



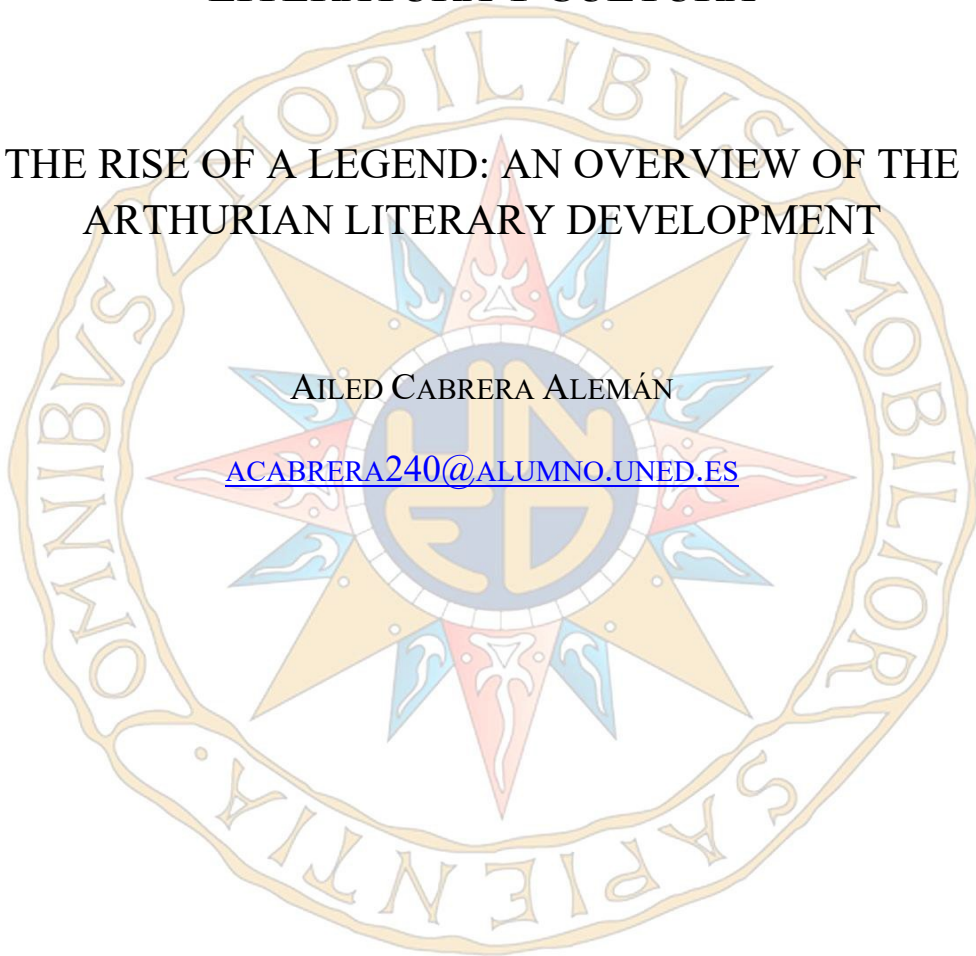
TRABAJO FIN DE GRADO

**GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES: LENGUA,
LITERATURA Y CULTURA**

**THE RISE OF A LEGEND: AN OVERVIEW OF THE
ARTHURIAN LITERARY DEVELOPMENT**

AILED CABRERA ALEMÁN

ACABRERA240@ALUMNO.UNED.ES



TUTOR ACADÉMICO: Marta Cerezo Moreno

LÍNEA DE TFG: Literatura inglesa hasta el siglo XVII

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA

CURSO ACADÉMICO: 2020-21- Convocatoria: Junio

Dedication

To my tutor, for her guiding hand

To my family, for their unwavering support

Abstract

The literary development of the Arthurian legend can be observed in three authors' work, which set the foundation for future retellings of the legend: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*; Chrétien de Troyes's *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charrette*, and *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*; and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. An analysis of these works' most influential and notable additions to the legend reveals how each author adapted the Arthurian legend to their unique style and worldview.

Keywords: King Arthur; Arthurian romances; courtly love; chivalry; knights

Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
1. Motivation	5
2. Academic Relevance.....	6
3. Research Questions.....	7
4. Methodology and Outline	8
5. State of the Art.....	8
AN OVERVIEW OF THE RISE OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND.....	11
1. Geoffrey of Monmouth's <i>Historia regum Britanniae</i>	11
1.1. The Influence of the <i>Prophetiae Merlini</i>	11
1.2. The Conception of Arthur.....	14
1.3. The Arthuriad: Imperial Arthur and his Court	15
2. Chrétien de Troyes's Romances	19
2.1. <i>Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)</i>	19
2.2. <i>Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)</i>	22
3. Thomas Malory's <i>Le Morte Darthur</i>	25
3.1. Chivalry in Malory's <i>Morte Darthur</i>	26
3.2. Malory's Lancelot	28
3.3. Lancelot in the Grail Quest.....	30
3.4. Guinevere in Malory's <i>Morte Darthur</i>	31
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	33
REFERENCES	34

INTRODUCTION

1. Motivation

Some myths become part of the collective consciousness and stay there for millennia, surviving and flourishing in innumerable texts and media. It has been theorised that the most enduring stories are those that are the most malleable and therefore the most adaptable. They are stories that have “unfinished cultural business” or “continuing historical relevance (economic, cultural, psychological)” as Hutcheon has observed. And perhaps no other story has so much “unfinished business” as the story of Arthur in the Anglo-Saxon world, with each subsequent author continuing the intertextual dialogue and moulding the story to the particular historical issues of their time and their own agenda. Not only that, but the virtual impossibility of attesting Arthur’s historicity with any certainty has transformed Arthurian legend into a fascinating mystery.

Arthur has become part of the English imagination and a central figure in the Matter of Britain. He is the protagonist of early folk stories whose origin has been lost in the mists of time. Even before Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his famous *Historia regum Britanniae* (c.1136), it seems Arthur had already enjoyed international renown as attested by the carvings of an Arthurian scene found in the Italian cathedral at Modena which has been dated between 1099 and 1109 and unequivocally proves Arthurian legend already enjoyed wide-spread acclaim by that time (Hutton 34). Unfortunately, no extant manuscripts survive that could shed light on the early evolution of the legend. We can only count on the *Historia Brittonum*, dating to the ninth century and tentatively attributed to Nennius, as the earliest source to mention Arthur.

The chroniclers gave way to the romance tradition and, at the hands of Chrétien de Troyes, the Arthurian legend became the standard of courtly love, spreading all over Western Europe. Arthurian characters and stories enjoyed great popularity during the Middle Ages but they were not only a source of literary enjoyment and moral instruction. They were also used in British public life. For example, Merlin’s prophecies were for a long time subject to speculation and political interpretation with passages and elements associated with real-life events and people. The Arthurian legend was also employed as a way for monarchs to ascertain their power, one prime example being the staging of ‘Arthur’s tomb’ found in Glastonbury in 1191, just at a time when it was beneficial to dash the Welsh’s hope of the return of their ‘legitimate’ king, as Pryor has noted.

Another Arthurian author whose literary impact is unquestionable and relevant to Medieval literary studies was Thomas Malory, whose *Le Morte Darthur* still enjoys wide popularity and the status of a classic. Consequent modern adaptations of the myth have been almost invariably inspired by his series of Arthurian tales, and a myriad of studies and analyses of his work are published every year.

Whether an Arthurian figure actually existed or not, the value of the myth and its impact on the British mind cannot be denied. Now more than ever Arthurian legend has a hold on the modern imagination. Its role has extended to the global stage and, as Pryor remarks, one day Arthur might become “the most enduring character from British history”. The vastness and allure of Arthurian literature are what prompts my motivation in focusing my TFG on some of the most influential literary works which helped establish the Arthurian legend in the “Matter of Britain”.

2. Academic Relevance

The Arthurian legend bears great weight and importance in the field of *English Studies*. Not only in the study of English literature and history but in the study of the evolution of the English language as well. This topic is of great significance in the subjects studied in our Degree, as an understanding of the Arthurian legend and its impact is essential for a complete grasp of British culture and psyche.

Arthurian texts, for example, had an important role in Medieval translation with texts being translated and adapted to and from German, French, English, Icelandic, Danish, Italian, etc. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, as a case in point, was translated from the original Latin to Norman-French by Wace. And Wace's *Roman de Brut* was subsequently translated by Layamon into Middle English.

The Arthurian, medieval body of work is representative of British literature and its evolution. Many of these Arthurian texts have become literary classics and continue to be studied and read by many students and scholars of English literature which ensure their endurance and place of honour among other medieval texts. They provide prime examples of the origins of courtly love in romance literature. At the hands of Chrétien de Troyes, a new genre was born with his beautiful Arthurian romances. Malory's *Morte*, one of the last great representatives of chivalric romance, became the standard for anyone looking to immerse themselves in Arthurian legend.

Specifically, the Arthurian legend was studied in the course *Literatura Inglesa I - Ejes de la Literatura Medieval y Renacentista* through the reading and analysis of passages from Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* and the anonymous poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and was again referenced in the study of Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* in *Gender Studies (Género y Literatura en Países de Habla Inglesa)*.

3. Research Questions

This TFG aims to give an overview and analysis of the literary development of Arthurian legend through some of its most influential literature. For that purpose, I will focus on the main literary works which contributed to the consolidation of the Arthurian legend as we know it today. Consequently, I will centre on Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*; Chrétien de Troyes's romances, specifically, *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charrette*, and *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*; and Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*. Of these selected works, I will analyse certain essential elements that each work introduced into the legend, which were of fundamental importance for later renderings of the myth.

I will then address, separately, the import of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* which helped popularise King Arthur and introduced characters like Uther Pendragon and Merlin. In this pseudo-history, Arthur becomes for the first time a conquering emperor, but his nascent empire promptly collapses due to Mordred's treachery and Guinevere's betrayal.

Chrétien de Troyes's romances, on the other hand, were the most influential in the Arthurian romance tradition with the introduction of 'courtly love' in *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charrette*, and the creation of the Holy Grail in his unfinished *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*. Since these two romances were consequently absorbed by later rewritings of the Arthurian legend and became staples, in this TFG I will centre only on them—leaving out Chrétien's other romances—and analyse the use of their innovative characters and themes.

Finally, Malory's *Morte Darthur* earns its place in this TFG's analysis indisputably by nature of its status as a classic. After it was published, it quickly became the seminal work on Arthurian legend to which later authors would draw on for their own adaptations of the legend, and readers, for the ultimate rendering of the tales of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. It was the first complete Arthurian chronicle written in the

English language which merged all the different storylines into a reduced and comprehensible manuscript which the advent of the printing press made easier to promulgate and cement into the popular mind.

4. Methodology and Outline

The methodology to be used in this TFG will adhere to its main objective, that is, it will centre on the most important additions that each selected work of Arthuriana made to the overall legend. Since the importance that each work had was different, I will analyse diverse aspects depending on the literary work at hand. In Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, for example, the focus will be on its corresponding section on Merlin's prophecies and then on King Arthur: his remarkable conception shrouded in deceit, his achievements as king and then as an emperor—especially his continental conquests—and his exemplary court.

Regarding Chrétien de Troyes's romances, the focus will change to the particulars of the romance tradition. I will analyse the importance of 'courtly love' and the portrayal of infidelity and chivalry in *Lancelot*. With de Troyes's *Perceval*, conversely, I will examine its religious theme and the progress of Perceval as a knight through his adventures.

As for Malory's *Morte Darthur*, I will study its distinct portrayal of chivalry and 'courtly love' with relation to adultery, its sympathetic approach to the character of Lancelot, and his role in the Grail Quest, and Malory's portrayal of Queen Guinevere.

Thus, for the realisation of this study, I will use a variety of resources. Mainly, essays from experts in the field of Arthuriana, which have been published in printed and digital editions. These essays provide detailed discussions and criticism on various themes and topics appertaining to the literary works that will be examined.

5. State of the Art

Since the Middle Ages, Arthurian legend has been under scrutiny by scholars, particularly, by historians which called into question the historicity of King Arthur. The first of these was William of Newburgh who, in 1190, remarked of Geoffrey's *Historia* that "it is quite clear that everything this man wrote... was made up" (Thorpe). During the Renaissance, Arthuriana underwent serious scholarly criticism at the hands of Polydore Vergil, who entirely rejected Arthur as a true historical figure in his *Anglica*

Historia (1534). But it was not until the end of the 19th century that attempts were made to explore the Arthurian tradition thanks to the English scholar, Jessie L. Weston.

Before the 1980s Arthurian scholarship was focused mainly on literary history but, from that point on, an ever-increasing number of articles and essay collections on Arthurian criticism have been published. With the main objective of this TFG in mind, I have picked a number of relevant studies, historical and critical, that analyse elements and themes of Arthurian legend.

The first stop is on an eminent collection of essays written by some of the best Arthurian scholars that, despite its age, offers extremely good criticism on Arthurian texts from a historical perspective. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* was first published in 1959 and edited by Roger Sherman Loomis. From its essays, I will use Parry and Caldwell's analysis of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*; Jean Frappier's on Chrétien de Troyes and his analysis of *Lancelot and Perceval*; and some elements of Eugène Vinaver's analysis of Sir Thomas Malory.

Arthurian Narrative in Latin Tradition, first published in 1998 by Siân Echard offers in its first chapter a very complete examination of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*. She analyses the position of Arthur inside the larger history of the English kings and how this colours Geoffrey's account of King Arthur. This chapter particularly informs my approach to the conception of Arthur and, later, his reign. By the hand of Echard also comes *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin* edited by her and first published in 2011. In this compilation of essays, there are two centred on Geoffrey: one by Julia Crick which focuses on the *Prophetiae Merlini* and their complexities which are evidence of Geoffrey's artifice, and the other written by Echard herself on Geoffrey's *Arthuriad*, it begins by analysing Geoffrey's sources and the relation of his pseudo-history to actual history, and then proceeds to examine the text itself from Arthur's conception to his doomed reign.

Chrétien de Troyes Revisited by Karl D. Uitti, published in 1994, is entirely centred on Chrétien de Troyes's romances. Chapter 4, written as a comparative study between *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (*Lancelot*) and *Le Chevalier au Lion* (*Yvain*), has a separate section on *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* that analyses the romance's sources, Lancelot and chivalry, and his relationship with Guinevere. Chapter 5's focus is on *Le Conte du*

Graal (Perceval) and examines the uniqueness of the tale compared with Chrétien's other romances, the tension between chivalry and religion, and Perceval's knightly progress.

A Companion to Malory, published in 1996, collects several essays on Malory's *Morte Darthur* written by distinguished scholars. Richard Barber's essay on chivalry in the *Morte* will guide my analysis of Malory's perspective on chivalry. This collection also contains an excellent essay by Elizabeth Edwards on the place of women in the *Morte*, which examines, in part, the role of Guinevere in Arthur's court and among his knights. C. David Benson's essay on the ending of the *Morte* also adds particular insight on adultery and its role in the downfall of Arthur's court.

Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field, published in 2004, presents an excellent essay by Raluca L. Radulescu on Malory's characterisation of Lancelot during the Grail quest and 'The Healing of Sir Urry'. This essay on Lancelot and the crisis of Arthurian knighthood explores Malory's sympathetic perspective on Lancelot and will guide me in the making of this TFG.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE RISE OF THE ARTHURIAN LEGEND

1. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*

Before Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, Arthur had been written about as a *dux bellorum* in Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*. He was mainly depicted as a warrior king that went on adventures and defeated many magical creatures, e.g., witches, giants, etc. Geoffrey of Monmouth professed to have written his *Historia* based on "a very old book in the British language" (Parry and Caldwell 81) and though this claim may have some validity, it is currently considered that the majority of his *Historia* is the product of his boundless creativity (Parry and Caldwell 82).

Echard notes that the Arthurian section in the *Historia* was the most influential for the development of the romance genre (*Arthurian Narrative* 37). It was Geoffrey of Monmouth who first wrote a cohesive story of Arthur's life from his conception to his tragic death. And as Crick gathers, it is Geoffrey who tells for the first time of Arthur's conception, draws Merlin into the story, turns Arthur into a continental conqueror accompanied by his illustrious knights, and relates Arthur's death in battle with the treacherous Mordred.

In this part, I will be focusing on some of the most remarkable plotlines and elements Geoffrey introduces to the Arthurian legend and the influence these had in its development.

1.1. The Influence of the *Prophetiae Merlini*

In pre-Galfridian literature, Merlin appeared under a different name. Mainly known as Myrddin in Old Welsh tradition and Ambrosius in Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*, Geoffrey changed his name to Merlin, which some authors attribute to Myrddin's similarity to the French *merde* (Jarman 143). But Geoffrey not only gave a new name to Merlin, he was also responsible for creating his mythical life and for the reverence given to his prophecies even 500 years later (Loomis, "Prologue" XV).

Geoffrey initially intended to write about Merlin's prophecies after he had completed the *Historia*. But prompted by Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, he first wrote about his Merlin in his *Prophetiae Merlini* (c. 1135) (Parry and Caldwell 75). These prophecies were later mostly incorporated in Book Seven of the *Historia*, as noted by Parry and Caldwell (76).

Although Geoffrey claims to have translated the prophecies from Welsh (130; bk. 7), it is widely accepted that most of the content in the prophecies is Geoffrey's own creation (Parry and Caldwell 76). Nevertheless, some of their substance can be traced back to older sources like Nennius's *Historia* and Welsh tradition (Parry and Caldwell 76). Geoffrey took Merlin's origin story from Nennius's Ambrosius who was born of a mortal woman and an incubus. This troubling birth, particularly for the deeply Catholic Medieval mind, presented some anxieties as Crick points out. Notwithstanding, many chose to ignore it or explain it away.

As Parry and Caldwell affirm, the *Prophetiae* can be divided into three parts (77). The first deals with recent past events—for Geoffrey's time which is Merlin's future—like the sinking of the White Ship with Henry's heir in it. The second part predicts future events, some easily predicted—the conquest of Ireland—and others written so ambiguously that are liable to fit a wide range of different events. As the predictions progress, they become increasingly surreal with more disturbances of Nature and animal symbolism (Parry and Caldwell 78). In the third part, astrological references become pervasive instead. Echard observes that this celestial imagery has negative implications given the apocalyptic ending of the *Prophetiae* and works as a prediction and foreshadowing of Arthur's rule (*Arthurian Narrative* 61).

It is considered by some that Geoffrey, influenced by Gildas's *De Excidio Britanniae*, gives Merlin's prophecies a Biblical tone and style in some parts, for instance, when announcing the fall of the Britons (Faletra 19). As Faletra reasons, the prophecies imply that the future is in a way pre-existent and that it can be discerned by knowledgeable human beings (25).

In later Arthurian chronicles, as in Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Merlin's prophecies are omitted. Crick concludes that the reason is to be found in an unsympathetic sentiment towards the prophecies. However, that may not have been always the case. Wace, himself, declares that his omission has a different explanation: "I say no more, for I fear to translate Merlin's Prophecies, when I cannot be sure of the interpretation thereof. It is good to keep my lips from speech, since the issue of events may make my gloss a lie." (par. 17). As Mason observes, Wace has a "scrupulous regard for the truth"; therefore, he refuses to translate Merlin's prophecies fearing to mistake their interpretation and provide an erroneous translation.

Whether Merlin's prophecies were frequently omitted, either by design or by necessity, Crick admits that this did not mean indifference. As discussed in the following paragraph, the prophecies played a role in public affairs and the political; and not only that, they provoked intellectual consideration. For example, as Crick writes, even bishops were among the first students of Merlin's prophecies. Bishop Alexander, the one responsible for encouraging Geoffrey to publish the *Prophetiae Merlini*, and to whom Geoffrey dedicated the prophecies, was one of those scholars. Scholarly interest also spread to the Continent and continued during the following centuries, as Crick exemplifies: it was quoted in Italy by Joachim of Fiore and cited in the French court by Guillaume le Breton; Frederick Barbarossa, in Germany, commissioned a French translation. This continental enthusiasm and concern for Merlin's prophecies are understood when one acknowledges the fact that they were widely respected and accepted by an international audience convinced that they also concerned their national affairs.

As mentioned above, Merlin's prophecies continued to be taken as fact for centuries after their publication, producing an interplay between prophecy and history, as discussed by Crick. People in the Middle Ages read them looking to identify the prophecies not only with current events but also with past and future ones. In the 12th century, they were widely applied to the reign of Henry I, as noted by Crick. And as described by Weir, during Henry II's reign, Henry was identified with Merlin's King of the North Wind; and his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, was seen as the Eagle of the Broken Covenant. A century later, in Edward I's time, the king was regarded in Scotland as the Covetous king of Merlin's prophecies, as Morris remarks. Readers, as Crick observes, also found allusions to the accession of Edward II in 1307 and the Black Death of 1347. It is striking that the prophecies were even introduced in historical writing, as Crick remarks; for instance, in Matthew Paris's *Historia anglicana*, he extrapolates historical events with passages from the *Prophetiae*. It is hardly surprising, then, that the prophecies became self-fulfilling in some cases; as Crick explains, they guided action. For example, during the tumultuous reign of Henry II, steps were taken to fulfil a particular prophecy at the time of the capture of William IV, king of Scots.

The *Prophetiae* was mainly continued to be circulated separately from the *Historia*, which may explain its later absence from Arthurian texts despite its unmitigated interest and authoritative consideration by readers across the continent. As Crick observes, the prophecies received utmost reverence, almost as much as scripture, and were the subject

of even extensive exogenesis. The *Prophetiae* established Merlin as an irrefutable historical figure in the Medieval mind, and his role in the Arthurian legend was forever rooted.

1.2. The Conception of Arthur

The story of Arthur's conception starts at a festive celebration where Uther Pendragon forgets his kingly responsibilities in favour of his obsession with Igera, as Echard notes (*Arthurian Narrative* 43). Uther effectively puts his personal interests above those of his people (Echard, *Arthurian Narrative* 52). Echard implies that Geoffrey may want us to see a stain on Arthur's birth since Uther selfishly wants Igera; and to quell his desire he goes into war with a previously loyal vassal—Gorlois—and commits adultery by deceiving the oblivious Igera (*Arthurian Narrative* 52).

For this ultimate deception which brings about Arthur's conception, Uther is assisted by Merlin without whose help it would have been impossible for Uther to trick Igera since Uther is only able to don Gorlois's face thanks to Merlin's aid. Here, it is important to mention that, according to Echard, Merlin's character shifts when Geoffrey begins to tell Arthur's story ("Geoffrey"). Echard considers that, immediately after Merlin spouts his prophecies, Geoffrey no longer represents him mystically ("Geoffrey"). Instead, he assumes the role of "wise man and adviser" (Echard, "Geoffrey"). Something that can be appreciated when Uther summons him, and Merlin says he will "employ new arts" and through "means of certain concoctions" he will change the appearance of Uther, Ulfyn, and Merlin himself (of Monmouth 158-159; bk 8). Thus, as Echard concludes, Merlin helps Uther not with magic but with 'drugs' ("Geoffrey").

Uther's artifice succeeds in deceiving Igera, which undoubtedly makes the reader feel uncomfortable, and even more so when the news of Gorlois's death arrives. This leaves us wondering why Geoffrey chose this particular origin story for the generous and great King Arthur. It could be argued that this deceitful conception serves to increase Arthur's worth since, despite being born from sin, he becomes the greatest hero of his age. Some similarities can even be found in Arthur's conception with that of Merlin's, another esteemed and notable character in the *Historia*. As Geoffrey narrates, Merlin's father also changed his appearance to be able to lay with the woman he desired, the only difference was that he was an incubus demon. And Merlin, as Arthur, despite his deceitful conception, went on to become a great and distinguished man.

Echard, however, wonders if the means by which the desired end is achieved are not sabotaging that end from the beginning (*Arthurian Narrative* 54). This makes sense since it is obvious throughout the *Historia* that the Briton kings always fail to stop outside threats whenever they allow their attention to wander and are not in full control of their forces, as Echard argues (*Arthurian Narrative* 54). While Uther is putting personal interest above his duty, Gorlois is unjustly killed by his army which then proceeds to shamelessly loot Gorlois's fortress. It is also distraction that plays a role in Arthur's downfall; while he is otherwise engaged in the continent, Mordred takes the opportunity to seize Arthur's kingdom and queen. Echard concludes that fortune may not always be in charge of human affairs but it surely is when the attention of authority has been distracted (*Arthurian Narrative* 54).

Echard also reflects that although Geoffrey is later quite clear about Arthur's legitimacy, the nature of Uther and Igera's marriage is not quite so (*Arthurian Narrative* 54). Gorlois's death means Uther is free to marry Igera; Geoffrey says that "when he learned of all that had occurred, he did indeed bemoan the death of Gorlois, but he also rejoiced that Igera was now freed from the bond of marriage (160; bk 8). However, Echard argues that their marriage may not have been a happy one since, according to the original text, when Geoffrey refers to their union, he used the phrase—*cum minimo amore*—"joined by no love at all" (*Arthurian Narrative* 55). Echard says this may have been an oversight on Geoffrey's part (*Arthurian Narrative* 55) and, indeed, the two translations of the *Historia* I have in my possession have 'fixed' this apparent scribal error. One of these books translates the controversial phrase as "bound by mutual affection" (of Monmouth 160; bk 8). But if Geoffrey phrased the text this way deliberately, Echard points out it would cast further shadows on Arthur's future (*Arthurian Narrative* 55). This wording, accompanied by the dark images conjured up by the prior placement of the *Prophetiae* in the *Historia*, seems to be warning the reader and foreshadowing the catastrophic end before Arthur has even appeared on the page (Echard, *Arthurian Narrative* 55).

1.3. The Arthuriad: Imperial Arthur and his Court

As soon as Arthur appears in the *Historia*, the reader knows that a grand story is about to unfurl. The Arthuriad takes up around a third of the *Historia* according to Echard (*Arthurian Narrative* 48). Geoffrey lingers on Arthur's story, detailing and describing,

unlike anything he has done previously. His first description of Arthur depicts him as a perfect ruler:

Although Arthur was only fifteen years old at the time, he was a youth of outstanding virtue and largesse. His innate goodness made him exhibit such grace that he was beloved by almost all the people. (of Monmouth 163; bk 9)

Echard points out that unlike the previous kings in the *Historia*, Arthur is portrayed as practical and shrewd which, accompanied by his goodness, might suggest he will be less likely to suffer from the same failings as the kings before him (*Arthurian Narrative* 46). She considers that Arthur is the embodiment of the ideas of kingship that existed in the 12th century (46).

Formally, Arthur's story is also different from the rest of the *Historia*. As Echard has argued, the effect is produced by the style and the thematic and artistic force (*Arthurian Narrative* 48). Geoffrey lingers on Arthur's victories, and the reader can bask in the fairness of a just and victorious reign, so that, when fate inevitably intervenes, the shock is even more striking (Echard, *Arthurian Narrative* 49).

Immediately after Arthur's coronation, he proclaims his intention to reclaim his land from the Saxons, which is his by right of inheritance (of Monmouth 163; bk 9). He goes on to battle at York, Lincoln, and Bath. He is victorious at each one and only does a strategic withdrawal at the advice of his counsellors. It is worthy of note that Geoffrey, seemingly arbitrarily, changes the name of the Battle of Mount Badon—from Nennius's *Historia Brittonum*—to Bath (Parry and Caldwell 84). In this battle, as Echard has observed, Arthur is further established as an "anti-pagan crusader" since, during his pre-battle speech to his troops, he calls onto God to aid in the banishment of the pagan scourge from their land ("Geoffrey"). It is also in preparation for this battle that we witness Arthur's arming, a convention that is common in epic and romance, according to Echard, and that hasn't been done by the previous kings in the *Historia* (*Arthurian Narrative* 49). His shield, sword, and spear are named and, as Parry and Caldwell conclude, the names are obviously derived from Welsh sources (84).

After felling "470 men on Caliburn's blade" (of Monmouth 167; bk 9), Arthur secures a rotund victory at the Battle of Bath but tirelessly continues his campaign, this time in Scotland, battling Scots and Picts and even repels an Irish invasion. Back at York to celebrate Christmas, he proves once more his good judgment by rebuilding churches,

establishing communities of religious men and women, and restoring titles and property (of Monmouth 170; bk 9).

As said above, after Arthur succeeds in defeating the Saxons, he subdues the Scots and Picts, sails over to Ireland, and goes on to conquer not only Ireland but Iceland. The kings of Gotland and Orkney fearing an invasion offer him tribute. Thus, Arthur reclaims Britain and beyond. Geoffrey tells us that for twelve years Arthur dwelled in his realm without going on farther campaigns and it is, at this time, when he starts to form his famous court by inviting “the bravest men from the far-flung reaches of his domains to join his household” (171; bk 9). But of course, Arthur’s ambition goes further, he desires to submit all of Europe and thus conquers Norway for his brother-in-law Loth, and subdues Denmark in the process, Gaul also, after nine years of conquest (of Monmouth 171-3; bk 9). But most impressively of all, it is Arthur’s victory over the Romans (of Monmouth 196; bk 10).

Arthur’s imperial conquests do not enjoy popularity in modern adaptations of the legend. As Lynch notes, it is one of the most neglected aspects of the story; but for medieval writers, it was of great importance (172-3). For Geoffrey, this imperial activity is something positive, especially since Arthur has returned Britain to its “original state”: as it was when Brutus first arrived (Echard, “Geoffrey”). Echard also affirms that “Geoffrey continually emphasises that this warfare is righteous” since Arthur always has a legitimate reason for seizing control of all of Europe; usually, these reasons are in the form of an illegitimate or immoral ruler (*Arthurian Narrative* 46-7). In Norway, there is a usurper who has taken the throne from Loth, and the Roman wars are justified since the Romans had previously subjugated the Britons (Echard, *Arthurian Narrative* 46-7). Echard argues that a “strong, legitimate rule and the difficulty of achieving it” are central themes for Geoffrey’s *Historia* (*Arthurian Narrative* 47).

However, Lynch views the legitimacy of the Roman war through different eyes. To him, Arthur’s argument for war is “unashamedly acquisitive” since he simply seeks the glory of defeating the Romans and “carrying off their prestige” which includes their riches (173). Although Lynch himself acknowledges that Geoffrey has given Arthur some legitimacy to claim Rome by making him a descendant of Brutus, whom he claims to be Aeneas’s great-grandson (173). But as Lynch notes, Arthur paradoxically claims, in a speech to his nobles, that “nothing that is acquired by force or violence can be justly

possessed by anyone” (of Monmouth 178; bk 9), blissfully ignoring that he has done exactly that in Gaul (174).

Lynch also makes a curious observation, Arthur wins an empire but, in almost its entirety, he gives it away mostly to client rulers: Scotland goes to Anguselus, Moray to Urian, Norway is given to Loth, Normandy to Bedevere, Anjou to Kay, etc. (174). Lynch considers that given the political climate of Geoffrey’s time, it seems deliberate that Arthur had lordship over the Angevin territory since they were enemies of the Normans and he was writing for an Anglo-Norman audience (174).

As said above, in lulls between Arthur’s campaigns, Geoffrey takes the time to give ample descriptions of Arthur’s court. After Arthur successfully subdues Gaul, Geoffrey pauses the narrative to describe Arthur’s court at Caerleon in—apparently accurate (Echard, “Geoffrey”)—detail (173-4; bk 9). Parry and Caldwell consider that Geoffrey took inspiration for Arthur’s court from Welsh tradition, especially from *Culhwch and Olwen*, but added his own touch to the narrative by making Arthur’s court into a glorification of all the courts he knew (84). Geoffrey’s description of Caerleon is followed by a long list of nobles and barons whose names, according to Parry and Caldwell, “he picked at random from old Welsh pedigrees” (84). But at this celebration there are also many foreign dignitaries from Western Europe which provides a wider notion of Arthur’s overarching influence (Echard, *Arthurian Narrative* 50).

It is at this plenary court that Geoffrey describes a jousting tournament, where we get the first glimpse of proto-romance as Echard observes (*Arthurian Narrative* 50):

Britain had at that point attained such a state of dignity that it surpassed all other kingdoms in its courtliness (...) those ladies would only grant their love to a man who had thrice proven his worth in battle. They were therefore made all the more chaste and the men all the more virtuous out of love for them. (of Monmouth 176; bk 9)

As can be seen, the knights have to thoroughly prove their prowess before the ladies will grant their love. Echard notes that this role assigned to the women, where they incite knightly deeds, foreshadows the concerns of the future vernacular romances. Arthur, for the first time, starts to elevate his court to a new height of modernity, that courts in the real world would eventually try to emulate (Echard, “Geoffrey”). Echard affirms that this plenary court was indeed introducing a new evolutive step in British history (“Geoffrey”).

2. Chrétien de Troyes's Romances

Chrétien de Troyes's romances were some of the most influential in the development of the Arthurian legend. He is considered the father of Arthurian romance (Archibald 140) and brought to prominence the Matter of Britain, though as Frappier remarks, he did not create the genre—Arthurian romance—out of nothing (157). Putter argues that because the authors following Geoffrey believed his *Historia* to be true, they did not change much of the story. Thus, it was needed for an author like Chrétien, who was not tied down by the constraints of history, to come along (43-44). Frappier attributes Chrétien's originality to using the spirit of Champagne and of France to supply the subject matter “with a more exquisite savour, clearer meaning, and broader human values” (157).

As Kelly comments, all existing evidence points to the fact that Chrétien was the first to include the quests by the Knights of the Round Table, Lancelot and Guinevere's love and the (Holy) Grail. In Chrétien's romances, the Knights of the Round Table take centre stage and Arthur is relegated to a more passive role, never becoming the main character in a quest (Archibald 140).

In this part, I will be analysing his two more famous romances, the ones that would be the most rewritten and adapted into other Arthurian stories: *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charrette*, and *Perceval ou le Conte du Graal*.

2.1. *Le Chevalier de la Charrette (Lancelot)*

One of the first things that come to mind on the subject of Arthurian love is the love triangle of King Arthur, Sir Lancelot, and Queen Guinevere (McCracken 188). This love represents the epitome of ‘courtly love’ in Arthurian literature. Lancelot, inspired by his love for the queen, is able to achieve his exceptional feats while, at the same time, elevating the renown of Arthur's court (McCracken 188). Indeed, chivalric prowess made knights respected and admired by fellow knights and fit to receive the love of a lady (Uitti 15).

It is worthy of mention that Chrétien left the *Lancelot* romance unfinished and gave it to Godefroy de Lagny to complete (Frappier 159). Archibald wonders whether the reason for this was that Chrétien grew unhappy with the subject matter—given to him by his patron Countess Marie de Champagne—or because it would be too difficult to give the lovers a satisfactory conclusion, having in mind that their love would only end with the fall of Camelot (141). Frappier seems to lean towards the former reason, given that he

advocates that Chrétien had a distinct code of ethics, demanding of his heroes sacrifice and greatness of soul; he reflects that though in *Lancelot* an adulterous relationship is idolised, Chrétien considered a marriage of true love as the ideal union (161). Frappier further suggests this by analysing the prologue of *Lancelot*, where Chrétien under the guise of thanking his patron, Countess Marie, skillfully disentangles himself from being considered the creator of the subject matter (175). However, Chrétien likely saw the commission as an artistic challenge and by the time he gave up on the story he had already achieved its main objective (Frappier 175).

Before Chrétien de Troyes wrote his romances there is no extant evidence in Old French of a knight named Lancelot (Uitti 69). Though Chrétien's prologue seems to suggest otherwise when he says that the countess has commanded him to write about Lancelot's adventures but with a 'twist' (Uitti 69). Uitti says that, however, two sources can certainly be discerned: the Tristan and Iseult legend and the "Matter of Britain". In Thomas's *Tristan*, a similar episode can be found: a queen is abducted, due to her husband granting a boon carelessly, and is returned to the king by a knight from the court (Uitti 69). And, of course, there are also the parallels of the love triangle and the adulterous relationship that the main characters of *Tristan and Iseult* share with *Lancelot's* (Uitti 69). Uitti remarks that *Lancelot* draws from the "Matter of Britain" using Celtic myth throughout the story, for example, there are references to fairies and the Land from Which No Stranger Returns—the Land of Gorre—(69). He also mentions as sources the story found in a hagiography—the Latin life of St Gildas—about the abduction of "Gwenhwyfar" by King Melwas, and Geoffrey's *Historia* or Wace's *Roman de Brut* because of the parallel between these stories of Guinevere's betrayal to Arthur with another man, i.e., Mordred and Lancelot (70).

Frappier distinguishes two parts in the poem, set apart by the moment Lancelot crosses the Sword Bridge; according to him, the first part is commonly considered incoherent and absurd, while the second follows logically Lancelot and Guinevere's dramatic relationship (177). This stark difference, I wonder, may be because the first part follows more closely Chrétien's sources, especially Welsh tradition, while the second part is more fully the fruit of Chrétien's imagination. As Frappier acknowledges, it is generally considered that a myth of Celtic origin forms the basis for the story (177). Though he also warns about erroneously concluding that Chrétien simply followed an established pattern without having the freedom to add new elements (178).

Chrétien's *Lancelot* is a highly esteemed exponent of 'courtly love' (*amour courtois*), a term that, as Uitti points out, was coined by Gaston Paris in the early 1880s to describe Lancelot's unwavering devotion towards Guinevere; the same kind of devotion celebrated by the Provençal *trobadors* in the 12th century (73). Paris, in fact, considered Chrétien de Troyes to be the "epic poet" of 'courtly love' (Uitti 73). The *Lancelot*, Uitti adds, is mostly structured by a lyric mode known as the song of the *mal-mariée* (the Ill-Married Wife) (74). Uitti notes that Guinevere is married to Arthur but she loves Lancelot; she is, thus, in a dangerous situation: if she acts on her love, she not only commits adultery but also treason against her lord (74). This, in turn, produces a split in Guinevere between her "external" duty to the masculine world—the City of Men—, i.e, her husband and his realm, and her "internal" feminine world where her private feelings and identity reside (Uitti 74).

Putter argues that the central theme of Chrétien's *Lancelot* is not the adulterous relationship between Guinevere and Lancelot but the conflict posed by Love and Reason, as demonstrated by Lancelot's momentary hesitation before mounting the cart (48). Chrétien uses Gawain and Lancelot as contrasting characters in the romance, each upholding a different value system (Putter 49). Gawain is representative of Reason while Lancelot is of Love. As Gilbert asserts, chivalric reason demands that a knight must maintain honour and avoid shame; and love is usually entwined with this goal since it rouses knights to great deeds of valour (158). So, understandably, in the cart episode, reason dictates that a knight must decline to ride the cart—given that Chrétien has warned it is a dishonour to do so—, just as Gawain decides. Lancelot, on the other hand, is guided by love and as Putter points out love does not listen to reason (49). Putter adds that this dichotomy is suggestive that truly heroic status cannot be achieved by listening to both sides, Lancelot must be guided completely by love to be fulfilled as a hero (49).

Uitti reasons this episode a bit further, saying that Lancelot's genuine honour lies not in being respected publicly but in the heart, where Love resides (72). It is also important to note that Lancelot represents a "feminised" chivalry; as Uitti observes, Lancelot is not trying to rescue the queen to increase his chivalric honour like Gawain. Instead, he is just trying to be reunited with the woman he loves; the rest is merely incidental (72). Kelly notes that it is Lancelot's love, even if it is foolish at times, which makes him able to rescue the abducted queen. Not only that, but he also frees the captives from Logres—Arthur's subjects—and saves Gawain in the Underwater Bridge.

Gilbert considers that the text encourages us to analyse our ideas of good and evil, perhaps even outside the literary confines of the story. She asks: is Lancelot the height of knighthood whose love allows him to transcend the usual rules, or is he a social outcast and a criminal? (158). Uitti, may have an answer, he determines that because Lancelot sacrifices public respect in service to his personal goal, he regains that “respect” by rescuing the queen; thus, the story seems to be suggesting that the service of Woman, Love, and Heart is the way—perhaps the only way—to achieve true knightly prowess, especially considering that Gawain failed the quest (72-3).

Uitti considers it highly ironic that Lancelot, who is hardly considered “respectable”—mainly because he chose to ride the cart—, is the one responsible for restoring order to the Arthurian world since, while doing these feats, he is betraying his king by loving his wife (65). Though, Uitti adds, it is Arthur who is at fault for the destruction of this order in the first place; he agreed to grant his boon to Meleagant, and let the queen leave the court with Kay, who then failed to defend Queen Guinevere and got them both captured (64). Uitti even boldly states that Arthur’s weakness and foolishness are one of the basic principles of the story (70).

Archibald reflects that despite the serious subject of the romance, i.e., Lancelot’s commitment to rescuing the queen, the text becomes comic at times, usually when Lancelot is too entranced by his love (140). For instance, when he fails to hear the challenge of a knight and is thrown off from his saddle into a ford or when he finds Guinevere’s comb and treats the golden tresses left on it with religious fervour (Archibald 140). Although, Uitti asserts, this humour does not affect our admiration of its hero (73). However, Archibald ponders the reason for this parodic tone: is it because Chrétien wants to express admiration for the extremes of ‘courtly love’ or whether he is subtly suggesting that the subject is being taken too seriously? (140) Archibald points out that early Arthurian texts used the legend to discuss contemporary issues, not just literary ones; he wonders if Chrétien’s romances could be both describing chivalric values and also transgressing romance values and conventions (145-6).

2.2. *Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)*

Chrétien’s *Perceval* or *Le Conte du Graal* is likely the most enduring and influential of his romances. Many subsequent writers would tirelessly rewrite the quest of the Holy Grail, changing and adding elements to the story according to their own interpretation,

until the quest became the “central religious strand of Arthurian legend” (Saunders 205). In fact, it was not until Robert de Boron, that the Grail was linked to the blood of Christ and given a more religious origin (Putter 50). One of the reasons, perhaps, that this short romance garnered so much attention and produced so many consequent rewritings by a multitude of authors is the fact that it was left unfinished—because of Chrétien’s death—, leaving readers with many intriguing, unanswered questions. The unanswered questions, Barber says, are the ones that have garnered the most interest in the story (*Holy Grail* 25). Like Putter acknowledges, one of those unanswered questions—and the most important—was the nature and significance of the Grail (50). Frappier argues that, in his opinion, Chrétien deliberately chose to hint at possible meanings with tantalising obscure mysteries, instead of giving clear explanations, to increase the charm of the story, mixing the paganism of the older myth with Christian spirituality (190).

Frappier poses some interesting questions about the structure of the romance. First of all, he wonders about the difference in length between *Perceval* and the rest of Chrétien’s romances; because while the latter ones were uniformly written in up to 7,200 lines or less, *Perceval* has 9,234, and it was not even close to finished (Frappier 189). The second oddity about *Perceval*’s form is that, halfway through the existent story, the author abandons Perceval’s quest and focuses entirely on Gawain’s whose plotline does not share the central theme of the main storyline (Frappier 189). Some authors, Frappier comments, find this such a compositional flaw that they even have doubts about its authorship (188): a writer as gifted as Chrétien would not have committed such a grievous error. Still, Frappier makes a convincing case as to why this might have been Chrétien’s intention; he considers that, as in *Lancelot*, Chrétien wanted to maintain a kind of parallelism between Perceval’s storyline and Gawain’s subplot so that their contrasting experiences might be better appreciated (189). Because while Gawain possesses all the characteristics desirable in a knight, he suffers from a kind of shallowness that stops him from achieving his full potential. As Frappier notes, he is too concerned with “earthly glories” and has a “weakness for casual amours” (189), often putting aside his quest to pursuit transient delights. While Perceval, who starts his journey as an uncouth, Welsh ignoramus, learns quickly from his mistakes and tries to do better. Even when he is told he will never succeed in restoring the health of the Fisher King and his wasted kingdom, Perceval stubbornly refuses to give up and continues looking for a way to fix his catastrophic error (Frappier 189).

Unlike Chrétien's previous romances, in this one, the main theme does not revolve around a love story; instead, it is about the character development of a knight (Barber, *Holy Grail* 14). The title, as Barber indicates—and every fiction writer knows—does not automatically mean the subject of the story. In this case, it only refers to the symbolic object around which the plot revolves (*Holy Grail* 14). Initially, Perceval is uncouth and unknowing of the ways of chivalry. He sets out for Arthur's court only carrying the knowledge of his mother's ambiguous and, as Gilbert notes, misunderstood advice (157). Slowly, he starts to grow into a model knight, aided by different characters and learning from his blunders and experiences. When he first carries out his mother's advice correctly, it leads him to learn the basics of knighthood and being knighted by Gornemant; but as Barber notes, the impatience of youth leads him to leave immediately (*Holy Grail* 15). Instead of further interiorising the knowledge he has just learned, he sets out for adventure; perhaps, if he had stayed longer, he would have better understood Gornemant's advice about a knight not talking too much and would have asked the question he needed to ask at the Grail castle. He will later learn that his lack of compassion and interest in the fate of the wounded king has deprived him of the opportunity to stop his suffering and grief (Barber, *Holy Grail* 20).

Chrétien somehow disconcertedly gives two reasons as to why Perceval did not speak up during the Grail procession at the Grail castle. One of them is that he was too compliant with Gornemant's advice against verbosity; the other, that it was because he abandoned his mother while she fainted, as the hermit informs him. Frappier argues that while these two reasons are different, they are both valid if seen from their respective viewpoints: not having any sagacity nor discernment is a worldly flaw, while not having compassion nor sympathy is a spiritual one (189). He considers that by understanding this and trying to atone for it, Perceval ascends to a higher moral plane while Gawain will never reach it (189-90).

According to Archibald in *Perceval*, Chrétien is exploring the tensions between chivalry and religion (146). This issue, as Kelly remarks, was of great, contemporary significance for Chrétien's aristocratic audiences. Indeed, Perceval must learn to equilibrate being a knight with his Christian beliefs. His mother's last and most important advice—as she points out—is that he should visit churches and pray. But, in the end, he forgets to go to church and even wears armour on Good Friday, which, as Kelly observes, illustrates his status as a knight who has forgotten God. Here, Gawain produces a

counterpoint, since he decides not to participate in the Tintagel tournament because he must undergo a trial by combat whose outcome only God will decide (Kelly). According to Barber, at the point where Perceval realises that the Fisher King is sustained by his host, he also learns that, equally, he needs to attend Mass daily to sustain his soul. By understanding the part religion plays in the life of a true knight, he has just taken the next step towards chivalric perfection (Barber, *Holy Grail* 25).

Kelly notes that Perceval undergoes a sort of learning process, an *Entwicklungsroman*, in which Perceval slowly matures and develops his character. Thus, Frappier divides Perceval's growth into three stages: the first one, his learning of chivalry, and its feats and values, where he commits an error of judgment by keeping silent and not asking the question; the second one is achieved when Perceval establishes his freedom of choice and refuses to be ruled by Fate, by deciding to try and rectify his mistake despite the Loathly Lady telling him he won't succeed; the third one comes gradually, as he realises he was wrong to leave his mother in a faint, to suffer and die alone, compounded by the mysteries roused by the vision of the Grail and the purification the hermit advises (190). Barber widens the scope of his interpretation of Perceval's growth, by noticing that the first stages of such growth appertain to earthly matters—he achieves the ideal knightly life by proving his skills and winning his lady—and then moving on to spiritual growth when he becomes a lost soul and is aided by his uncle, the hermit (*Holy Grail* 25). This parallels Perceval's mother's advice, at the beginning of the story, when she counselled him in earthly matters first and then begged him to always pray to God and adhere to his faith (Barber, *Holy Grail* 25).

3. Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*

Thomas Malory, self-identified as a “knight-prisoner”, is responsible for one of the greatest works of Arthurian literature written in English. Vinaver calls him “the prose-writer whose language gave new life to a dying tradition” (550). Malory's amalgamation of Arthurian tradition is responsible for the majority of the modern adaptations of the legend. William Caxton presented his collection of Arthurian tales as a single composition under the title of *Le Morte Darthur*. However, Malory himself made a distinction between a *series* of works and a single *tale* (Vinaver 544). According to Vinaver, those tales were often unconnected and the only unity the series can claim is in its manner, style, setting, atmosphere, and the choice and treatment of characters; but there is no unity in its structure nor design (544-6).

The first impression upon reading *Le Morte Darthur* is that Malory has done an impressive work of condensing and compiling all the main Arthurian stories, circulating at the time, into a comprehensive book; but Vinaver argues that is not the case (545). According to him, Malory's method was much more complex and subtle; what he set out to do was to untangle all the stories' threads from his sources and then write them separately, something that was incredibly difficult since those stories were tightly interwoven in an elaborate narrative (545). He was not always successful, though, as Vinaver admits, his successes redeemed the failures (545). It is important to note, however, that as Nolan comments, the question of unity in the *Morte* is far from a settled debate as the text does not offer any definitive answer (154).

In this part, I will analyse some of the most interesting and influential aspects of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, specifically his portrayal of adultery and Guinevere, his version of the Grail story, and his matter-of-fact conception of chivalry, especially as related to his Lancelot.

3.1. Chivalry in Malory's *Morte Darthur*

Le Morte Darthur, Barber affirms, is above all a chivalric romance; chivalry guides not only the knights of the Round Table's actions and attitudes but also all the climactic moments of the tales ("Chivalry" 19). Chivalry is closely linked to two essential concepts: courtly love and tournaments. Barber observes that just as tournaments are not real war, courtly love is not real love; they are idealisations of real-world concepts and do not carry the same consequences as their counterparts in the actual world ("Chivalry" 21). But, of course, chivalry in real life and chivalry found in literature are not the same (Barber, "Chivalry" 25). In literature, there was a chivalric tradition where knightly life was idealised independently of historical chivalry (Barber, "Chivalry" 26). In this literary chivalry, Barber identifies three types that he considers necessary for a full understanding of Malory: military chivalry, courtly love, and spiritual chivalry ("Chivalry" 26).

According to Barber, military chivalry evolved from the *chansons de geste*; this kind of chivalry is very closely depicted in the vein of the warrior-band where loyalty is of knight to knight and knight to lord, and a knight makes his way fully by progress in arms as in Malory's *Tale of Sir Gareth* ("Chivalry" 26). As for courtly love, the archetypal situation is that of a knight, usually young, who is besotted with the lady of the castle; however, their relationship is kept at a distance, never coming to fruition as more than an

amitié amoureuse and reality, Barber remarks, is not allowed to intrude (“Chivalry” 27). The love-theme in chivalry is best represented by Tristan and Lancelot, though as Barber admits, Tristan’s story usually goes beyond the bounds of courtly love rituals; Lancelot’s, however, who has a parallel situation to Tristan, stays within those conventional bounds, up until the downfall of Arthur’s kingdom (“Chivalry” 27-8). And, finally, spiritual chivalry is best exemplified by romances of the Holy Grail, which Barber finds to be the most original kind of chivalry, all other quests pale in comparison to the quest of the Holy Grail (“Chivalry” 28). Stories centred around the Grail quest are about the character’s excursion into the spiritual realm as he seeks religious attainment and the salvation of his soul, thus becoming a well-rounded knight.

One also has to keep in mind that, in Malory’s time, there was a chivalric revival happening. In the previous half-century, tournaments had been nearly unknown in England (Barber, “Chivalry” 31). As Barber reflects, this means that, for Malory, chivalry is a newly-revived ideal, not an invocation of past traditions (“Chivalry” 31). Although, as Malory’s work progresses, it is possible to detect a more intense wistfulness about the golden age of chivalry (Barber, “Chivalry” 29). This, as Barber points out, is a common *topos* that is found to a certain extent in all of romance literature, where medieval writers, including Malory, consider the past to be better than the present (“Chivalry” 31). In this idealised past, everything was better; knights were more loyal and steadfast in fealty and love but, as Barber argues, this does not diminish the relevance of Malory’s present chivalry as an inspiration (“Chivalry” 31).

For Malory, chivalry is a secular institution and his story is the story of the knights of the Round Table who were bound in fellowship by their friendship, mutual support, and loyalty to Arthur (Barber, “Chivalry” 31). Cooper further notes that Malory’s knights form a true fellowship because they support and rescue each other and, usually, only engage in combat because of mistaken identity or because of a failure in the fellowship which becomes more common towards the end of the *Morte* (“Introduction”). Malory’s ideal of knighthood is best represented by the oath of the knights of the Round Table, summarised by Cooper as: to avoid treason and wrongful quarrels, be merciful, aid ladies and never offer them violence, nor sexual violence (“Introduction”). Barber comments that this oath has the common theme of justice and the defence of what is right, i.e., the foundation of chivalry, while also adding mutual loyalty and support (“Chivalry” 32). He further defends that Malory’s stance towards chivalry is fundamentally human and so, his

story is about chivalry in the real world, where human weakness can be catastrophic for its greatest accomplishments, but it is the quest for a better way in the world through justice, valour and courtesy (“Chivalry” 34-5).

3.2. Malory’s Lancelot

For Malory, Lancelot is the knight *par excellence* (Barber, “Chivalry” 32) and a “rare worthy in a corrupt world” (Gilbert 159). As Radulescu observes, this constitutes a striking shift from Gawain who had, until then, held that position in English tradition (285). For his *Tale of Sir Lancelot du Lake*, Malory draws from episodes in the Prose *Lancelot* (Windeatt 89), purposefully selecting the episodes with a high moral tone, those where right and wrong are unequivocal while, at the same time, depicting his villains more sharply, augmenting the contrast between hero and villain (Barber, “Chivalry” 32). However, as Vinaver comments, Malory was sceptical about the supernatural, so he tended to remove any of the magical entrapments that were common in the French tradition (546). Malory was also uncomfortable with the emotional and religious aspects of chivalry and felt conflicted about courtly love since Lancelot’s greatest strength and weakness is his love for Guinevere (Barber, “Chivalry” 32). Early in the tale, a lady accuses Lancelot of not loving any lady despite being unmarried and mentions the rumour that he loves Queen Guinevere, which he conspicuously does not deny, but his response, as Barber notes, is remarkably chivalrous (“Chivalry” 32):

‘Fair damosel,’ said Sir Lancelot, ‘I may not warn people to speak of me what it pleaseth them; but for to be a wedded man, I think it not; for then I must couch with her, and leave arms and tournaments, battles and adventures. And as for to say to take my pleasance with paramours, that will I refuse, in principal for dread of God. (...)’ (bk. VI.10)

This quote seems to suggest that, in Malory’s opinion, constant love is not conducive to chivalry. However, he is in complete accord with the convention that knights must fight for their ladies and wear their love-tokens in tournaments. Barber concludes that it is the formalities of courtly love Malory takes issue with, as can be deduced from his passage in *The Book of Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* where Malory talks about the subject of love before Queen Guinevere’s announces her maying expedition (“Chivalry” 33).

(...) For there was never worshipful man nor worshipful woman, but they loved one better than another; and worship in arms may never be foiled. But first reserve the honour to God, and secondly thy quarrel

must come of thy lady. And such love I call virtuous love. (bk. XVIII.25)

In that passage, Barber argues, that though Malory's argument is not very clear, he distinctly talks about how feats of prowess simultaneously merit and originate from the love between a knight and a lady, but Malory noticeably places this love outside marriage or courtship and separate from morality or contracts ("Chivalry" 33). Loomis amusingly remarks that though this passage has been praised as one of the "most delightfully cadenced bits of medieval prose", it is also ungainly, and he conjectures that, at the time, Malory may have been drinking Bordeaux without any restraint (*Development* 175).

Benson considers that though Malory makes use of the two most popular subjects of medieval literature—love of God and erotic love—they are devoid of any deep energy (227). This is most evident in Lancelot's much-subdued desire towards Guinevere where his love has gone from a fiery passion that borders on obsession—as in the French tradition—to a kind of stoic but steadfast love. Benson further reasons that Malory's Lancelot is not interested in sex, which becomes most evident when he rebuffs ladies' overtures by presenting himself as uninterested instead of otherwise engaged (i.e., with Guinevere), contrary to what his French counterpart in the *Mort Artu* does (228). Cooper adds that Malory's sex scenes seem to occur with the wrong people. For instance, Igrayne believes Uther to be her husband, and Lancelot is deceived by Elaine of Corbin into thinking she is Guinevere (*Language of Love* 298). Benson concludes that Malory values human love but not erotic passion and is more concerned with friendship and camaraderie (228).

Windeatt asserts that Malory dispensed with any dramatisation of Lancelot and Guinevere's love, thus removing the focus on lust and sin, instead, he implied their relationship through other character's remarks about the lovers and through Lancelot's feats of loyalty and devotion to the queen (89-90). As Benson remarks, by the end of *Morte Darthur*, Malory even tries to diffuse our assumption that Lancelot and Guinevere were in bed together; indeed, the reader is left with the notion that they act more as brother-in-arms than courtly lovers (228). Of Malory's famous quote: "(...) whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not thereof make no mention, for love that time was not as love is nowadays" (bk. XX.3), Gilbert deduces that Malory is in effect dismissing the adultery charge since he considers that, even if Lancelot and

Guinevere had a sexual relationship, it is not something that should be judged under modern societal conventions (159-160).

3.3. Lancelot in the Grail Quest

Malory's *The Noble Tail of the Sangrail* is driven by the clash between chivalry and Christianity (Cooper, "Introduction"). As Radulescu notes, the quest marks a point of no return for the knights of the Round Table; it is the first religious quest that will involve all of them, and only a few will accomplish it (285). In my opinion, this is the beginning of the end for Arthur's court. Arthur himself is convinced that all the knights will never again be reassembled as a whole (Mann 210). This sense of dread is compounded by the open condemnation of Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous relationship; the reader glimpses for the first time the storm gathering on the horizon (Radulescu 285).

The narrative follows the knights' and their progress and revelations as contrasted by Galahad's accomplishments—who is a kind of Messianic knight—and Lancelot's, the best of the sinners (Radulescu 286). Malory's *Sangrail* removes the didactic tone of the French *La Queste del Saint Graal* and attempts to resolve the tension between religion and the experiences of life of Malory's contemporaries (Radulescu 286). In the Quest, chivalric pitfalls, like pride, are considered a sin; and most Arthurian knights go on the Quest only to gain fame instead of wanting to find the Holy Grail. Thus, understandably, they fail: Perceval and Lancelot only come close to partially unveiling the mystery of the Holy Grail because they have acknowledged their sins (Radulescu 287). At the beginning of the quest, Lancelot is reviled for his past sins—pride and adultery—by a divine voice and Lancelot immediately considers that his path to salvation is to relinquish "worldly adventures" and "worldly desires" (bk. XIII.19). But as Radulescu comments, no mention is made about his adultery (287). Malory's *Sangrail*, as opposed to the French *Quest*, endeavours to make the reader feel closer to Lancelot instead of distancing him, so we find his depiction more sympathetic and are liable to excuse his human errors (Radulescu 288).

Radulescu observes that when Lancelot finally speaks of his sin of adultery, he only sees it as such because it has broken the Round Table oath (288). Instead of seeing his sin of adultery for the act itself, Lancelot announces that his love of the queen is wrong because he has done battle for her whether right or wrong and never only for God's sake but only to win worship and be better beloved by her (bk. XIII.20). At this point, there is

a further difference between the *Queste* and the *Sangrail*, the hermit to whom Lancelot has just confessed this sin, in the *Queste*, tells him to never keep the company of the queen, while in the *Sangrail* he tells him: “(...) ye shall no more come in that queen’s fellowship *as much as ye may forbear*.” (bk. XIII.21; my italics). Thus, the *Sangrail* hermit is much less strict than his French counterpart, so Malory’s Lancelot is less guilty when he eventually returns to the queen (Radulescu 289). However, for the moment, Lancelot has found out that the source of his valour is God and that he was wrong in doing displays of prowess for personal pride instead of for God’s sake (Radulescu 289). Radulescu concludes that in the *Sangrail* the focus has shifted “from a sin of lust to a sin of excessive pride in his prowess” (289).

By the end of the *Sangrail*, Lancelot has failed the quest but could glimpse the Grail, something the other failed knights could not achieve, by virtue, in part, that he has repented for his sin (Radulescu 285). But when he falls again by returning to Guinevere, Malory strategically places ‘The Healing of Sir Urry’ (285-6). Malory seems to be using the healing of Urry as a counterbalance for Lancelot’s failure in the Grail quest (Radulescu 285). Since this healing could only come about by the best knight in the world, and Lancelot is the one to do it, it suggests divine approval in spite of Lancelot’s adultery (Benson 229). Benson surmises that Lancelot’s salvation is bodily since his miracle is physical—by curing a wound—; he is thus a chivalric hero, not a religious saint or courtly lover (229).

3.4. Guinevere in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*

Edwards argues that Malory’s queens in their castles are linked with adultery and that is the central contradiction of the Arthurian chivalric world (43). She further states that the exposure of that contradiction, in which allegiance to the king equates adultery with the queen, is what binds the narrative of his last books, and causes the destruction of the court (43-4). Edwards considers that in the Arthurian cycle adultery sustains the court and, at the same time, it is what drives the plot to its catastrophic ending (Edwards 47). Similarly, Vinaver notes that the combination of a clash of loyalties and the exuberant passions that made Arthurian chivalry great is the cause of the downfall of Arthur’s kingdom (546).

Gilbert considers that the Arthurian world benefits from Lancelot’s love for the queen politically, socially, morally, and spiritually (159). This paradox by which Guinevere’s adultery is both good and bad is very well expressed, as Edwards observes, in the

‘Poisoned Apple’ episode, without Lancelot at court, Guinevere is devalued and considered “a destroyer of good knights” (bk. XVIII.5), and even Arthur goes as far as to scold her for not controlling her lover (Edwards 45):

But now I miss Sir Lancelot, for and he were here he would soon put me in my heart’s ease. What aileth you,’ said the King, ‘that ye cannot keep Sir Lancelot upon your side? For wit you well,’ said the King, ‘who that hath Sir Lancelot upon his party hath the most man of worship in this world upon his side. (bk. XVIII.4)

Edwards concludes that Guinevere is equated to the Round Table—which was part of her dowry—hence, she is responsible for holding the knights at court and is found at fault if she drives them away; her role is to sustain the ‘homosocial’ bonds between the knights and her husband (45). Guinevere, in Malory, is considered an object of desire as a result of being desired by the king, and thus, her only value is that she is married to the king (Edwards 45). She is the focus of the men who desired her so that they can establish bonds and enact their rivalries, exemplified by the “almost ritual combats” that often happen in the *Morte* (Edwards 45-6). Adultery is therefore what sustains the court and what destroys it, and Mordred is the last character that drives its destruction by trying to take possession of the queen (Edwards 49). Edwards concludes that the kingdom is not won by succession (i.e., the queen’s children) but by taking hold of the queen who is the key to the stability of the court (49).

Edwards asserts that Malory, in his last books, is forced to confront the ‘femininity’ he has been all along trying to repress—including from his sources—, which is evident by his writing more about love, and much of that, from a woman’s perspective (51). By the end of the *Morte*, Guinevere surfaces as one of his most interesting characters, showing different facets of her personality. Edwards says she is “imperious, impulsive and sometimes witty”, using her power to punish Lancelot when she feels jealousy, and the use of that power is what drives the other knights, including her husband, to find her capricious and cruel (50). But she is not just a one-sided character, despite her jealousy and anger, she also shows pity for Elaine of Astolat and reproaches Lancelot for not having been kinder to her (Edwards 50). In the end, Guinevere takes responsibility for her actions and her role in the downfall of the kingdom, accepting that she must heal her soul and never see Lancelot again, and for that, she must withdraw from the world (Edwards 54).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the onset of this TFG, I set out the objective of providing an overview of the literary development of the Arthurian legend focusing on its early beginnings by discussing the most popular and the best of the first Arthurian works. These works, written by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Chrétien de Troyes and Sir Thomas Malory, were respectively inspired by the Arthurian literature written before them. Each author tried to adapt their works to the demands of the time they were writing in, using their own style to infuse new life into a very old story.

As I have discussed, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* is responsible for presenting a "historical" Arthur, from his birth to the downfall of his court, embedded into the mostly fictional history of English kings. Geoffrey created an incredibly popular prophetic Merlin whose prophecies—even if separately published from Arthur's stories—only helped to increase Arthur's fame and confirm his historicity in the eyes of Geoffrey's contemporaries. With Geoffrey, Merlin became a permanent fixture of Arthurian literature; he was the famed sorcerer who brought about Arthur's conception. Geoffrey also made Arthur into the best of kings, even an emperor, who was always victorious in battle and removed the Saxon scourge from England, uniting the realm once more. Arthur's court became a representative of excellence, where the noblest of knights flocked to and its beautiful ladies inspired their feats of prowess.

The talented Chrétien de Troyes introduced 'courtly love' into Arthurian literature, writing very human romances where the Knights of the Round Table take centre stage instead of King Arthur. I have analysed how Chrétien's *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* presented Lancelot and his love for Queen Guinevere. Lancelot's devotion is such that he undergoes the deepest of shame for a knight—riding the cart—to be able to rescue her. He chooses Love instead of Reason and overcomes every obstacle in the quest, thereby proving that Love is the way to achieve true knightly prowess. Chrétien's *Le Conte du Graal*, on the other hand, left readers with many unanswered questions, fuelling great interest in subsequent writers. His Perceval showed that a knight could only achieve the ideal of knightly life if he also grew spiritually and sustained his soul with his faith.

Finally, by discussing some of the aspects of Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte Darthur* I have tried to display his unique representation of chivalry and the different ways in which he used it. For him, chivalry is a secular institution and his knights strive to uphold

justice and maintain strong bonds of fellowship. His Lancelot steals the limelight from other knights of the Round Table and, even though he fails the greatest quest—the Holy Grail quest—, Malory gets him very close to achieving it and later redeems him as the best of secular knights. In *Le Morte*, Lancelot and Guinevere's adultery is not as much of a sin, and Malory tries to remove the sexual element; his Lancelot is more interested in knightly deeds than in sexual gratification. And, surprisingly, his Guinevere emerges as a strikingly good character from his very masculine world.

In the Introduction to this TFG, I talked about what causes a story to transcend time and to keep being rewritten. Mainly, it seems that the fortunate ones are those that still have something to say and lend themselves to be adaptable. I think that this TFG has shown that the Arthurian legend has survived for as long as it has because each author that ventured to adapt it, did it so by moulding the story to the respective needs of their time and their audience, using their unique skills, worldview and style as new blocks to add to the foundations that previous authors had built. This, in my opinion, is what makes the Arthurian legend so adaptable. It is all thanks to talented authors who see a new and worthy story to be written in an ancient myth that still has something to say.

REFERENCES

Archibald, Elizabeth. "Questioning Arthurian ideals". *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 140-6.

Barber, Richard. *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief*. Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 14-25.

---. "Chivalry and the *Morte Darthur*". *A Companion to Malory* (Arthurian Studies) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G Edwards, D. S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 19-33.

Benson, C. David. "The Ending of the *Morte Darthur*". *A Companion to Malory* (Arthurian Studies) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G Edwards, D. S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 227-9.

Cooper, Helen. "Malory's Language of Love". *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field* (Arthurian Studies) edited by Bonnie Wheeler, D. S. Brewer, 2004, p. 298.

---. (Transl. & Ed.). Introduction. *Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript*, by Sir Thomas Malory, Kindle Edition, Oxford World's Classics, 1998.

Crick, Julia. "Geoffrey and the Prophetic Tradition". *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin* (Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages) edited by Siân Echard, Kindle Edition, University of Wales Press, 2011.

Echard, Siân. *Arthurian Narrative in Latin Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 37-61.

---. "Geoffrey of Monmouth". *The Arthur of Medieval Latin Literature: The Development and Dissemination of the Arthurian Legend in Medieval Latin* (Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages) edited by Echard. Kindle Edition, University of Wales Press, 2011.

Edwards, Elizabeth. "The Place of Women in the *Morte Darthur*". *A Companion to Malory* (Arthurian Studies) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G Edwards, D. S. Brewer, 1996, pp. 43-51.

Faletra, Michael A. (Transl. & Ed.). Introduction. *The History of Kings*, by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Broadview Editions, 2008, pp. 19-25.

Frapplier, Jean. "Chrétien de Troyes". *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* edited by Roger Sherman Loomis, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 157-90.

Gilbert, Jane. "Arthurian ethics". *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 157-60.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Kindle Edition, Routledge, 2012.

Hutton, Ronald. "The early Arthur: history and myth". *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 34.

Jarman, A. O. H. "The Merlin Legend and the Welsh Tradition of Prophecy". *The Arthur of the Welsh: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval Welsh Literature* (Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages) edited by Rachel Bromwich et al., University of Wales Press, 2008, p. 143.

Ailed Cabrera Alemán. The Rise of a Legend: An Overview of the Arthurian Literary Development

Kelly, Douglas. “Chrétien de Troyes”. *The Arthur of the French: The Arthurian Legend in Medieval French and Occitan Literature* (Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages) edited by Glyn S. Burgess. Kindle Edition, University of Wales Press, 2020.

Loomis, Roger Sherman. “Prologue”. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* edited by Loomis, Oxford University Press, 1974, p. XV.

---. *The Development of Arthurian Romance*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1963, p. 175.

Lynch, Andrew. “Imperial Arthur: home and away”. *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 172-4.

Mann, Jill. “Malory and the Grail Legend”. *A Companion to Malory* (Arthurian Studies) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G Edwards, D. S. Brewer, 1996, p. 210.

Malory, Thomas, Sir. *Le Morte Darthur: The Winchester Manuscript* edited and translated by Helen Cooper, Kindle Edition, Oxford World's Classics, 1998.

McCracken, Peggy. “Love and adultery: Arthur’s affairs”. *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 188.

of Monmouth, Geoffrey. *The History of Kings*, edited and translated by Michael A. Faletra, Broadview Editions, 2008, pp. 130-96.

Morris, Marc. *A Great and Terrible King: Edward I and the Forging of Britain*. Kindle Edition, Pegasus Books, 2015.

Nolan, Barbara. “The Tale of Sir Gareth and the Tale of Sir Lancelot”. *A Companion to Malory* (Arthurian Studies) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and A.S.G Edwards, D. S. Brewer, 1996, p. 154.

Parry, John J. & Robert A. Caldwell. “Geoffrey of Monmouth”. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* edited by Roger Sherman Loomis, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 75-84.

Pryor, Francis. *Britain AD: A Quest for Arthur, England and the Anglo-Saxons*. Kindle Edition, Harper Perennial, 2009.

Putter, Ad. "Love and adultery: Arthur's affairs". *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 43-50.

Radulescu, Raluca L. "'now I take upon me the adventures to seke of holy thynges': Lancelot and the Crisis of Arthurian Knighthood". *Arthurian Studies in Honour of P.J.C. Field* (Arthurian Studies) edited by Bonnie Wheeler, D. S. Brewer, 2004, pp. 285-9.

Saunders, Corinne. "Religion and magic". *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 205.

Thorpe, Lewis. Introduction. *The History of the Kings of Britain*, by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Kindle Edition, Penguin Classics, 2015.

Uitti, Karl D. *Chrétien de Troyes Revisited*. Twayne Publishers, 1994, pp 15-74.

Vinaver, Eugène. "Sir Thomas Malory". *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History* edited by Roger Sherman Loomis, Oxford University Press, 1974, pp. 544-50.

Wace. *Arthurian Chronicles: Roman de Brut*, translated by Eugene Mason, Kindle Edition, The Floating Press, 2013, par. 17.

Weir, Alison. *Eleanor of Aquitaine: By the Wrath of God, Queen of England*. Kindle Edition, Ballantine Books, 2012.

Windeatt, Barry. "The fifteenth-century Arthur". *The Cambridge Companion to the Arthurian Legend* (Cambridge Companions to Literature) edited by Elizabeth Archibald and Ad Putter, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 89-90.