Britain, like the Rome of Arthur’s youth, became another ‘slowly-fading mistress of the world’. And the English Arthurian story, which had always been predicated on dominance and power, was radically unsuited to England’s newly diminished place in the world.

While much of its literature has continued to be concerned with the traditional Arthurian themes of order and authority – perceiving Arthur to be the fount of strong government – much of the Arthurian literature of the twentieth century has been situated, not amid imperial wars and continental affairs, but within a politically and racially fragmented Britain. No longer an imperial king, Arthur has become a chieftain struggling to unite what is left of post-Roman Britain against further incursions from the Heathen. This is true of John Masefield’s *Midsummer Night* (1927) and *Badon Parchments* (1947) and the great flood of historical fiction which appeared after the Second World War. It is also the case with T.H. White’s Arthuriad, which articulated its author’s sense of post-imperial anxiety not amid barbarian Saxons, but among Britain’s own barbarians, the Celts. Arthur, in short, while still being concerned with order has, in the twentieth century, become a figure of resistance – an emblem of an embattled social and national elite struggling against the vagaries of a post-imperial world. Only the Arthur of America has been concerned with the idea of imposing order on a wider world – manifest in a presidential, Cold War Camelot, in the martial confidence of MGM’s *Knights of the Round Table* (1953) and the imperial derring-do of Jerry Bruckheimer’s *King Arthur* (2004), released a year after the invasion of Iraq, where Arthur leads a band of medieval G.I.s to save a half-barbaric country from falling to the irreligious Saxons. Although Alan Lupack and Barabara Tepa Lupack have claimed that the American Arthurian tradition is ‘the
ultimate democratization' of the myth, American culture since 1945 has been the inheritor of the authoritative Arthurian imperium. English Arthuriana, meanwhile, has not only grown closer to the Celtic Arthur in terms of themes and sources – it has also become, as a narrative of resistance, closer to it in terms of ideological significance.

If the Arthurian legend has seemed out of place in the modern world, due to England's, or Britain's, diminished position within it, there is another, more recent, change which may shape future Arthurian literary production even more profoundly. The Arthurian story has always – at least in Britain – been concerned with the unity of the disparate nations of this island. Often it has been so in the form of English or, in the twelfth century, Norman imperialism. But, as David Jones wrote, it could also be true of those writers whose national identities did not belong to a rigidly English or Welsh or Cornish patriotism. In Jones’s words, it is the only tradition that is ‘equally the common property of all the inhabitants of Britain (at all events of those south of the Antonine Wall’). And for Jones, as for many writers whose interest in the legend was not concerned with order, authority and imperialism, Arthur has been inextricably linked with the idea of ‘the unity of this island’, as he wrote in his final Arthurian work:

Does the land wait the sleeping lord  
or is the wasted land  
the very lord who sleeps?9

Yet as devolution challenges the very concept of the ‘unity of this island’, can the story of Arthur survive such a massive political shift? Probably the answer is yes, but it will emerge as a very different cultural product.
Notes

Introduction


2 Tennyson, ‘To the Queen’, l. 61.

3 Tennyson, ‘The Epic’, l. 295.


13 M.W. MacCallum's *Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' and Arthurian Story from the XVIth Century* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1894).


Gordon Hall Gerould, 'King Arthur and Politics', *Speculum* 2.1: 33-51 (33).


Sardar, *Thomas Kuhn*, 60.


Richard White includes the Arthurian sections of three Scottish chronicles in his anthology, *King Arthur in Legend and History* (London: J.M. Dent, 1997): John of Fordun (129-131), Andrew of Wyntoun (131-134) and William Stewart (134-40). It is interesting to note that, due to the paradigmatic construction of Arthurian literature, the essentially anti-Galfridian and (in the case of Boece and his adapters) anti-Malorian Scottish chronicles have received little critical attention. Only in 2005 was there published a full-length study of the works of John of Fordun and his successors. See Rhiannon Purdie and Nicola Royan, *The Scots and Medieval Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005).


The Arthurian entries in both the *Historia Brittonum* and the *Annales Cambriae* are contained in *King Arthur in Legend and History*, ed. White, 4-6.


A translation as well as a discussion of the difficulties in interpreting Pa gur yv y yorthaur? is available in Patrick Sims-Williams, 'The Early Welsh Arthurian Poems', in Arthur of the Welsh, 38-46.


For discussions of the sometimes vehement debates over the genesis of the three romances see Padel, Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature, 77-82; and Gerald Morgan, 'Welsh Arthurian Literature', in A History of Arthurian Scholarship, 92-3.

Padel, Arthur in Medieval Welsh Literature, 89. The complete text was edited and translated by Robert Williams in 1876; see Y Seint Greal (Cribyn: Llanerch, 2002).


On the border-identity implications of the Historia see chapter 2 of Knight’s Arthurian Literature and Society; and, more recently, Michelle R. Warren, History on the Edge: Excalibur and the Borders of Britain, 1100-1300 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000). J.S.P. Tatlock’s The Legendary History of Britain: Geoffreys of Monmouth’s ‘Historia Regum Britanniae’ and its early vernacular versions (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950) remains an important work in the field, especially with regard to its dismissal of Geoffrey’s use of Welsh sources.

The idea that the Historia provided a quite conscious equivalent to the Charlemagne chansons was first put forward by Gordon Hall Gerould in ‘King Arthur and Politics’, Speculum 2.1 (January, 1927): 33-51, following a similar suggestion in J.D. Bruce’s The Evolution of Arthurian Romance, I, 23.


Julia Catherine Crick, The ‘Historia Regum Britanniae’ of Geoffrey of Monmouth, III: A Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1989). See also Crick’s The Reception of
Geoffrey of Monmouth's 'Historia Regum Britanniae': the evidence of manuscripts and textual history (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1989). The early editions of Malory, all in black letter, are: Caxton (1485), Wynkyn de Worde (1498), de Worde (1529), William Copeland (1557), Thomas East (c. 1577) and William Stansby (1634).


48 'Sir Lancelot' is based on the story of Lancelot's encounter with Sir Tarquin – cf. Malory, Le Morte Darthur, ed. Shepherd, 159-65. 'The Legend of King Arthur' and 'King Arthur's Death' are found in a composite ballad in the Percy MS (ff.179'-183'), which were divided into two works by Percy in his Reliques. There is, however, no doubt that they were originally two separate works blended together. See Charles Bowie Millican, 'The Original of the Ballad “King Arthur’s Death” in the Percy Folio MS', Publications of the Modern Languages Association of America 46 (1931): 1020-4, and Robert H. Wilson, 'Malory and the Ballad “King Arthur’s Death”', Medievalia et Humanistica 6 (1975): 139-49. The critical history of 'The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnelle' is more complicated. P.J.C. Field expounded the belief that Malory was the author of 'The Weddyng' in 'Malory and “The Weddyng’ in Malory and “The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell”', Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen 219 (1982): 374-81. Stephen H.A. Shepherd, more recently, has countered Field's claim in a persuasive essay: 'No Poet had his Travesty Alone: “The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnelle”', in Romance Reading on the Book: essays on medieval narrative, presented to Maldwyn Mills, ed. Jennifer Fellows, Rosalind Field, Gillian Rogers and Judith Weiss (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), 112-28. If Shepherd is correct, and evidence does indicate that he is, the ‘Weddyng’ raises interesting questions concerning the Morte Darthur’s reception – particularly as Malory claims (in the Caxton edition) to have completed his Arthuriad between 1469-70, but the ‘Weddyng’ was composed, most scholars agree, around 1450. This might lead to the suggestion that Malory’s earlier tales were in circulation before the octology’s completion.

49 A useful summary of the Elizabethan age's relationship with Arthur – including Shakespearian references, non-extant Arthurian dramas and speculation of why more works relating to the Matter of Britain were not produced – is given by James Douglas Merriman in his Flower of Kings: a study of the Arthurian legend in England between 1485 and 1835 (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1973) 31-48.


MSS of Geoffrey’s *Historia* have various dedications. Dedications to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, are the most commonly found. In at least seven MSS Waleran, the Count of Mellen, is also named. Despite the intimate associations with the Earl of Gloucester, his opponent, King Stephen, is named as a dedicatee in MS Berne, Stadtbibl. 568. See Lewis Thorpe, ‘Introduction’, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 9-45 (39-40, n. 7). Alexander, the Bishop of Lincoln, is the dedicatee of the *Prophetiae Merlini*, incorporated into the *Historia*. See Geoffrey, *The History of the Kings of Britain*, 170-185 (170).

Layamon, in his adaptation of Wace’s *Brut*, informs us that Wace’s Anglo-Norman version of Geoffrey’s *Historia* was patronised by Eleanor, the wife of Henry II, and one of the great cultural benefactors of the age. See Layamon’s *Brut*; or, *Hystoria Brutonum*, ed. W.R.J. Barron and S.C. Weinberg (Harlow: Longman, 1995), ll. 43-52. On the idea that Wace’s *Brut* was conceived as political propaganda for Henry II see Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, ‘The Round Table: idea, fiction, reality’, *Arthurian Literature* 2 (1982): 41-75 (49, 61-68).


See Janson, ‘Prophecy, Propaganda, and Henry VIII’; and Starkey, ‘King Henry and King Arthur’. Barber lists Arthurian pageants at Coventry in 1498, at the marriage of Margaret Tudor and James IV of Scottdand in 1503, at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520 and in London processions of 1522 and 1544 – *King Arthur: hero and legend* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer), 139-40. Henry VIII fostered many Arthurian associations. Like his father he, too, named a son Arthur and spent over £4000 on an Arthurian-style tournament at Winchester (in which he participated) in 1511. He also ordered the repainting of the Round Table in the colours of the Tudor green and gold. The redecoration included making Arthur’s visage appear not unlike his descendant. The purpose, as with the Arthurian trappings at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, was to impress visiting members of foreign powers with the historical splendours of England’s past.


For example, Sir Melias’s pursuit of ‘such deeds of prowess and valour as shall win me repute’ is termed as covetous and proud – mortal sins that were exemplary virtues in earlier romances. See *Queste del Saint Graal*, trans. P.M. Matarasso (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 66, 70. See also the treatment of Gawain and Lancelot at 41-2, 76, 89-93, 263. Such is the position of secular knighthood in the text (in contrast the celestial chivalry of Galahad, Bors and Perceval) that the slaying of a knight is termed ‘a trifling offence’, whereas the death of a hermit is mourned in martyred tones (204).
Chapter One

1 Tennyson, ‘The Epic’, l. 18. On Tennyson’s ‘Morte d’Arthur’ being influenced by Arthur Hallam’s death see Ricks’s headnote to the poem, 146-64 (148).
3 Merriman, in The Flower of Kings, 63, memorably described Dryden’s Arthuriad: ‘The final effect of the whole – to use the word loosely – with its compounding of sentimentalised blindness and exposed innocence, rhetorical passions, and febrile eroticism, resembles a slightly sticky marshmallow sundae laced with absinthe and sprinkled with cantharides.’ For a brief, though well-balanced account of the
ridicule Blackmore suffered at the hands of Dryden, Pope and other contemporaries see Richard C. Boys, *Sir Richard Blackmore and the Wits* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949). Stephen Knight, in *Arthurian Literature and Society*, 158, described Fielding's *Tom Thumb* as Arthur's 'nadir'. Nonetheless, Dryden's Blackmore's and Fielding's works each gained remarkable popular success which, considering their much-derided aesthetic merits (particularly in the case of Blackmore), presumably attests to the attraction the figure of Arthur could still hold over audiences at a time when the Matter of Britain was very far from the national consciousness.

4 For the most recent account of the ideological utilities of the Arthurian legend from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries see Rob Gossedge and Stephen Knight, 'Arthur in the Underworld: the sixteenth to nineteenth century', in *The Cambridge Companion to Arthurian Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Alexander and Ad Putter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).


6 The best introduction to Warton's career and his impact on the development of medievalism and his vital contribution to the study of English literary history is David Fairer's Introduction to Warton's *History of English Poetry* (London: Routledge, 1998), 1-70.


12 See John Pinkerton (ed.), *Scottish Poems, reprinted from scarce editions*, 3 vols (London: John Nicols, 1792); David Laing (ed.), *Select Remains of the Popular Poetry of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne, 1822) and Walter Scott (ed.), *Sir Tristrem; a metrical romance of the thirteenth century by Thomas of Erceldoune, called the Rhymr* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable, 1804). *Sir Tristrem* was republished four times in the nineteenth century: 1806, 1811, 1819, 1891. Scholars have since been unsure of the latter text's Scottish origins. For discussion see Bertram Vogel, 'The Dialect of *Sir Tristrem*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 40 (1941): 583-544; Alan Lupack, 'Introduction', in 'Sir Lancelot du Laik', and 'Sir Tristrem', ed. Lupack (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University Press, 1994), 143-52. For contemporary literary production see: Scott, 'The Bridal of Triermain', in *Poetical Works* (London: Macmillan, 1881), 338-66; and Anne Bannerman, 'The Prophecy of Merlin', in *Tales of Superstition and Chivalry* (London: Vernor and Hood, 1802), 126. The Scottish historiographical Arthur was also well known by the nineteenth century, see: Johannis de
Fordun, *Scotichronicon, cum supplementis et continuatione Walteri Boweri*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Roberti Flaminii, 1752); a second edn was published in 1759. Hector Boece’s *Scotorum Historiae* was first available, in William Harrison’s translation of John Bellondon’s Scottish dialect version, in vol. 5 of Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, 6 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1807). This Anglicised edition bears little ideological similarity to the original *Historiae*; more faithful was the facsimile edition of Bellondon’s 1572 translation: Hector Boethius’ *Scotorum Historiae*, trans. John Bellondon (London: W. Bulmer, c. 1820).


14 The key text in the Welsh scholarship of Arthurian materials is the *Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales*, ed. William Owen Pughe, Iolo Morganwg and Owen Jones [1800-7], reprinted in a one-volume edition in 1870 (Denbigh: Thomas Gee). See also Pughe’s *The Cambrian Biography, or historical notices of celebrated men among the Ancient Britons* (London: E. Williams, 1803), which gave summaries of *Culhwch ac Olwen* and Arthurian verses from the *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, as well as ‘historical notices’ on Arthur, Cai, Geraint, Peredur, Olwen and Gwennhyfar. Pughe also prepared an edition of *The Mabinogion* (a title of his invention and not, as is commonly thought, Charlotte Guest’s), the MS of which is available at the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, MS 12342. Gerald Morgan, ‘Welsh Arthurian Literature’, in *A History of Arthurian Scholarship*, 77-94, 81, claims that Pughe showed Scott a copy of his translation of *Peredur* as early as 1800.

With a large preface concerning the authority of the 'History' (London: J. Bowyer, 1718). Three other editions were published in the century.


17 The two 1816 edns were reprinted from the corrupt 1634 Stansby edn: The History of the renowned Prince Arthur, King of Britain, with his life and death, and all his glorious battles, ed. unknown, 2 vols (London: Walker and Edwards, 1816) and La Mort d'Arthur: the most ancient history of the renowned Prince Arthur and the knights of the Round Table, ed. unknown, 3 vols (London: R. Wilks, 1816). A more satisfying text was the 1817 deluxe edition, which included a lengthy and learned dissertation by Robert Southey (though he did not, as some critics claim, actually prepare the edition): The Byrth, Lyf, and Acts of King Arthur; of his noble knights of the Rounde Table, their merveillous enquestes and adventures, thachyeung of the Sant Greal; and in the end Le Morte Darthur, with the dolourous deth and departyng out of this worlde of them all (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1817).


20 Merriman, Flower of Kings, 128 and n. 65, 248.


22 Scott, Sir Tristrem, xxvi.


Pughe's entries on Arthur, Seithenyn, Gwythno, Taliesin and Elphin in the *Cambrian Biograpy* are all major sources for Peacock's novel as was *The Myvyrian Archaiology*. Peacock read the latter in the original, having learnt Welsh from his wife, Jane Gruffydd. See Gossedge, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* for details.

*The Myvyrian Archaiology* contained twenty-seven poems apparently from the sixth century and attributed to Taliesin (at 22-83); a number of them were translated by Peacock - these were:


Tennyson, 'To the Queen', II, 38-41.

See the prose sketch of this plan in the preliminary notes to the *Idylls of the King*, in *Tennyson: a selected edition*, 667-74 (667-8).

The novel was called *Qui conta come la Damigella di Scalot morì per amore di Lanciolo de Lac*, ed. Giulio Ferrario (Milan: Dalla Societa Tipographica de Classici Italiani, 1804).

Letitia Elizabeth Landon, ‘A Legend of Tintagel Castle’ [1833], (The University of Rochester: The Camelot Project), available online [http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/Landon.htm, last accessed August 26, 2006].


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41 For both Sterling’s and Hunt’s strictures on the ‘Morte d’Arthur’ see the headnote to the poem, 148-9 in Ricks’s edn.

42 Malory, Morte D’Arthur, ed. Shepherd, 624.

43 Tennyson, ‘Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere’, ll. 16-7.

44 Tennyson, ‘Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere’, ll. 42-5.


47 For details of these, see the preliminary notes to the Idylls of the King, 667-74.

48 See Ricks’s preliminary notes to the Idylls, 672-3, for further details of the publishing history of the Idylls.

49 Roger Ascham, The Scholemaster. Or plaine and perfite way of teachyng children, to vnderstand, write and speake, the Latin tong, but specially purposelyd for the priuate brynging up of a youth in gentleman and noble mens houses, and commodious also for such, as haue forgot the Latin tong, and would, by themselves, without a scholemaster, in short tyme, and with small paines, recouer a sufficient habilitie, to vnderstand, write and speake Latin (London: Iohn Daye, 1570), 88.

50 Anon., ‘Preface’ to La Morte d’Arthur, R. Wilks edn, xii-xiii.

51 Southey, ‘Introduction’, in Malory’s The Byrth, Lyf, and Acts of King Arthur, i-lxiii. For instances of Southey’s squeamishness see, for example, xxiv and xxx.


54 Tennyson, ‘Merlin and Vivien’, l. 46.

55 Malory, Morte Darthur, ed. Shepherd, 78-9.


57 Quoted by Tennyson in a letter to the Duchess of Argyll, July 1867, reprinted in the preliminary notes to the Idylls of the King, 672.

58 Hallam Tennyson, quoted in preliminary notes to ‘Merlin and Vivien’, 805-807 (805).


62 Tennyson, ‘Geraint and Enid’, ll. 734-44.

Tennyson, ‘To the Queen’, l. 30.


The line ‘Ideal manhood closed in real man’ (l. 38 of ‘To the Queen’) were the very last words Tennyson added to his 1891 corrections. See prefatory material to the Idylls, in Tennyson: a selected edition, 671.


Tennyson, ‘To the Queen’, ll. 41-2.


Tennyson, ‘To the Queen’, ll. 61-2.

For a discussion of ideology in the Idylls see Knight, ‘The Phantom King: Tennyson’s Idylls of the King’, chapter 5 of Arthurian Literature and Society.

Tennyson, ‘To the Queen’, ll. 18-9.

Tennyson, ‘To the Queen’, ll. 21, 23.

Tennyson, ‘To the Queen’, ll. 65-6, 24-5.

The year before Tennyson began satisfying critics’ hopes, there appeared in an unsigned review of William Morris’s The Defence of Guenevere, and other poems in the Saturday Review 6 (November 20, 1858), 506-7, a mention of ‘the British subject which Milton resigned in despair to the feebleness of Bulwer, or – may it be hoped? – to the fullness of Tennyson’s powers’. Quoted in Brewer and Taylor, The Return of King Arthur.


Muriel Whitaker, The Legends of King Arthur in Art (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1990), 179.


90 Barber, King Arthur: hero and legend, 150.

91 Barber, King Arthur: hero and legend, 163-4.

92 The first and most influential account of Arthurian visual interpretations is Whitaker’s The Legends of King Arthur in Art, see also Debra Mancoff’s The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art (New York: Garland, 1990) and her The Return of King Arthur: the legend through Victorian eyes (New York: Garland, 1995).


94 See, for instance, John Burnett, Vivien’s Song from the ‘Idylls of the King’ (London: Leader and Cock, 1859) and The Song of Fortune, from ‘idylls of the King’ (London: Leader and Cock, 1859); ‘Dolores’ [Elizabeth Dickson], Vivien’s Song (In love, if love be love), from the ‘Idylls of the King’ (London: Jeffreyes, 1861); Emily Josephine Troup, Vivien’s Song (London: Published on behalf of the composer, 1878) and William Richardson Dempster, Songs in the ‘Idylls of the King’ (New York and London: William A. Pond, 1864).


A similar organisation for girls, The Queens of Avalon, required its members to have read all of the *Idylls* before reaching the level of 'Queen'. See Lupack and Tepa Lupack, *King Arthur in America*, 66. See also Forbush’s *The Queens of Avalon*, 4th edn (Boston: The Knights of King Arthur, 1925), 33 and Forbush and Dascomb Forbush, *The Knights of King Arthur: the Merlin’s book of advanced work* (Oberlin, OH: The Knights of King Arthur, 1915), 27.


Chris Brooks and Inga Bryden, for instance, have claimed that Swinburne’s work presents a ‘politically, socially and theologically subversive medievalism’ that reacted against the idea of Arthur as upholder of establishment values. See their ‘The Arthurian Legacy’, 262.

Swinburne, in contrast, sought to create a new poem that was ‘acceptable for its orthodoxy and fidelity to the dear old story’. Swinburne, letter to R. H. Horne, February 13, 1882, in *The Swinburne Letters*, quoted in Taylor and Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur*, 32. Taylor and Brewer also quote the following extract from a letter to Rossetti (December 22, 1869): ‘My first attempt at a poetic narrative may not be as good as “Gudrun”, but it doesn’t lick the Morte d’Albert, I hope I may not die without extreme unction’, 150.


Swinburne, *Tristram of Lyonesse*, 149.

Barber, *King Arthur: hero and legend*, 165. Swinburne wrote in his letter to Rossetti (December 22, 1869), that he wrote ‘not after the Chaucerian cadence of Jason, but after my own scheme of movement and modulation in Anactoria, which I consider original in structure and combination’. Quoted in Taylor and Brewer, *The Return of King Arthur*, 150.


According to Barczewski the word 'sea' appears forty-four times in the *Idylls*, 'waves' eighteen. See *Myth and National Identity*, 204.


Tennyson’s poems inspired illustrators from quite early. But contrast the early examples of Paolo Priolo, *Illustrations of Alfred Tennyson’s* ‘Idylls of the King’ (London: Produced for the Art Union, 1863) and Amy Butts, *Sixteen Illustrations to the ‘Idylls of the King’* (London: Day and Son, 1863) with the great cyclic editions of *The Doré Book of Illustrations to Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the King’* [1878] (New York: Dover, 1995) as well as Simmons’s edition of *Le Morte Darthur* (London: Dent, 1893), with illustrations by Aubrey Beardsley. For examples of twentieth-century illustrated editions see Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale’s b/w illustrations for the *Idylls* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911) and Florence Harrison’s b/w illustrations for *Tennyson’s ‘Guinevere’ and Other Poems* (London: Blackie and Sons, 1912).


129 Tennyson, ‘Sir Galahad’, l. 3.
132 For a lengthy discussion of Arthurian drama from this period see chapter 4 of Brewer and Taylor, The Return of King Arthur, 205-34.
135 Clement Scott, From ‘The Bells’ to ‘King Arthur’: a critical record of the first-night productions at the Lyceum Theatre from 1871 to 1895 (London: John MacQueen, 1896), 372-84.
137 Carr, King Arthur, Act IV.
Chapter Two

2 Tennyson, 'The Passing of Arthur', ll. 94, 100-1, 114-7.

3 See chapter eight 'The Great War' in Mark Girouard's *The Return to Camelot*, 275-93, for an overview of the use of chivalry in the First World War.

4 Tennyson, 'Sir Galahad', ll. 3-4.


10 Peter Hunt, headnote to an extract from Yonge's *The Daisy Chain; or, aspirations, a family chronicle* (1856), in *Children's Literature: an anthology*, ed. Hunt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 131.

11 Quoted in Hunt, *Children's Literature*, 131.


20 Watts's *Sir Galahad* was bequeathed to Harvard by Grenville Lindall Winthrop, as part of a massive collection of four thousand artworks. For a history of the bequest see C.R., 'Unveiled', *Harvard Magazine*, March-April 2003, available online [http://www.harvardmagazine.com/on-line/030391.html, last accessed January 23, 2006].

21 Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 175.

22 H.E. Luxmoore, quoted in Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 176.

23 MacCallum, *Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King' and Arthurian Story from the XVth Century*, 41.

24 On chivalric memorials to the Anglo-Boer War see Girouard, *Return to Camelot*, 169, 173; Poulson, *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, 113-4; Meurig Jones, 'Survey of Memorials to the Second Anglo-Boer
War in the United Kingdom and Eire', first published in the Journal of the Africana Society, 1.15 (Anglo-Boer War Centenary Issue, 1999), revised and published online as part of the Anglo-Boer War Memorial Project, available online [www.casus-belli.co.uk/abswmp/index.html, last accessed January 23, 2006].

For an account of the Bishop of Ripon's unveiling of the memorial window see 'Tennyson Memorial at Haslemere', The Times, August 1899: 8.


Goebel's paper is one of the few studies of German medieval imagery in the First World War available in English. I am indebted to his discussion.

David Lloyd George, 'An Appeal to the Nation', September 19, 1914, in The World's Greatest Speeches, ed. Lewis Copeland, Lawrence W Lamm and Stephen J. McKenna, 4th edn (New York: Dover, 1999), 201-4 (204, 203). In the same speech Lloyd George also characterised the staples of the German diet as being 'blood and iron'.

Girouard, Return to Camelot, plates xxviii-xxxx.


See for instance, the memorial notice printed in The Times (April 18, 1916: 1) of Lieutenant Hugh Arthur Grenville Malet, killed on April 18, 1915. The notice includes a near-quotation from Tennyson's 'The Holy Grail', ll. 294-5: 'Oh Galahad, Galahad for such as thou art the Vision'.


J.D. Jones, 'Sir Galahad', Quiver 51 (May 1916): 661-3. For discussion of Quiver's use of chivalric ideology see Bontrager, 'The Imagined Crusade'.

Arthur Winnington-Ingram's Easter homily was paraphrased in The Times, April 17, 1911: 5.

Quoted in Paul Fussell, 'The Fate of chivalry and the Assault Upon Mother'.

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30  Girouard, Return to Camelot, plates xxviii-xxxx.


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39  Girouard, Return to Camelot, plates xxviii-xxxx.


41  See for instance, the memorial notice printed in The Times (April 18, 1916: 1) of Lieutenant Hugh Arthur Grenville Malet, killed on April 18, 1915. The notice includes a near-quotation from Tennyson's 'The Holy Grail', ll. 294-5: 'Oh Galahad, Galahad for such as thou art the Vision'.


45  J.D. Jones, 'Sir Galahad', Quiver 51 (May 1916): 661-3. For discussion of Quiver's use of chivalric ideology see Bontrager, 'The Imagined Crusade'.

46  Arthur Winnington-Ingram's Easter homily was paraphrased in The Times, April 17, 1911: 5.

47  Quoted in Paul Fussell, 'The Fate of chivalry and the Assault Upon Mother'.

48  Girouard, Return to Camelot, plates xxviii-xxxx.
42 Anon., ‘Young America’, The Times: 9
44 Henry Newbolt, ‘Vitai Lampada’ (1897), in Poems: new and old (London: Faber and Faber, 1921), 95-6, l. 8.
45 See Girouard, Return to Camelot, 233-5.
51 Graves, Goodbye to All That, 157.
59 Sassoon, ‘They’, ll. 7-10, 12.
62 Cannadine, Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy, 75.
64 Pollard, ‘Preface’, xi.
Examples of Owen’s direct borrowings and transtextual relationships with Tennyson can be witnessed in ‘To Poesy’ (cf. Tennyson’s ‘To Poesy’, 1830) and ‘Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind in Dejection’ (cf. Tennyson’s ‘Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind’, 1830) – both poems completed by 1912. In 1911 Owen worked on a fragment, beginning with the line ‘Full springs of Thought around me rise’, which mentions Tennyson’s marriage to Emily Sellwood (ll. 27-8). All poems are available in The Poems of Wilfred Owen, ed. Jon Stallworthy [1985] (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), 3-6, 11-13, 175-6.

‘Cramped in that funnelled hole’ is partly based on ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ (1854); the title of ‘Wild with all Regrets’ is taken from Tennyson’s ‘Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean’, a lyric in The Princess (1847), Part IV, ll. 21-40 (l. 39), while ‘Futility’ (1918) borrows heavily from part LVI of In Memoriam. For Owen’s verse see Poems, 182-3, 188-9, 32-3.

There is a likely reference to ‘Merlin and the Gleam’ in Owen’s ‘Six O’clock in Princes Street’, Poems, 79 (ll. 5-8): ‘Neither should I go fooling after clouds, / Following gleams, untrue, / And tiring after beauty through star-crowds, / Dare I go side by side with you’. Cf. Tennyson’s lines: I am Merlin, / And I am dying, / I am Merlin / Who follows The Gleam’ (ll. 7-10). In a letter to Siegfried Sassoon written just after completing ‘Six O’clock in Princes Street’ Owen parodied these same lines: ‘I am Owen; and I am dying. I am Wilfred; and I follow the Gleam’. Letter to Sassoon, November 27, 1917, in Collected Letters of Wilfred Owen, ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 512.


Owen, ‘Hospital Barge at Cérisy’ (1917), Poems, 104-5 (ll. 2-5).

Owen, ‘Hospital Barge at Cérisy’, ll. 9-14.


Brooks, ‘Camelot’, ll. 86, 90-1, 139-40, 24-30.


Poulson, The Quest for the Grail, 111.

Poulson lists the following church memorials: St Mary’s, Bloxham (1921), St John’s United Reform Church, West Hartlepool (1923), Barnaby Gate Methodist Church, Newark (1922), St. Alban’s, Streatham Park (1921) and St John the Evangelist, Exmouth (1921).

Clifton College’s Great War Memorial Window depicts Arthur and Galahad; Barton School commissioned a St George and Galahad window, as did Rydal School, Colwyn Bay. In the courtyard of
Victoria College, Jersey, there stands an 8-foot bronze statue of Sir Galahad. King's School, Chester, features a Watts-like Galahad, accompanied with further stained-glass figures of Arthur, Lancelot, Bors and Tristram – beneath each image is a quotation from the *Idylls*. See Poulson, *The Quest for the Grail*, 112-3.


90 Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 239.


98 The *Morte Darthur* was a constant companion, other books change according to which account one reads. Lawrence James, *The Golden Warrior: the life and legend of Lawrence of Arabia* [1990] (New York: Paragon, 1993), claims it was *The Odyssey* (154); Lawrence’s letter to D.G. Hogarth, April 7, 1927 (512-3) claims: ‘My books in Arabia were the *Morte*: Aristophanes (I read all the *Peace*, very gratefully, and without much technical trouble) and *The Oxford Book of English Verse*. Not so fastidious after all.’


100 James, *The Golden Warrior*, 344.


102 For a succinct account of the making of the Lawrence legend see James, *The Golden Warrior*, 265-98.

103 Angus Calder, ‘Introduction’ to *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, v-xxv (v).
Chapter Three

1 Two Sir Galahads – one an Old English Mastiff, the other a Cocker Spaniel – won several prizes in the 1930s. The Spaniel, in particular, enjoyed several victories between 1938 and 39. For details see ‘City and Suburban Canine Society’, The Times, March 7, 1930: 21; ‘White Kennel Association’, The Times, April 30, 1938, 14; ‘Richmond Dog Show’, The Times, July 5, 1939: 23. Accounts of the careers of the many Galahads and Grail racehorses are contained in the various ‘Racing News’ reports of The Times between 1920 and 1925.


6 There is no full-scale biography of Weston published. However, Janet Grayson has written an excellent survey of her life, with particular emphasis on her scholarly relationships: ‘In Quest of Jessie Weston’, Arthurian Literature 11 (1992): 1-80. Grayson includes as an appendix an annotated bibliography of Weston’s work, including some little-known articles. Additional information can be found in Weston’s obituary, The Times, October 1, 1928: 191; Gillian Thomas, ‘Weston, Jessie Laidlay (1850-1928)’, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Howard Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn
Further references to the Oxford DNB are all to the online edn.


9 There were seven published volumes in Weston’s Arthurian Romances Unrepresented in Malory’s ‘Morte D’Arthur’ series. Volume one, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (1898), retells the Middle English romance in modern prose; Weston provides an introduction and notes. Volume two, Tristan and Isolde (2 vols, 1899), is Weston’s translation of Gottfried von Strassburg’s work. Volume three, Guingamor, Lanval, Yvolet, Le Bisclavert (1900), is a translation of four French lays into English. Volume four, Morien (1901), is a translation of a Dutch romance. Volume five, Le Beaus Desconnus and Cligés (1902), renders two Middle English versions of Libeaus Desconsus and Chrétien’s Cligés into modern prose. Volume six, Sir Gawain at the Grail Castle (1903), contains translations of the Gawain-Grail episodes from Chrétien’s Perceval, Heinrich von dem Türlin’s Die Crône and the Vulgate Lancelot. Volume seven, Sir Gawain and the Lady of Lys (1907), translates two episodes from Wauchier’s Continuation of Chrétien’s Perceval. All were published in London by David Nutt.

10 For a summary of German scholarship on the Arthurian legend see Albrecht Classen, ‘German Arthurian Literature’ in A History of Arthurian Scholarship, 122-139. But see also Keith Busby and Jane H.M. Taylor’s chapter in the same book, ‘French Arthurian Legend’, 95-121 (especially at 101).

11 Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance, I, iv.


16 Nutt’s firm published several of Meyer’s translations from Old Irish: Merugud Uilix maicc Leiritis. The Irish Odyssey (London: D. Nutt, 1886); Aislinge Meic Conglinne. The Vision of Mac Conglinne, A Middle-Irish wonder tale, with an Introduction by Wilhelm Wollner (London: David Nutt, 1892); King and Hermit. A colloquy between king Guaire of Aidne and his brother Marban (London: David Nutt, 1901); Liadain and Curithir. An Irish love-story of the 9th century (London: David Nutt, 1902); Four Old-Irish songs of summer and winter (London: David Nutt, 1903). Nutt also provided an essay on ‘The Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld and the Celtic Doctrine of Rebirth’, for Meyer’s translation, The Voyage of Bran Son of Febal to the Land of the Living. An Old Irish saga (London: David Nutt, 1895); while Meyer provided translations of the stories of Tuan mac Cairill and the Dinnshenchas of...


18 Bruce includes a chapter on ‘The Theory of Celtic Origin’ in *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, 269-76; his argument against the Celticists – and Nutt in particular – is at its strongest at 275-6.


30 All quoted in Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, 260-1.

31 Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, 1, 277-89.


39 Eliot wrote of _The Waste Land_: ‘it was only the relief of a personal and wholly insignificant grouse against life; it is just a piece of rhythmic grumbling.’ Quoted in Brewer and Taylor, _The Return of King Arthur_, 237.


42 Peter Ackroyd, _T.S. Eliot_ [1984] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), 127. They had also been included to avoid the charges of plagiarism which had been levelled at his earlier poetry. Ackroyd has stated that ‘it was the presence of the notes which provoked the attention of reviewers’. Their response, however, was mixed.


45 Anon., ‘Review of ‘The Waste Land’ and Notice of the First Issue of _The Criterion_’, _TLS_ 1084 (October 26, 1922): 690. _The Waste Land_ appeared first in the first issue of Eliot’s new magazine, _The Criterion_ in October 1922. The notes were not appended to the poem until its publication by Faber in the following year.


55 Anon., 'Review of "The Waste Land" and Notice of the First Issue of *The Criterion*', TLS, 1084 (October 26, 1922): 690. Even Edmund Wilson, the earliest Weston-centric critic, saw the poem as a 'whole world of strained nerves and shattered institutions' ('The Poetry of Drouth', 144). On the later critics' spiritual-based reading of the poem see Clinton A. Brand, 'The Voice of This Calling: the enduring legacy of T.S. Eliot', *Modern Age* 45.4 (Autumn, 2003): 357-66 (360): 'However, Eliot did not use tradition only or even primarily as an instrument of critique for contrasting a shabby present with a vibrant past – though crude readings of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and *The Waste Land* hardly get beyond this inference.'


57 Wilson, 'The Poetry of Drouth', 144.


59 Brooks, *The Waste Land: an analysis*, 31; Wilson, 'The Poetry of Drouth', 144. Brooks writes of his fellow Westonian (31): 'Even a critic so acute as Edmund Wilson has seen the poem as essentially a statement of despair and disillusionment, and this account sums up the stock interpretation of the poem'.


63 Brewer and Taylor are firm Westonians (*The Return of King Arthur*, 235-9); Barber has described *The Waste Land* as 'a powerful vision of the spiritual desolation [Eliot] felt in the modern world' (*King Arthur: hero and legend*, 185); Lupack has claimed that the poem is 'a reflection of the human conditions of rampant spiritual decline' (*The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend*, 263).


66 Arnold, 'Hagar in the Wilderness', ll. 203-4.


Ackroyd, T.S. Eliot, 33.


Ackroyd, T.S. Eliot, 74-5, 83.


All lines refer to ‘The Passing of Arthur’ and The Waste Land: ‘dust’ (Tennyson, ll. 77; Eliot, l. 30), ‘bones’ (Tennyson, l. 215; Eliot, l. 390), ‘rock’ (Tennyson, l. 215; Eliot, ll. 331 ff.), ‘graves’ and ‘tombs’ (Tennyson, l. 343; Eliot, l. 387), ‘agony’ (Tennyson, l. 369; Eliot, l. 324), ‘lamentation’ (Tennyson, l. 370; Eliot, l. 367), ‘dead’, ‘death’ and ‘dying’ (Tennyson, ll. 115, 74; Eliot, ll. 328-9), ‘murmur’s, ‘mutters’ and ‘rumours’ (Tennyson, ll. 347, 268; Eliot, l. 367).

Tennyson, ‘The Coming of Arthur’, ll. 188; The Waste Land, ll. 323


The Waste Land, ll. 55, 312-21, n. 46.

The Waste Land, ll. 399-422.


Tennyson, ‘The Coming of Arthur’, l. 84.

Tennyson, ‘Merlin and Vivian’, l. 73.

Tennyson, ‘Geraint and Enid’, ll. 31, 50, 100, 313, 438.
Tennyson, ‘Geraint and Enid’, I. 313.


100 Tennyson, ‘Geraint and Enid’, II. 948-51.

101 Tennyson, ‘Lancelot and Elaine’, II. 525, 224, 300.


112 Brian Howard, quoted in Ackroyd, T.S. Eliot, 128.

113 See Lupack and Tepa Lupack, King Arthur in America, 135-82, for a discussion of these and other Eliot-influenced U.S. writers.


118 Barber, The Holy Grail, 295.

119 Barber, The Holy Grail, 296.


121 Grayson, ‘In Quest of Jessie Weston’, 35-40. For comments on Weston and her work see Waite’s The Holy Grail: the Galahad Quest in Arthurian Literature [1933] (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 1993), 393, 434 and 479.

122 Barber, The Holy Grail, 295.


124 Williams, War in Heaven, 136.

125 Williams, War in Heaven, 137.

126 See Waite, The Hidden Church of the Holy Grail, 163-4, 373, 387. Alan Lupack, in The Oxford Guide to Arthurian literature (466-7), supplies the following additional information: ‘Prester John was believed to be a priest-king who ruled an idyllic kingdom somewhere in Asia (or, in some versions of the legend, in Africa) […] In Wolfram’s Parzival (first decade of the thirteenth century), Prester John is
the son of Parzival's half-brother Feirefiz and Rapanse de Schoye. In *Der jüngere Titurel* (c. 1270), the Grail is taken to his realm for safekeeping. In Richard Johnson's *Tom a Lincolne* (1599; 1607), Arthur's illegitimate son, the Red-Rose Knight, visits Prester John's realm and persuades his daughter Anglitora to run off with and ultimately marry him. [...] And in Umberto Eco's novel *Baudolino* (2000), the title character writes a letter purportedly from Prester John, whose realm he seeks, to Frederick Bararossa, with the help of 'Kyot' and 'Boron', who supply information about the Grail'.

128 Williams, *War in Heaven*, 255.

129 Williams, *War in Heaven*, 255.


134 Moore, *Peronnik the Fool*, 358.


146 Butts, *Armed with Madness*, 73, 12.

147 Butts, *Armed with Madness*, 77.


149 Butts, *Armed with Madness*, 123.


152 Butts, *Armed with Madness*, 20, 131, 141, 83, 18, 37.
Chapter Four


2 For instance, see Sivori Levey, Guinevere and Arthur. Adapted from Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the King’, Pilgrimage Plays 41 (Roehampton: Fountain, 1920); Grace Calvert Holland, The King and His Knights. A Poetry Drama adapted from Lord Tennyson (London and New York: French, 1925); Winifred F. Allen, The Old Order Changeth. From the ‘Idylls of the King’, Parish Plays 18 (London: Sheldon Press, 1928); Elden Mary Hill, The Fall of Camelot. A play. Adapted from Tennyson’s ‘Idylls of the Kings’ (London: A.H. Stockwell, 1929).

For examples of Waugh’s use of Tennyson’s conception of the Arthurian story see Part Three, Chapter vi of *Decline and Fall*, ‘The Passing of Paul Pennyfeather’, a loose parody of Tennyson’s ‘The Passing of Arthur’ (186-90). While Tennyson’s *Idyll* is one of the most sombre of Victorian poems, Waugh’s chapter deals with the escape from prison of a young man who had been sentenced (falsely, it turns out) as a white slave trafficker. He is abetted by Sir Alastair Trumpington, a former student of his from Llanabba public school who watches Paul sailing to Crete ‘like Sir Bedivere’ (190).


Indeed, ‘there is no implied hierarchy of authors in the *Wake* as there is in *Ulysses*’. Seamus Deane, ‘Introduction’, *Finnegans Wake*, vii-xl (xii).


James Bridie, ‘Lancelot’, in *Plays for Plain People* (London: Constable, 1944), 17; pagination for each play is discontinuous.


George Woodley, *Cornubia: a poem in five cantos* [1819], Thomas Hogg, *The Fabulous History of Cornwall* [1827], William Hals, *The Complete History of Cornwall* [c. 1736], H. J. Whitfield, *Scilly and its Legends* [1852], Robert Hunt, *Popular Romances of the West of England: the drolls, traditions, and superstitions of Old Cornwall* [1865], extracts of which can be found in *Inside Merlin’s Cave*, 81-
Hogg's History contains much more Arthurian matter than could be contained in this anthology, and so the 1827 (Truro: E. Heard) edition ought to be consulted. Particularly interesting is its unusual treatment of Merlin's involvement in Arthur's story (which is largely adapted from Geoffrey, supplemented by Hogg's local knowledge/imagination). R.S. Hawker's 'The Quest for the Sangreal' (1863) is discussed below.


David Staines, Tennyson's Camelot: the 'Idylls of the King' and its medieval sources (Waterloo, Ca: Wilfred Laurier University, 1982), 25-6.

See notes to Hawker's 'The Quest of the Sangreal', in Inside Merlin's Cave, 101-113.


Katherine Lee Jenner, 'Angelice, a Patriotic Song of our Motherland' [1926], in Inside Merlin's Cave, 183-4 (ll. 3, 17-20).

B.D. Vere, King Arthur: his symbolic story in verse [1930], in Inside Merlin's Cave, 193-8 (195).

Robert Morton Nance, 'An Balores', in Inside Merlin's Cave, 220-3; the translation can be found at 198-202.

See, for instance, his textbook introduction to Kernewek, Cornish for All: a first book (St. Ives: James Lanham, 1929), as well as his An English-Cornish Dictionary (St. Ives: Federation of Old Cornwall Societies, 1934) co-written by A.S.D. Smith.


These aims, which remain in place today, can be found at the Gorseth Kernow's website: www.gorsethkernow.org.uk, last accessed February 7, 2007.

The relevant Arthurian section of the Gorseth's ceremony is contained in Inside Merlin's Cave, 219-20 (in Cornish), 191 (in English).


E. Whitefield Crofts, Tourist's Companion to West Cornwall (1877), quoted in Ronald Perry, 'Cornwall's Mining Collapse Revisited', 6.

A.K. Hamilton Jenkin, Mines and Miners of Cornwall: part xvi, Wadebridge, Camelford and Bude (Cornwall: Old Cornwall Societies, 1970); the relevant passage is contained in Inside Merlin's cave, 213-5.


John Daniel has given the entire list of GWR’s locomotive names in his database, ‘Great Western Standard Gauge Locomotive Name Database’ (2000-6), available online [http://www.greatwestern.org.uk/names.htm, last accessed February 7, 2007].

See, for instance, Brenda Duxbery and Michael Williams, *King Arthur Country in Cornwall* (St Teath: Bossiney Books, 1979), though there are numerous examples of this. The work of John Matthews is comparable.


Amy Hale, ‘King Arthur and Modern Cornwall’, 23.


Marie Trevelyan, The Land of Arthur, its Heroes and Heroines (London: J. Hogg, 1895); Owen Morien Morgan, The Light of Britannia: the mysteries of ancient British druidism unveiled, the original source of phallic worship revealed; the secrets of the court of King Arthur revealed...the Holy Grail discovered in Wales (Cardiff: D. Owen, 1987). Ernest Rhys’s work is discussed in the following chapter.


Edwards, The Eisteddfod, 40.

There is no English-language biography (or critical study) of Jones’s work. For information see Emrys Wynn Jones, ‘Jones, Thomas Gwynn (1871–1949)’, Oxford DNB.

T. Gwynn Jones, ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’, in Caniadau (Wrecsam: Hughes a’i Fab, 1934), 15-34 (II. 481-3). No complete translation of ‘Ymadawiad Arthur’ has been published. An extended extract is available in Tony Conran’s second edition of Welsh Verse. This translation was very kindly provided by Katie Gramich, who has been of immeasurable assistance in suggestions for this section.


J. Ellis Williams, ‘Drama’, A Great Welshman, 6-8 (7).

Winners of the Eisteddfod Chair for the awdl following Jones include: J. Machreth Rees’s ‘Geraint ac Enid’ (Rhyl, 1904); John Dyfnaill Owen’s ‘Y Greal Santaid’ (Swansea, 1907); D. Cledlyn Davies’s ‘Dychweliad Arthur’ [‘Arthur’s Return’] (Mold, 1923); William Morris’s ‘OgofArthur’ [‘Arthur’s Cave’] (Neath, 1934). In addition, D. Tecwyn Evans won the cyfieithiadau (academic prize) for his translation of Morris’s ‘The Defence of Guenevere’, ‘Diffyniad Gwenhwyfar’, at the 1915 Bangor Eisteddfod; and Pardam Besrudd won the Rhiangerdd for ‘Olwen’ (Neath, 1918). Breaking away from the Romantic version of the Arthurian story, the winner of the 1936 Crown at the Abergwaun Eisteddfod was David Jones’s ‘Yr anialwch’ (The Waste Land). Each year the National Eisteddfod
Committee produces a paperback volume containing all the prize-winning entries, with accompanying adjudications.

Away from the Eisteddfod, the Tristram and Iseult story was the central theme of the most significant work of Elphin (Robert Arthur Griffith), *Sonedau'r Nos* [Night Sonnets] (1902); E. Tegla Davies published *Y Great Sanctaidd* [The Holy Grail] for children (Wrexham: Hughes a'i Fab) in 1922; Frank Harold Lee's adaptation of Malory, *The Children's King Arthur* (London: Harrap, 1935) was translated into Welsh as *Brenin Arthur y plant* (London: Harrap, 1953); and Tom Parry-Jones reworked the early Welsh poem ‘Preiddau Annwn’ into a short verse drama featuring Pluto and Persephone, instead of Arthur and his warriors, in *Preiddau Annwn* (Aberystwyth: Gomer, 1944), 7-19.

These were published in three forms: the 1902 Eisteddfod edn: *Yr Awdl, Y Bryddest, A'r Telynegion* (Caernarfon: Eisteddfod Committee, 1902), 1-48; *Ymadawiad Arthur a Chaniadau Ereill* (Caernarfon: Cwmni y Cyhoeddwyr Cymreig, 1910), and *Detholiad o Ganiadau* (Gwasg Gregynog: y Drenewydd, 1925).


Jones, ‘Atro Arthur’, in *Manion* (Wrecsam: Hughes a'i fab, 1932), 70-2, ll. 5, l. Again, the English translation has been kindly provided by Kate Gramich.


J. Graham Jones, ‘Wales Since 1900’, 225.

I am indebted to Katie Gramich for pointing out this reference.


R.S. Thomas, ‘Welsh History’ (l. 15) and ‘Welsh Landscape’ (l. 20), in *Collected Poems* [1993], (London: Phoenix, 2000), 36 and 37.

Thomas, ‘Welsh History’, l. 30.


Thomas, ‘A Welshman to any Tourist’, *Collected Poems*, ll. 6, 8-12.


Chapter Five


3 B. Ifor Evans, ‘Foreword’ to W.P. Ker’s The Dark Ages [1904] (London: Thomas Nelson, 1955), v-xiii. Evans also stated that Ker’s scholarly ability lay in his ‘synthetic power of unifying, often across centuries, apparently disparate ideas, gave a strong and fresh illumination to the themes he explained’ (vi).


5 Ker was born in Glasgow in 1855; he died during a walking expedition in Italy in 1923, a year after he retired from academic life. He held professorships at the University College of South Wales, Cardiff, and University College, London; he was also a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, from 1879; and was elected Chair of Poetry at Oxford in 1920. During the Great War he was engaged in confidential work for the Admiralty. See Evans, ‘Foreword’, to Dark Ages; R.W. Chambers, ‘Ker, William Paton’, rev. A.S.G. Edwards, Oxford DNB (2004).

Ker, The Dark Ages, 339.

Ker wrote that the Three Romances ‘in spite of their foreign associations [...] are hardly less purely Celtic than the Four Branches [of the Mabinogion] themselves’ – The Dark Ages, 338. The debate over the Welsh or French origins of the Three Romances – which is part of a much wider debate as to the indebtedness of Arthurian romance to Celtic sources, discussed below – is summarised by Gerald Morgan, ‘Welsh Arthurian Literature’, in A History of Arthurian Scholarship, 77-94 (esp. 88-9).

Ker, Epic and Romance, 334, 337.

Ker, Epic and Romance, 337.

Ker, Epic and Romance, 335.


Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1963), 175.


Chambers, Arthur of Britain, 20, 232.

Eugène Vinaver, Malory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929); ‘Malory’s Morte Darthur in the Light of a Recent Discovery’, reprinted from the Bulletin of the John Rylands Library (Manchester: Manchester


23 J.D. Bruce, The Evolution of Arthurian Romance from the Beginnings down to the Year 1300 [1923], 2 vols (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1958), I, 94, 269, n.2, II, 90-103.

24 Bruce, Evolution of Arthurian Romance, I, 74-91.

25 Brynley F. Roberts, for instance, stated in 1964 that as ‘Bruce was the starting point for any excursion’ into Arthurian scholarship, so is Loomis’s 1959 collection ‘that text today.’ See ‘Supplementary Bibliography’ to the 1964 reprint of Chambers’s Arthur of Britain, 301-20 (302).

26 Loomis, The Development of Arthurian Romance, 15.

27 For instances of all these jumps see Weston, From Ritual to Romance [1920] (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), and Loomis, Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance [1926].

28 Loomis, ‘Objections to the Celtic Origin of the “Matière de Bretagne”’, 215.


30 Loomis, ‘Objections to the Celtic Origin of the “Matière de Bretagne”’, 220.

31 Her first work, assisted by Nutt, was a verse translation of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s Parzival. She followed this with a critical study, Legends of the Wagner Drama (New York: Charles Scribner, 1897).

32 Loomis, ‘Objections to the Celtic Origin of the “Matière de Bretagne”’, 213.


42 Weston, 'Introduction', *Sir Gawain and the Lady of Lys*, xv.

43 For instance, Loomis, in *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance*, employs the fame of Bleheris to substantiate his claims concerning the dominance of Celtic bards and conteurs in the mid twelfth century (29, 32).

44 Grayson, 'In quest of Jessie Weston', 12.

45 Weston, 'Introduction' to *Sir Gawain and the Lady of Lys*, xv-xvi.

46 Frederic Madden (ed.), *Syr Gawayne; a collection of ancient romance-poems, by Scottish and English authors, relating to that celebrated knight of the Round Table* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1839).


48 The title of Rhys's first volume of autobiography was called *Everyman Remembers* (London: J.M. Dent, 1931).


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57 Malory, Le Morte Darthur, ed. Shepherd, 689.
60 Roberts, Ernest Rhys, 30.
64 Roberts, Ernest Rhys, 66.
65 Rhys, Wales England Wed, 104.
66 David Llewellyn Dodds has collected the complete Arthurian works of Masefield, save Badon Parchments, in John Masefield, Arthurian Poets Series (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1994).
69 Masefield, So Long to Learn, 91.
70 Masefield, In the Mill (London: Heinemann, 1941), 235-6; C.B. Smith, A Life, 53.
73 Masefield, ‘Badon Hill’, ll. 139-40.
82 Masefield, ‘The Fight on the Beach or The Passing’, ll.115-8.
An example of the desolation of war is contained in one of the unpublished Arthurian poems of this period, ‘The Coming of the Pirates’ (Dodds, 276), which describes the fear of the people as they see ‘the red sails of the pirates’ approach: men ‘fleeing before the stroke / A widow with a child upon her arm / A handless victim of the pirates’ sport’ (ll. 17-19).


Masefield, ‘Fulfilment’, Collected Poems, 901-8 (l. 5).

Masefield, ‘Fulfilment’, l. 88.

Masefield, ‘Fulfilment’, l. 135.


Eliot placed Jones among the four greatest modern writers – namely himself, Pound and Joyce – in ‘A Note of Introduction’, In Parenthesis [1937] (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), vii-viii (vii); Auden wrote that In Parenthesis is ‘the greatest book about the First World War’ that he had read, while The Anathemata (1952), Auden claimed that Jones was ‘one of the most important poems of our time’ – ‘On The Anathemata’, in David Jones: Man and Poet, ed. John Matthias (Orono, Maine: National Poetry Foundation, 1989), 45-9 (45-6); Yeats hailed the author of In Parenthesis at a party in 1938 – Keith Alldritt, David Jones: writer and artist (London: Constable, 2003), 108; Stephen Spender took Stravinsky to visit Jones in his monastic room in Harrow-on-the-Hill sometime in the 1950s.

Stravinsky, who was a great admirer of Jones’s work said that it was ‘like visiting a holy man in his cell’ – Spender, ‘David Jones’, Man and Poet, 65-8.


See, for instance: Auden, ‘On The Anathemata’, in Man and Poet, 51-3; J.E. Meredith, Review of Jon Silkin, Out of Battle: the poetry of the Great War, in Poetry Wales 8.3 (Winter, 1972): 96-105 (103). Jones’s second great work, The Anathemata, which many critics have favoured over In Parenthesis, was never quite finished to Jones’s satisfaction. Two volumes of poetic fragments have been collected by his friends René Hague and Harman Grisewood: The Sleeping Lord and Other Fragments (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) and The Roman Quarry (New York: Sheep Meadow Press, 1981).


Jones, In Parenthesis, 70, 1; cf. Malory, Morte Darthur, ed. Shepherd, 280.


105 Jones, In Parenthesis, 66, and corresponding note: n.12, 203.


110 Jones, In Parenthesis, 80-2.

111 Jones, In Parenthesis, 84.

112 Jones, In Parenthesis, n. 37 (K), 209.

113 Jones was familiar with Collingwood’s work, referring to it in the Prefaces to both In Parenthesis (xiii) and The Anathemata (36).


116 Jones, In Parenthesis, 137.

117 Jones, In Parenthesis, 139.

118 Jones, In Parenthesis, 154.

119 Jones, In Parenthesis, 154.


121 ‘In Parenthesis poses for itself the problem of re-attaching traditional meanings to the unprecedented actualities of the war. […] The poem is a deeply conservative work which uses the past not, as it often pretends to do, to shame the present, but really to ennoble it. The effect of the poem, for all its horrors, is to rationalise and even to validate the war by implying that it somehow recovers many of the motifs and values of medieval chivalric romance. […] It is both overtly patriotic and even propagandist’ – Paul Fussell, The Great War and Modern Memory [1975] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 145, 147. Cf. Mary E. Jones’s article, ‘Heroism in Unheroic Warfare’, Poetry Wales 8.3 (Winter, 1972), 14-21: ‘The great Welsh heroic battles are battles of defeat for the Welsh; their greatness lies in sacrifice, not in victory. The First World War for David Jones does not continue the tradition of Waterloo, of Trafalgar, of the Boer War, but of ancient battles which were heroic defeats, battles such as those at Catraeth and at Camlann and Llewelyn’s last battle. […] What the men privately achieve is in no way related to the aims, achievements and failures of the organising “staff”, for there is a barrier of total non-communication between the privates and “staff”’ (15).


123 Aldritt, David Jones, 106.

124 Aldritt, David Jones, 156.

125 Dilworth, ‘David Jones and Fascism’, 155.


127 On the parallels between the Catholic right and fascism see Hobsbawm, Age of Extremes, 114-5. Cf. Elizabeth Ward’s contextualisation of Jones’s Catholicism with regard to the Catholic intellectuals, such as Christopher Dawson, with whom Jones mixed in the 20s and 30s: David Jones: mythmaker, 42-63.


129 These critics are mentioned in Williams’s essay, ‘Malory and the Grail Legend’ (1944), in The Image of the City and Other Essays, ed. Anne Ridler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944), 186-94.


131 Extracts from the ‘commonplace book’ are contained in Williams’s The Image of the City and Other Essays, ed. Anne Ridler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).


Williams claimed that the presence of Byzantium in the Taliessin-cycle was not inspired by Yeats’s recent Byzantine Poems: ‘The Making of Taliessin’ [1941], in *Image of the City*, 179-93 (181).


Williams, ‘The Prayers of the Pope’, *Region*, 50-61 (l. 102).

Lewis, *Arthurian Torso*, 104.


Williams, ‘Bors to Elayan: on the king’s coins’, *Taliessin*, 42-5 (ll. 29-31).

Williams, ‘On the King’s Coins’, ll. 54-9.

Williams, ‘On the King’s Coins’, ll. 60-3.

Williams, ‘On the King’s Coins’, ll. 72-3.

Williams, ‘On the King’s Coins’, ll. 94-6.

Williams, ‘On the King’s Coins’, l. 32.


Williams, ‘Lamorack and the Queen Morgause of Orkney’, *Taliessin*, 38-41 (ll. 2, 9-10).


Iolo Morganwg, NLW MS 13139A (late eighteenth / early nineteenth century), transcribed and translated by Patrick K. Ford, in *Ystoria Taleisin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 42.
Chapter Six

1 T.H. White, Projected Introduction to The Once and Future King (never published), quoted in Elisabeth Brewer, T.H. White’s ‘The Once and Future King’ (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), 210.
3 A complete bibliography of White’s work can be found in François Gallix, T.H. White: an annotated bibliography (New York and London: Garland, 1986).
6 The Ill-Made Knight (New York: Putnam, 1940); British edn (London: Collins) appeared in 1941.
7 Townsend Warner, T.H. White, 175.
8 White, The Once and Future King (London: Collins, 1958); U.S. edn published the same year (New York: Putnam).
10 White, TOFK, 334.
11 White, TOFK, 335.
12 White, TOFK, 342.
13 White, TOFK, 454.
14 White, TOFK, 526, 517.
15 White, TOFK, 602.
16 White, TOFK, 685.
17 White, TOFK, 697.
18 White, TOFK, 781.
19 White, TOFK, 812.
22 White, TOFK, 463-5.
23 The older Lancelot enjoys being 'nagg[ed]' over drinking too much (TOFK, 587), while Agravaine is not only frequently drunk, but appears to be suffering from the effects of delirium tremens (TOFK, 568, 605); on Arthur's 'warm feelings' for Lyó-lyok see TOFK, 773-6 and 783-4. These passages were cut when the geese scenes were inserted into The Sword in the Stone (TOFK, 169-87). Townsend Warner's biography of White contains many instance of White's affection for animals, especially his Red Setter bitch, Brownie.
24 For White's eighteen-point list on Lancelot's characteristics see Townsend Warner, T.H. White, 148-50.
25 White, TOFK, 339.
26 Rosemary Sutcliff, King Arthur Stories [The Sword and the Circle; The Light Beyond the Forest; The Road to Camlann] (London: Red Fox, 1999).
30 Townsend Warner, T.H. White, 166.
31 White, TOFK, 511.
32 White, TOFK, 511.
33 White, TOFK, 511-2.
34 White, Journal, June 14, 1940, quoted in Townsend Warner, T.H. White, 166.
35 For hawking see TOFK, 9-11, 358-9; jousting, 54, 345-7; armour, 20, 59-72, 342-7; archery, 39; hunting, 146-59; and architecture 577-8.
36 White, TOFK, 345, 281, 343, 349.
37 White, TOFK, 5, 23.
38 White, TOFK, 213.
Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites are mentioned on page 345, Roger Ascham is unconsciously quoted by Arthur as he comments on the gradual decline of his kingdom: ‘If something is not done [...] the whole Round Table will go to ruin. It is not only that feud and open manslaughter have started: there is the bold bawdry as well’, TOFK, 469. The rest are discussed between 702-4 and 809-12.

Brewer, T.H. White’s ‘The Once and Future King’, 86.

White, T.H. White’s ‘The Once and Future King’, 86.


Edward Strachey (ed.), Le Morte D’Arthur [1868], 2nd edn [1891] (London: Macmillan, 1901), xiii. White’s heavily annotated copy of Strachey’s Morte is now preserved in the Harry Ransom Centre in the University of Texas, Austin, along with a great collection of White’s MSS and papers. See also Brewer, T.H. White’s ‘The Once and Future King’, 198, 211.

White, Projected Introduction to The Once and Future King (never published), quoted in Brewer, T.H. White’s ‘The Once and Future King’, 210.


White, TOFK, 209, 702.

White, TOFK, 561.

White TOFK, 575, 599.

White, Letter to L.J. Potts, December 5, 1940, Letters to a Friend, 115-6.

White, TOFK, 721, 803.

White, TOFK, 739.

White, TOFK, 764.

White, TOFK, 722-3.

White, TOFK, 799.

White, TOFK, 780.

White, TOFK, 781.
61 White, *TOFK*, 722, 801.
62 White, *TOFK*, 801.
66 White, *TOFK*, 789.
67 White, *TOFK*, 788.
68 White, *TOFK*, 790-1.
70 White, *TOFK*, 284.
71 White, *TOFK*, 284.
72 White, *TOFK*, 284.
73 White, *TOFK*, 562-3.
76 White, *TOFK*, 225-32.
78 White, *The Ill-Made Knight*, 187.
79 White, *TOFK*, 472
81 White, *TOFK*, 563-4, 646.
82 White, *TOFK*, 562-3.
83 Hallam Tennyson, quoted in preliminary notes to ‘Merlin and Vivien’, 805-807 (805).
84 White, *The Sword in the Stone*, 295; *TOFK*, 220.
86 White, *TOFK*, 238.
88 White, *TOFK*, 245.
93 White, *TOFK*, 568.
94 White, *TOFK*, 697.
See, for instance, Alan Lupack, ‘The Book that Grows Up’, *Arthuriana* 11.3 (Fall 2001): 103-114 (112-3).

Brewer, *T.H. White’s ‘The Once and Future King’*, 3.


Bridie, ‘Lancelot’, in *Plays for Plain People* 17, 4-5.


Alan Jay Lerner (Book and Lyrics) and Frederick Loewe (Music), *Camelot: based on ‘The Once and Future King’ by T.H. White* [first performed in 1960] (London: Chappell, 1961).


111 Collingwood, *Roman Britain*, 324.
113 Rosemary Sutcliff, *Sword at Sunset*, vii.

One of his more disruptive qualities was a left-wing outlook which could take curiously graceless forms (he once refused to conduct at a performance of ‘The Immortal Hour’ because King George V was there). The Arthur cycle, in his hands, kept its Tennysonian panoply yet ended with a peasant’s revolt and a red dawn in the east. (Ashe, ‘The New Matter of Britain’, in *The Quest for Arthur’s Britain*, ed. Ashe (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 244-57 (255).)


132 An extract from Alan M. Kent’s ‘Nativitas Christi’, is included in *Inside Merlin’s Cave*, 217-8.


Vinaver, 'Introduction', Works, xliv.

Green, King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, 11.

Sutcliff, King Arthur Stories [The Sword and the Circle; The Light Beyond the Forest; The Road to Camlann] (London: Red Fox, 1999), 635-6; James Riordan, Tales of King Arthur [1982] (London: Dean, 1992), 119-20. All three conclusions are very similar and it may be that Sutcliff and Riordan are more directly influenced by Green than Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur'.


Dalrymple, 'English Arthurian Literature', 146.


Quoted in Janet Grayson, 'In Quest of Jessie Weston', 12.

Conclusion

1 Tennyson, 'The Coming of Arthur', ll. 329-30.
2 For discussion of the dating of Malory's Morte Darthur see the Introduction, n. 44.
3 Tennyson, 'The Coming of Arthur', ll. 503, 508-12.
4 Tennyson, 'The Coming of Arthur', l. 474.
5 Tennyson, 'The Passing of Arthur', l. 408.
6 Tennyson, 'The Coming of Arthur', 504
Cf. Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack, *King Arthur in America* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), especially their conclusion (326): ‘The prevalence of Arthurian material in American popular culture, which makes the legends accessible to everyone and which promotes the ideals of the Arthurian realm as attainable by anyone who cultivates the right values, is in fact the ultimate democratization of the Arthurian tradition.’


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