
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

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ABSTRACT

Arthurian legend is examined through a discussion of its origins, various versions, and the underlying drives behind its creation and its permanence. Early historical and literary works and their writers are studied, as well as the attitudes and opinions expressed in the works that illustrate the writers' motivations and the biases that influenced them. This study looks at the importance of the similarities and differences between works, as well as the lasting impact of the works on the legend itself. Subsequent writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have their works examined as well. A discussion of the underlying motives and attitudes that influenced these writers sheds light on the range of works and the flexibility of the Arthurian legend as a whole. The strengths and weaknesses of each story are reflected in the ways that each adds to or subtracts from the legend, and those strengths and weaknesses also affect the readability of the work and its popularity, which in turn affects the legend's spread. The overall significance of the legend is discussed as well, using psychological principles to uncover the causes for the legend's persistence through time and across culture. The main focus is on psychoanalysis and its examination of underlying motivations in human behavior, but links are also drawn between myth in general and the Arthur legend in specific. Throughout the thesis, examination of the legend's extraordinary persistence is emphasized, as are the factors that connect writers of all times and cultures to one another and to their audiences.
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INTRODUCTION

Drawn to the story like so many others, I have been interested in the legend of King Arthur since I was a child. Having survived for more than 1300 years, Arthur’s story has become a mythic giant and a historical mystery. With its numerous and varied adaptations over the years and its amazing ability to survive, the legend has appeared in multiple genres and has attracted a wide range of followers from all age groups and demographics, all of whom are drawn by the myth’s mysterious and irresistible appeal. Arthur’s story started as a mere spark of a local hero fable and became the engulfing fire of legend, feeding from and on human idealism and creativity. The legend’s marvelous endurance and constancy, yet remarkable flexibility, have caused me to wonder about its origins and the mysterious quality that has allowed the legend to survive. Where did the story come from? Who were the writers who influenced its creation and encouraged its continuation? What is it about their works that is significant? And why has the story affected and influenced so many and persisted so strongly throughout time? Through this work, I hope to increase my understanding of this beloved king and his perennially inspiring story.

I will start with the legend’s origins, both historical and literary, discussing the role each has played in our knowledge and understanding of the myth. The writers themselves will be examined as well in an attempt to understand their motivations. In seeking out the varying and often vague historical “facts” associated with the story, I will illustrate the difficulties associated with the search for a historical Arthur. Also, I intend to explore the similarities and the differences between the sources, pointing out the variety of sources to which we might turn for information about and support for the legend. From the examination of origins, I will move on to further explorations of the myth.
Among these further explanations, I will look at four significant modern authors whose works have become valuable additions to the legend. As with the original writers, these authors were influenced and motivated by both personal and societal factors, using the legend's flexibility and influence to their advantage. Two of the bodies of work, those by Alfred Lord Tennyson and T. H. White, are more traditional versions of the story, remaining closer to the romantic themes of the authors who first recorded the legend, while the works of Lady Mary Stewart and Marion Zimmer Bradley break from this tradition in ways unique to each author. However, regardless of their degree of adherence to the legend's romantic roots, all four writers make the stories their own with their personal styles and their unique approaches. And while there are differences among them, there are also important similarities. These four writers whose works are so significant are only a part of the greater whole of the Arthurian tradition, and it is that tradition, most specifically its creation and endurance, that leads me to wonder why it has become such a momentous work even today.

When studying Arthurian legend, I found myself questioning the reasons for its enormous popularity and significance in our lives even today. What influenced Arthur’s rise to fame? In the third section of this thesis, I will examine the human desire to create and seek out stories like the Arthur myth that reflect our external lives and internal selves. My attempt is to find a connection within us as a species that can help explain why the story is known, studied, and loved so universally. I hope to use my knowledge of psychology to better understand this phenomenon.

I anticipate that through writing this thesis I will gain a greater insight into the Arthurian legend, which will in turn help me to better understand the human desire for myth and fantasy. Also, I hope that this work can provide some insight for others and possibly encourage them to ask questions of their own, to delve further into the story themselves, and to find their own answers and insights—even if they do not agree with mine. I have chosen to explore this particular legend not just because it interests me, but also because a story of its caliber deserves to be studied.
THE BIRTH OF A LEGEND

Answering the question of who Arthur may have been is tricky, for many reasons. The first is that there is a scarcity of real, hard evidence. Another reason is that every author has his or her own opinions and agendas and therefore will interpret the evidence in his or her own way. Adding to these inconsistencies is that the varied and often vague evidence that does exist lends itself to equally varied and vague interpretations. Depending on the version in which one believes, one can find evidence to support his or her own theory and discredit that of an opponent, and that opponent can do the same. There is also the difficulty of attempting to construct a history as we define it now from legend, tradition, and the history of the Arthurian era. One of the major concerns here is that we view history and historical evidence differently than they were once viewed. Past writers of history had their own motivations and methods for "creating" their histories, allowing personal and political opinions to cloud fact. Therefore, the kind of factual evidence that we look for and consider to be reliable is often scarce, which leaves historians of Arthur with a task similar to constructing a single jigsaw puzzle using the pieces of several puzzles that do not always want to fit.

I do not intend to offer my own theory as to who Arthur really was, but instead to explore the historical and literary origins of the man and the legend and to point out the difficulties associated with the search.

Historical Origins

The first step that any historian of Arthur must attempt is to sort out what evidence we can say, without a doubt, belongs to Arthur. The first known historical account of Arthur is included in the Historia Brittonum (History of the Britons), a work most often attributed to the Welsh monk Nennius (Ashe, n.d., part 4 ¶ 1). Even though this may be an incorrect assumption (Barber, 1986), for the purpose of this paper, the possibly unknown author will be referred to as Nennius. According to Richard Barber's 1974 work, Nennius gives us not only the first, but also
the only historical account of Arthur's military career, and Nennius refers to Arthur not as a king, but as a mighty “leader of battles” or *dux bellorum*. According to Geoffrey Ashe (n.d., part 4 \( \frac{1}{2} \)), a modern Arthurian researcher, Arthur may have held an honorary position at the head of all the other kings of Britain. Honorary king or no, he was believed to have fought with the Briton kings against Saxon invaders. The *Historia Brittonum* tells us of twelve supposed battles in which Arthur fought and was victorious. The twelfth of these battles, and the best established historically, was the Battle of Badon Hill (Mons Badonius), where, Nennius tells us, Arthur slew 960 men by himself, a claim that, naturally, throws a wrench into the historical believability of the story. While Arthur may have been a great and mighty warrior, practically speaking, we know that he could not have killed so many men single-handedly at one battle. To make sense of this inconsistency, one could speculate that perhaps Nennius’ work was misinterpreted or that perhaps he was referring not to Arthur singularly, but instead to his army or troop. This quandary may also be explained away as an indication that Arthur was already becoming legendary (Ashe, n.d., part 4 \( \frac{3}{4} \)) and that Nennius’ exaggeration is an attempt to further that reputation. These are, however, only speculations and cannot be assumed as fact. In any case, this claim does cause us to doubt the believability of the Arthur legend as historical fact. Another concern with this text is that, while it is interesting, it tells us little about who Arthur was (Ashe, n.d., part 4 \( \frac{1}{4} \)), giving us a chronicle of events but little else.

A few more kinks need to be reconciled when it comes to the Nennius account. One comes to us in the form of the sixth century Welsh monk Gildas, who would have been a contemporary of Arthur’s according to the generally agreed upon dating for his existence, which places him somewhere in the fifth or sixth centuries (Carroll, 1996). In his work *De Excidio Britanniane* (*On the Destruction of Britain*), Gildas does discuss the battle of Mons Badonius and claims that a long period of peace followed; however, he does not mention Arthur as the victor. Considering Gildas’ relative chronological proximity to the event, his work should be more accurate than the Historia Brittonium. So does Arthur’s absence from Gildas’ version of events
indicate that perhaps Arthur was not the successful battle leader that we are led to believe by other works? Not necessarily. From what we know about Gildas, the Welsh monk had great contempt for the British kings, as is evidenced in his book discussing the ruination of British society. It seems unlikely that he would have mentioned Arthur’s victory and weakened his own case for condemnation (Barber, 1974). Barber also presents the possibility that Gildas and Arthur had a disagreement that ended in abhorrence between the two, which just might be reason enough for Gildas to keep from mentioning Arthur. However, this claim that there was a disagreement may not be true. The claim was made in a book chronicling the life of Gildas—who had become a Celtic saint—and, as was the way with such stories, may have been exaggerated or simply created in order to glorify its subject (Barber, 1974). Regardless of the exact reason, it seems safe to say that Gildas might have had personal motivation enough for not mentioning Arthur as victor. Even if he did not, we know that while Gildas’ work does not support the account of Nennius, it does not contest it either (Barber, 1974)

Other concerns compromise the trustworthiness of the Historia Brittonum. One of the most prominent concerns is that we are not certain where Nennius’ information came from. The author himself claims that he “made a heap of all [he] could find” (Carroll, 1996, p. 31), and that he used “the traditions of our elders” in creating his work (Barber, 1974, p. 16). This tradition is most likely the oral one, in a style similar to that of Welsh poetry (Barber, 1974). The practice of training bards to recite long epic poetry was once a common one, and despite the lack of paper evidence, that epic tradition can be considered relatively reliable in its own right. The epic of Beowulf is an example of this tradition’s lasting quality and the resistance to change of a single story across many years. Unfortunately, the virtual lack of hard evidence to support Nennius’ account cannot be completely compensated for based on this oral tradition. Richard Barber’s claims that the Historia Brittonum was the first historical account (1974) are countered by his 1986 criticism that the work is not a history at all. Yet he does say that the work does not come from nothing and that while it may not be a history itself, there is some historical evidence to
back it up. Therefore, while not considered a true history, its historical sources provide it with a certain amount of reliability as a source itself.

One source of Historia Brittonum’s historical evidence comes in the form of the Annales Cambriae (the Annals of Wales), which was compiled at the Welsh monastery of St. David’s from the eighth century on. This work contains yearly chronicles starting approximately in AD 445. The Annals mentions Arthur twice, once in the year numbered 72 (approximately AD 516) and once in year 93 (around AD 537) (Barber, 1986). The first entry tells us that “Arthur bore the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ on his shoulders...and the Britons were victors” (Carroll, 1996, p. 37) at the Battle of Badon Hill. Gildas placed this battle sometime around AD 500, which would put the two into a rough correspondence with each other and together lend support to Nennius. The second entry tells of the death of Arthur and ‘Merdaut’ (presumably the earliest incarnation of Arthur’s illegitimate son, Mordred). While the chronology of this work has been somewhat difficult to discern, it does lend support to the version of Arthur that would have fit into the historical tradition of the time (Barber, 1986).

Attempting to use tradition and ancient histories to discern historical fact is tricky at best. We define and write history in a different way than history was defined and recorded in the past, especially in the era when Arthur would have lived and the period following, when much of what we turn to for evidence was written. In Arthur’s time, there was little tradition, if any, of written history. What was known was passed down in the oral tradition. Even in the time when history began to be recorded, it was a different kind of history that probably relied largely on the oral tradition for much of its information. According to Barber (1986, p.7), “dates count[ed] for little and persons and events for a great deal.” History was to be taken “as an inspiration or as a warning to the men of the present, or as part of a vast divine scheme for man’s spiritual salvation” (Barber, 1986, p.7). While today we still discuss the importance of history as a lesson for the present, this is usually considered to be a more philosophical or religious approach as opposed to a purely historical one. In the past, this distinction was not made. One entry in the Annals of
Wales, for instance, states that Arthur carried the cross of "our Lord Jesus Christ" during battle. It seems unlikely that one would find a statement like this in a modern, and presumably objective, history text. If one did, it would most likely either be a quote from an ancient text or a way of indicating that the figure was a Christian and probably would not have been worded the same way. Ancient historical texts often leave us with a rather blurred line between history and tradition, as well as between historical and religious belief. Therefore, we not only look at the historical but also turn to the traditional.

In his book *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama* (1949), Lord Raglan discusses the significance of tradition and folk memory. According to Raglan, the difference between historical fact and tradition is that the latter is something known to the whole community, while the former often is not. Significant incidents like great battles would be part of tradition, while the specific details might be unknown, lost, or forgotten. We can even see similar trends in our more current histories, in which the facts about Vietnam, for instance, may differ from the memories that the general population have of those same events. Raglan also claims that in traditional stories names are not always "permanent features" (p. 11). Thus, in my opinion, many of Arthur's legendary deeds may have been events in traditional tales that were simply attributed to him, either to create or increase his popularity among the masses. It is also possible that stories told of men with similar names may have been innocently yet incorrectly attached to the Arthur of legend.

In the past the emphasis has been primarily on the legend, not the fact (Ashe, n.d., part 1 ¶ 6). Yet the tales of folklore and tradition can be of great value because they are not simply made from nothing; something sparked their creation. First of all, while Nennius' work is considered to be the first comprehensive work on Arthur, we know that he was not the first to mention him. Not only is he mentioned in the *Annals of Wales*, but we also know that he was mentioned by name (without the battle of Mons Badonius) a number of times in early Welsh literary sources. The most important of these works is *The Gododdin*, which dates from
approximately AD 600. In this work, the writer says of one British warrior that he “was no Arthur,” which indicates that Arthur was already considered a local hero by this time (Barber, 1974, p. 20). There may also be clues within the tradition of folklore itself that can lend support to the tales. One intriguing bit of evidence from the realm of traditional storytelling concerns an element of the Arthur myth present in other folklifes. Several versions of the legend imply that Arthur did not actually die, that he is instead merely asleep in cave somewhere—presumably to awaken when England needs him again. While the mortality of men would obviously rule out any actual truth in this claim, the claim itself is a significant detail. According to folklorist Jennifer Westwood, the story of being asleep in a cave has been told about many heroes. The significance of this claim is that, as far as we know, it has never been said of a person who did not exist. The heroes of whom this is said have always been real people, one a German Emperor, another a Spanish hero, not fictional characters (Ashe, n.d.). Of course, this evidence can only suggest the reality of Arthur, but it is compelling nonetheless. Another interesting form of traditional evidence is in Arthur’s name itself. During the fifth century AD, it was relatively common to give one’s children Roman names and Arthur is the Welsh form of the name Artorius. Therefore, a man by that name could have easily belonged to that period. Also, in records of the sixth century, we find several men named Arthur, and there was then and continues to be a tradition of naming children after heroes (Ashe, n.d.). While these elements cannot give us a definitive answer as to the truth behind the legend, they do suggest trends that have existed and help to support other evidence.

We may be tempted to turn to other places in our pursuit of a historical Arthur. Archeology, for instance, may lend support to what we believe to be true. Certain locations in the United Kingdom have been excavated that were inhabited around the time in which we place Arthur (Ashe, n.d.). One of the most compelling of these sites is Cadbury Hill, on which the much loved and legendary Camelot may have once stood. Found at the site, among other items, was earthenware that was not British, but had to have been imported from the East, which
indicates that it was the location of a wealthy household. The digging also revealed that the hill had been vacant during Roman times and then was extensively refortified during the late fifth century, the time when most agree that Arthur would have lived, and a “leader of importance and high authority” presumably did the refortification (Ashe, n.d. part 3 § 15). This archeological evidence can be very compelling; unfortunately, we cannot rely solely on it as historical proof. According to Richard Barber (1986), archeology cannot help us find a person; it cannot stand alone without the historical “framework of records” (p. 7), but can only corroborate historical evidence.

**Literary Origins**

In our continuing search for the origins of the Arthur legend, we look not only to the historical, but also to the literary foundation on which what we know is based. Literature may, in fact, afford us a better understanding of the myth and legend than fact alone might. The line between history and fiction is often blurred; the two are, in fact, often inextricably linked. This has been evidenced in the work previously discussed and is further evidenced in the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth. According to one author, Geoffrey marks the start of Arthurian writers’ tradition of “embellishing the tales to fit their own purposes” (DDTMedia, 2000, history section ¶ 9) (Of course, we know that such an embellishment is not an uncommon practice for writers. We saw that both Nennius and Gildas had their own motives when writing their “histories.”)

Geoffrey identifies Arthur for the first time as a high king of Britain (Snell, 2002), and it is from Geoffrey that we receive Arthur’s official biography, “the framework for everything that followed” (Ashe, n.d., part 2 ¶ 1). *The History of the Kings of Britain (Historia Regum Britanniae)* was written approximately during the 1130’s and was supposedly the first historical account of the British kings done in Latin. The work became of immense significance. According to Barber (1974) the work

...is the greatest single contribution to Arthurian romance. It provided the entire historical part of the story of Arthur, and was more extensively known and used by later writers than any other
part of the legend. It is a plausible account and therein lies Geoffrey’s greatest achievement. He produced an historical romance, which, whether he intended it or not, was lifelike enough to be taken by his successors as history for some six hundred years after his death. (p. 46)

Barber clearly gives this book rather high praise, which seems to have been the general consensus throughout the years. However, Geoffrey’s work is not considered a history and has not gone uncriticized or undoubted.

In exploring this work we first must look at Geoffrey himself. Not much is known about him except that he was a learned man and most likely a Welsh monk. Barber (1986) believes that Geoffrey was not interested in the Church, that he simply joined because it was “the most convenient career for a literary man,” and that there is little evidence of a religious vocation throughout his writings. We also know that he sometimes went by the name of Geoffrey Arthur (an interesting fact in and of itself) and that he was at Oxford for some time and held the title of “Master,” which was rare and indicated that he was not only educated, but possibly an educator as well (Barber, 1986). We know that he was interested in the Celts of the west and in the legends of Merlin (whose Welsh name was Myrddin) (Ashe, n.d.). In fact, his earliest surviving writing is the Prophecies of Merlin (Prophetia Merlini), a work later incorporated into the Historia Regum Britanniae (Barber, 1986), which leads us to wonder what other materials went into the famous text.

According to Geoffrey, the work comes from “an ancient book written in the British language.” If the book of which he speaks did, in fact, exist, it has been lost (Ashe, n.d., part 2 3), though it is clear that he did use early histories such as those materials previously discussed, including another early unnamed source from the Venerable Bede. Even some critics of Geoffrey’s work would agree that while up until the sixth century the work contains little history, it can “in some respects be reconciled with historical fact” when it reaches the time of Arthur (Carroll, 1996, p. 18). However, the work is generally considered to have included in its mix a great deal of fantasy. Ashe probably states it best when he writes, “what he does with his
materials is a marvelous flight of the imagination. You can certainly never trust him for history, although he does use history” (part 2 ¶ 4). It is generally accepted by Arthurian researchers that Geoffrey’s purpose for writing the text in the style that he did was an attempt to instill pride and glory in the descendants of ancient Britain—another writer with an agenda.

Admittedly, Geoffrey’s work is not perfectly precise; in fact, it is riddled with inaccuracies, fantastical embellishments, and is skewed by personal agendas. We also know that the life of the real Arthur would probably bear little resemblance to the legend (Snell, 2002). However, despite its inaccuracies and other problems, the Historia Regum Britanniae has been, and will continue to be, a major influence on the legend as we know it.

Just to give a general idea of the Arthurian legend, I have summarized the basic story as it comes to us from Geoffrey of Monmouth. (My summary is based on the summary offered by Geoffrey Ashe, a prominent Arthur historian.) The part of the Historia Regum Britanniae that concerns Arthurian historians begins with the time after Rome left Britain and the country became independent, the fifth century AD. The King of Britain, Constantine, was assassinated and a man called Vortigern seized control of the nation. Now, Vortigern who was either not very smart or did not think too far into the future, made a dangerous and disastrous choice by inviting heathen Saxons, a “very ruthless and piratical lot” (part 2 ¶ 8) from across the North Sea, to settle in Britain and help deal with his troubles with the Picts and others in the north. Unfortunately, Vortigern was not very strong in character and soon came under the control of Hengist, the Saxon leader. After a series of events, Vortigern fled to Wales in fear of his life and attempted to build a fortress there. At this point, Merlin entered into the legend for the first time as an advisor and/or prophet who foretold Vortigern’s doom, which quickly followed. After this, approximately around the 430’s, the rightful kings were restored. One of these rulers, Uther, according to legend, became enamored of the wife of the Duke of Cornwall, Ygerna, when she and the duke were guests of the king’s in London. The duke, having discovered Uther’s interest, took his wife and left the court without permission. He then placed Ygerna in the secure castle at Tintagel to
keep her away from Uther. Insulted by the duke’s abrupt departure, Uther invaded Cornwall and the duke marched out to meet him. Reenter Merlin. Merlin helped Uther gain access to Ygerna by changing him into the likeness of her husband, which allowed him to freely enter the castle at Tintagel. Thus, the begetting of Arthur occurred. At the same time, the real duke was slain in battle; subsequently, Uther was able to regain his true form, marry Ygerna, and claim Arthur as his legitimate heir.

Arthur came to power while still in his teens after the death of his father and proved himself an able king with his defeat of the Saxons and Picts, as well as others who were causing trouble, and the conquest of several lands. Throughout the battles he wielded the sword Caliburn, the Excalibur of later writings. After his successes Arthur returned home and “reigned with great magnificence, prosperity, and popularity” (part 2 ¶ 16). During his approximately twelve years of peaceful rule, he married Guinevere and created an order of knighthood of international fame. We begin to hear about many of the legend’s most famous knights (though not Lancelot, who didn’t come along until later writers). We also see the beginnings of the concepts of what will eventually become the Round Table and Camelot. At the end of this period, he decided to conquer more countries. The Romans, however, were not happy about this decision or about Arthur’s refusal to pay them tribute and demanded that he concede to their will in both matters. Choosing the offensive, Arthur led an army into Gaul, leaving his nephew and deputy Mordred at home with the queen. Arthur defeated the Romans and was marching onward when news came from home that Mordred had named himself king and convinced the queen to have an affair with him. The resulting conflict ended with Mordred dead and Arthur wounded and carried away to Avalon to be treated. After this, we don’t know what becomes of Arthur. His cousin becomes king and Geoffrey continues his history.

Geoffrey’s tale of Arthur concludes ambiguously. We do not know whether Arthur lived or died or stayed in Avalon or is asleep in a cave as some versions claim. According to Ashe (n.d.), Geoffrey is probably attempting to leave the door open for the folk belief that Arthur was
immortal. Geoffrey is not the only one to leave the story this way. Another writer, whose work has also had a significant impact on the legend, concludes with this spiriting away of Arthur to Avalon. While Geoffrey's work is probably the most significant, Sir Thomas Malory's 15th century *Le Morte D'Arthur* has become the best known. We know very little about the elusive author personally; we know only that he called himself a knight and a prisoner and that he completed the work sometime during 1469-1470. His text is representative of many earlier traditions and has come to define the English Arthurian romance (Britannia, n.d.).

Before I get too far into the discussion of Malory, I must first briefly discuss the French Vulgate Cycle, on which much of Malory's work is based. The Vulgate Cycle, with its five branches and eight volumes, is considered by some to be "a masterpiece of medieval literature." The several works that make up the Cycle, it is believed, were outlined by one man, but written by several (DDTMedia, 2000, Literature part 3 ¶ 1). The Cycle contains the entire story of Arthur from his birth to death, as well as the tales of Lancelot, including his affair with Guinevere, and the tales of several other knights. The Cycle is characterized by its focus on morality, purity, and spirituality, as well as by the "conflict between personal and public loyalty" (DDTMedia, 2000, Literature part 3 ¶ 2). All of these are important elements in the rise and downfall of Arthur and his ideal kingdom. The Grail quest is emphasized as the greatest spiritual achievement of the Round Table. We see that those who achieved it were spiritual and saintly. Others, most specifically Lancelot, failed because of their lack of purity. We also see that Arthur was not without sin. For the first time the idea of Mordred as Arthur's bastard son was introduced, and it was assumed that because of this sin, Arthur is vulnerable to defeat and death (DDTMedia, 2000). Also according to one source (DDTMedia, 2000, Literature part 3 ¶ 9-10), the Round Table was seen for the first time as a "means of righting wrongs and combating evil," and the stories of the cycle "[lived and breathed] the ideals of the times of the Vulgate authors."

The mysterious Malory also "echoed the signs of his times in his Arthurian writings" (DDTMedia, 2000, Literature part 6 ¶ 1.). His version reflects, at least in part, the life of Henry
V. Some of his recreation of the legend follows the events in Henry’s career. Malory made the work his own in other ways as well. Others before him had attempted to condense the Vulgate Cycle into a more reader-friendly form but their versions lacked a sense of connectivity between the stories (Barber, 1986). It was not until Malory came along with his compilation and translation of the Cycle—along with some works of English poetry—“that a true masterpiece embracing the whole story of Arthur and his knights was created” (Barber, 1986, p. 114). While remaining true to the main plotlines, Malory modified and modernized the early works (Benson & Foster, 1994), varying elements and details. Often, he would draw from a source and then make the conclusion his own (Barber, 1986). He departed from the Vulgate Cycle most in his thematic emphasis. Instead of characterizing the legend with lessons of sin and repentance, he emphasized the themes of chivalry and tragedy (DDTMedia, 2000). Even in the Grail quest, the focus is less on spirituality than on the earthly motives of man (Barber, 1986). The ideals of knighthood seem to be of the greatest importance in Malory’s re-creation of the world of Arthur. According to Barber (1986), Malory felt that it was in diverging from the goals and ideals of knighthood that men, and knighthood itself, were susceptible to failure. Some of this was illustrated in the story’s main hero, Lancelot. While the Vulgate Cycle emphasized Lancelot’s failure at the Grail quest because of his spiritual unworthiness, Malory emphasized his partial success. Even when the more spiritual Galahad did achieve the grail, Malory gave the sense that the glory for the achievement belonged to the whole Round Table (Barber, 1986). Thus, knighthood retains its greatness regardless of any moral or spiritual failings of the individual knights, especially those of Malory’s main hero.

Even though Lancelot’s character was greatly emphasized, Arthur remained the focus of the story. Malory may have wanted to make Arthur the central figure in the Grail quest, but there was, perhaps, not enough material to provide a more prominent place for Arthur in the story (Barber, 1986). Barber (1986, p. 123) believes that Malory paid Arthur his “highest compliment” by saying that “of him all knights may learn to be a knight” and that it is “Malory’s
portrait of Arthur, rather than his treatment of Lancelot, which was to attract later readers.” As we know, his work has indeed attracted many followers. It is his grand and sweeping portrayal of the legend, which has served as the basis for all English versions that were to follow (Benson & Foster, 1994, ¶ 5).

As one can see, the origins of the Arthur legend vary from the historic to the literary with a lot of blurring in between. Unfortunately, there is simply not enough concrete historical evidence to pinpoint without a doubt a single actual person whom we can consider to be the real Arthur. However, there is evidence enough to suggest that he probably was real or at the very least that there was a real person on whom the legend was built, even though he may have resembled only slightly the character found in subsequent works telling of his life. Also, fortunately, we know enough about Arthur’s origins in history and literature to discern his growth from a mysterious local hero to a character of great and time-surpassing legend. We are able, through the study of these origins, to witness retrospectively the birth of a legend.

THE SURVIVAL OF A LEGEND

After having explored the origins of the Arthur legend, we know that the early writers often had their own motivations (even when writing supposedly historical works) when relating events. These same trends continue with the authors of the legend’s subsequent incarnations. Each author approaches the story in his or her own way and relates the story based, in part, upon personal, cultural, and societal interests. The medieval authors like Gildas and Geoffrey of Monmouth are good examples of this concept. According to Geoffrey Ashe (n.d., part 1 ¶ 10), “they didn’t really care very much about getting it right,” and he compares this situation to our current view of the Wild West, in that their concern was more upon relating the story in a way that would interest their readers than in uncovering or adhering to the truth. Some of the more common and well-known elements of the legends, such as chivalry, tournaments, and courtly love, come to us because these were the issues current and interesting to the writers of the age in
which they were created, and not because they have any link to the historical Arthur (Ashe, n.d.). As a result, the story of Arthur has become a romantic one. It is upon these more romantic themes that many later writings have been based. Even those stories that attempt to reclaim the pre-medieval and more historically accurate feel or that attempt to take the story in their own directions still share certain elements and themes in common with the romances, most remaining true to the legend’s heart.

Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*

In nineteenth century England, there was renewed interest in the Arthur legend. Many modern nobles likened themselves to the lords and ladies of days past (Collver, 1998). Helping to revive the tale was Britain’s Poet Laureate, Alfred Lord Tennyson. His *Idylls of the King*, which was based—as many works had been and would be—upon Malory, helped the legend to become widespread and even more well known (Ashe, n.d.). While Tennyson praised *Le Morte D’Arthur* as being the best of its kind, he felt that it lacked a certain artistic grace (Grierson, n.d.). Tennyson took the work and made it his own—much as Malory had done with his predecessors. *Idylls* reflected much about the social concerns that surrounded Tennyson, yet the connection to the legend’s past is still evident. Tennyson wrote his epic work in a bard-like style that calls the reader back to the time when the legend first began (DDTMedia, 2000). The rendering of the *Idylls of the King* as a whole was an evolution. Its creation spanned several decades and was influenced by factors in its own time and those that came before.

While the final edition of *Idylls* can be taken as a single whole, it was written piece by piece over a number of years. Tennyson’s first Arthurian-themed works came out in 1832, followed ten years later by three more poems. One of the most significant of these was the ‘Homeric’ *Morte d’Arthur*, which marked Tennyson’s first attempt at retelling the main legend. It would be another five years before Tennyson added any more with *Enid* and *Nimue*. In 1859, *The True and the False, Four Idylls of the King* was published; it contained *Enid*, *Nimue*, *Elaine*, and *Guinevere*. More works were added between 1869 and 1885, the latter marking the date of
the final version (Grierson, n.d.). During the several decades of the evolution of the *Idylls*, changes occurred, both to the work itself and in Tennyson’s world. Some believe that *Idylls* developed because of the expectations placed upon Tennyson as the Poet Laureate of the world’s greatest power. It may be, of all Arthurian works, the one that most reflects the “social concerns, the aspirations, ambitions, and ideals of the period in which [it was] written” (Barber, 1986, p. 153).

Knowing Malory’s substantial influence on the legend of Arthur, it is not surprising that Tennyson’s work is influenced more by *Le Morte d’Arthur* than by any other work. However, he does not follow Malory exactly. Tennyson relates the story in the form of epic poetry, which is reminiscent of the method by which stories were told in Arthur’s time. It was once a common practice in the oral tradition for storytellers to memorize lengthy poems so that they might be repeated and passed on nearly word for word. A prose version of the legend had not been created with as much success in several centuries. Tennyson chose to diverge from Malory in other ways as well. Tennyson, for instance, does not start the tale with Arthur’s birth as Malory had, but instead begins with Arthur already as king and having his first encounter with Guinevere. His birth is merely related as a story told by the knight Bedivere within the story (DDTMedia, 2000). Another example of his divergence is the significant part that the knights’ personal romances play throughout the work. While Malory had chosen to separate the ideals of chivalry and courtly love, with the feeling that love was just “an obstacle on the knight’s road” (Barber, 1986, p. 122), *Idylls* revisits again and again the love lives of the knights. Tennyson uses them to reflect the opinions about men and women within his own time and the roles that each should play.

Tennyson looked to Malory as an authority on the matter of Britain (Andrews, 1969), but was not looking simply to translate his version of the story. He chose certain events from the work of his predecessor and put them together to form a new whole (Barber, 1986). Tennyson took the legend and recreated it, giving it a place within his own world.
During Tennyson’s time, Queen Victoria ruled over the empire on which the sun never set (Andrews, 1969), and it was an era filled with lofty ideals with which Tennyson could make easy links to Arthur’s own ideal kingdom. He succeeded in creating a version of the legend that stood as “a symbol of nineteenth-century ethics” (Starr, 1954, p.1). However, Tennyson was doing more than simply creating a reflection of ethical standards and of the changing age; the story would also stand as a warning to his empire and those that would follow.

During the Victorian era, there was a strict sense of male and female roles, and the standards for proper conduct were set high, at least among the middle and upper classes. There was also a strong separation between the sensual world and the worlds of morality and intellect. In *Idylls*, we see the powerful conflicts created when real, fallible human beings attempt to live up to these high ideals. These conflicts is seen both within stories and between them. Within the stories, the characters often suffer a conflict between their ideal and practical selves, for instance, Arthur’s realization that his roles as a friend and as a king often collide. Between the stories, Tennyson draws subtle links between certain poems, *Elaine* and *Guinevere*, for example, which were known as ‘The True and The False’, thus emphasizing the contrasts in their themes (Barber, 1986). One of the hallmarks of this work is the sense of man’s dual nature, split between duty and desire. In the work as a whole, there is a general sense of symbolism, with King Arthur and the Round Table as key representatives of high ideals. While Arthur is viewed as near perfect, he is not without faults, and his personal conflicts lead to his downfall. According to Barber (1986), the real tragedy of Arthur is that his ideals could be destroyed by a single sin. Tennyson’s work can be seen as a warning to his queen—and to other leaders—that the loss of faith can destroy even the most perfect and powerful of societies, as well as their leaders (Andrews, 1969).

**T.H. White, The Once and Future King**

*The Once and Future King* by T.H. White is often considered to be the most successful Arthurian tale in recent years (Barber, 1986). Even though many more Arthurian novels had been written since Tennyson’s time, White’s has been considered the next most significant. Like the
King Arthur

_Idylls_, it took several decades to complete. White’s interest in the legend seems to have been a lifelong one. While at Cambridge, he wrote his senior thesis about Malory’s _Le Morte d’Arthur_, (Collver, 1998), and generally thought very highly of it. Years later, he would go on to write the first of the four books that would eventually make up _The Once and Future King_.

This first book, _The Sword in the Stone_, was written in late 1937 and early 1938 as a “preface to Malory” (Barber, 1986, p. 194). This book, which would eventually go on to inspire the animated Disney film of the same name, tells the story of Arthur’s boyhood as ‘Wart,’ the foster son of Sir Ector of the Forest Sauvage. Readers witness Wart’s childhood adventures and education by the eccentric wizard Merlyn. White put much of himself into the character of Merlyn; many of Merlyn’s interests are White’s own. White adds an interesting twist to this character by having him age backwards, therefore knowing the future as his own past (Barber, 1986). With Wart’s education, we begin to see one of the most significant themes that White is attempting to impart. Merlyn changes Wart into a series of different animals so that he can experience some of the most fundamental elements of life and leadership. These lessons will eventually influence Arthur’s governing style as king. White’s main focus here is to show the power that knowledge can give a person (DDTMedia, 2000). This book ends with Wart pulling the sword from the stone.

The second book, _The Witch in the Wood_, came later and was revised and eventually renamed _The Queen of Air and Darkness_ before it became part of the final work. Here we are introduced to Morgause, the wife and queen of King Lot of Orkney (one of Arthur’s fiercest opponents), who is not only Arthur’s sister, but also the mother of his illegitimate son. White writes very little about the actual episode of Arthur’s incestuous seduction by the queen (Barber, 1986), yet it comes to a play a significant part later in the fourth book because of Mordred’s conception. Morgause is depicted as a witch and a cruel mother to her sons, who eventually become knights in Arthur’s court.
Lancelot’s story, the subject of the third book, *The Ill-Made Knight*, came out in 1940. In this installment, we learn much about Lancelot as a person. We find that starting in his childhood he strives to be a knight worthy of King Arthur’s court. He is not portrayed as the debonair hero, but instead as very ugly, with a feeling of some failing in himself. Yet, because of his feelings of inferiority and his desire to be worthy, Lancelot constantly strives to be the best knight (Starr, 1954). Through White’s characterization, Lancelot becomes a much more human character than he has often been portrayed as. Lancelot also strives for religious faith and a sign from God until he is eventually granted his miracle and is able to cure the incurable wound of another knight (Starr, 1954). In this book, we also witness the beginnings and struggles of Guinevere’s affair with Lancelot, as well as receiving a glimpse of why she is the way she is. Throughout the parts of *The Once and Future King* that include her, Guinevere is a multifaceted character as a woman and as a queen, and much of her character reflects the denial to her of her only possible vocation, child-rearing (Collver, 1998). The book ends with the two lovers resigning themselves to fate (Starr, 1954).

When the fourth book came, it came as a part of the final work. It is here, in *The Candle in the Wind*, that all the elements of Arthur’s downfall come together. Mordred comes to Camelot and uses Lancelot and Guinevere’s affair as a catalyst for the breakup of the Round Table (DDTMedia, 2000). Arthur is forced into a conflict that he had long hoped to avoid. While he had almost always known about the affair, he had chosen to ignore it because he loved both his wife and best friend and knew that their actions could be considered treason. Unfortunately, Mordred forces the confrontation and Arthur faces the prospect of destroying one love for another. To save all that he had worked to create for his kingdom and people, he would have to sacrifice those he loves most. Just when the situation seems likely to right itself, the winds of fate change again, and the story ends with Arthur on the eve of war with Lancelot. Despite the fact that the future seems bleak, White does not leave the story with a sense of hopelessness. It ends
with a glimmer of hope as Arthur tells his story to a young squire named Thomas Malory. Arthur keeps the boy from going to war so that he can tell the story to others (DDTMedia, 2000).

White also wrote a fifth book as a conclusion to the story, but it was not included in the original and was, in fact, not published until 1978. The fact that the fifth book existed, yet was not published until much later, explains the somewhat abrupt end to *The Once and Future King* (Barber, 1986). *The Book of Merlyn* was meant to balance *The Sword and the Stone*, returning to some of the more magical elements of the first book. However, some consider this work a somewhat disappointing end to the highly readable and enjoyable tetralogy (Barber, 1986). Barber (1986) also feels that the work was not published with the other books because of its anti-war themes and its idea that man is “uncurably vicious and inferior” (p. 196). The emphatically pacifist mentality of this book was not considered fitting in WWII England.

According to Nathan Starr (1954), Tennyson reminded us that the Arthurian legend can take on any symbolism that writers of any age might choose to find there. White seems to have been proving that point. He was not just relating the same old story; he, like others, had something to say. The most significant elements that White chose to emphasize were his own pacifist beliefs and his feelings about the importance of education and the proper uses of power. Instead of focusing on Arthur’s prowess as a warrior, White portrays him as a thinker, almost cursed by his education at the hands of Merlyn. Bound by his ability to think about the causes and consequences of people’s actions, Arthur’s attitudes change from his war-eager childhood to the war-weariness of his later years (DDTMedia, 2000). He often finds himself contemplating the legitimacy of using power and violence (Collver, 1998); these conflicts arise both within himself and with the world around him. His viewpoint is a unique and often unpopular one in a world where those with power dictate what is right. For White, this concept was probably particularly personal living in the age of leaders like Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin. White’s king seeks to use his power for justice, in the hope that eventually forceful means will not be needed to create just ends (Collver, 1998). White seems to have felt that education is one of the most
significant tools a ruler needs to create and rule a just and peaceful kingdom. Despite the heaviness of White's message, the novel is not weighed down by it. Instead, "one of his major triumphs is the way in which he combines grave and gay in one harmonious whole" (Starr, 1954, p. 116)

Humor was a significant new addition to the legend, which had always been told with pomp and reverence (Latil, 1997), and White's style helped to make the work and the legend more accessible to a wider audience. The comedic flavor helps make the more serious themes easier to accept (Latil, 1997) and makes the story more human and easier to appreciate for its entertaining quality as well as its literary value. White's approach to characterization also makes the story more human. Readers are able to appreciate and understand the characters as people, not just as superheroes and villains. The story is not just about ideals or the battle between good and evil, but also about human beings, an approach that most readers can identify with. White also helped connect modern readers with the medieval world through the use of colorful descriptions and anachronism. In this way, he makes his presence known as a modern man writing about a time that he could not experience firsthand (Latil, 1997). His knowledge of medieval life helps paint a picture in the minds of readers (Starr, 1954). And White anachronistically uses common modern terms and references, such as a mention of Bermuda—most of which come from the backward aging Merlin—in part for the sake of humor. The common language use also makes the story easier to read than if White had used the outdated romantic language of previous writers.

As a whole, White's work is considered to be a giant in the field of Arthurian literature. While retaining the legend's idealism and traditional elements, White's personable story provides readers with a version of the legend that reflects their real lives and not just their idealistic fantasies.

Mary Stewart, The Merlin Trilogy and The Wicked Day
During the late 1960’s and into the 1980’s, popular novelist Mary Stewart wrote four books about the legend that created a new version of the Arthur myth. *The Crystal Cave, The Hollow Hills,* and *The Last Enchantment* are part of what is known as the Merlin Trilogy with Merlin as the narrator and protagonist, while *The Wicked Day* tells the story of Arthur’s nephew-son Mordred from his own perspective. Stewart wrote with an interesting blend of the legendary and historic. Readers are taken back, not to twelfth-century Britain, but to the fifth, the time during which a real Arthur would have lived. Stewart’s approach has proven to be exceedingly popular, hers being some of the most-read modern Arthurian novels (Henriksson, 1997).

The first book in the series, *The Crystal Cave,* was published in 1970. In it we learn of Merlin’s youth. Stewart’s Merlin is an imaginary character created as a composite of four possibly real men (Stewart, 1970). Readers learn of Merlin’s upbringing as a bastard prince in the Welsh court of his mother’s father. Believed by most to be the son of the devil and possessing the power of Sight (a sort of psychic sense), Merlin is often feared, even from a young age. Throughout the book, we see Merlin’s journey from bastard prince, to runaway, and then to servant of Britain’s rightful heir, Aurelius Ambrosius (a person from real history). Several years have passed since his older brother’s murder and Ambrosius is planning to return to Britain and take back his crown from the usurper Vortigern. Merlin discovers that he is Ambrosius’ son, but that he cannot be his heir. That role instead goes to Ambrosius’ younger brother Uther Pendragon. During Merlin’s time as his father’s servant and eventually Uther’s, Stewart includes several incidents from the legend. One of these is the story of Merlin’s prophecy to Vortigern beside the ruins of his collapsing palace. Another is the conception of Arthur. Instead of magic, Merlin uses planning and disguise to help Uther gain access to the willing Igraine. At this point the first book ends.

*The Hollow Hills,* which came three years after the first book, continues Merlin’s story almost exactly where *The Crystal Cave* left off. It is, however, meant to be able to stand alone, as the first book was (Stewart, 1972). With this book we witness Merlin’s spiriting away of Arthur
as an infant. Merlin takes the boy to be fostered away from the High King’s court in order to protect him from enemies and from his father’s anger. Uther refuses to claim the child because of the circumstances of his begetting and hopes for an undisputable and legitimate heir. In Arthur’s early years, Merlin secretly leaves him to the care of Sir Ector of Galava while he travels abroad publicly in order to throw off spies searching for the young prince. He also pursues a quest of his own, seeking the sword of Macsen Wledig. Here is one of those places where Stewart combines history and legend. Merlin tells us that Macsen Wledig, a character from Celtic legend, and Magnus Maximus, a real historical figure, are one and the same (Stewart, 1972). Because Maximus is an ancestor of Ambrosius and Merlin (and subsequently of Arthur), Merlin is able to obtain the sword, Caliburn, and hold it in safekeeping until it is needed. After several years, Merlin returns to Arthur secretly. Merlin, who is disguised as the humble caretaker of the forest chapel, tutors Arthur, who is unaware of his parentage, along with his best friend Bedwyr. When Arthur is fourteen, he learns of Merlin’s true identity and rides with him to battle to join the ailing King Uther. After an impressive showing on the battlefield, Arthur is seduced the night before he discovers his true parentage by his father’s bastard daughter Morgause in her bid for power. The next day, just after Arthur is publicly declared, Uther dies and opposition to Arthur’s claim rises. The book closes with Arthur raising Caliburn among flames from the stone altar where Merlin had placed it and with the kings and people of Britain paying him homage.

Throughout the last book, The Last Enchantment, we witness Arthur growing in power and Merlin in age. With Arthur on the throne and Merlin’s main task complete, most of the paranormal power that he had once both served and commanded leaves him, and he serves Arthur as an advisor with intellect and wisdom, but as an ordinary man, not a prophet. With this book, we see many more of the classic elements of the legend, but often with a slightly different slant. Morgause takes her place as Queen of Orkney by snatching Lot from her younger sister Morgan. The infamous murder of the infants born at the time of Mordred is engineered by Morgause and Lot, but is blamed on Arthur. Morgause, however, arranges for the child to be secreted away,
without Lot's knowledge, to protect it and her claim on Arthur. In another trick of Morgause's, Merlin experiences his classic madness with the help of poison. Arthur marries not one but two Guineveres (Guenever and Guinevere), as is supported by tradition (Stewart, 1979). The former dies in childbirth, along with the child. The latter falls in love with Arthur's best friend, Bedwyr—an event briefly foreshadowed in the second book. We also see Merlin's relinquishing of power to the girl Nimue. In this version, he willingly gives his power to his lover so that she can serve as Arthur's advisor once Merlin is gone. Merlin goes to his "death" in the cave of his childhood as he had foreseen ever since his youth. What he had not foreseen was that he does not die, but instead is in a coma-like state from which he wakes and returns to Arthur as his friend and surrogate father. While the trilogy as a whole does not include all of Arthur's legend, it does foreshadow and allude to many happenings to come that are part of the legend's tradition.

In *The Wicked Day*, the sequel to the Merlin trilogy, the legend continues. The story is told from the point of view of Mordred, the legend's traditional villain. It starts with Mordred being raised ignorant of his parentage—much as his own father was—and then being thrust into a world that he does not understand. The role he plays in his father's downfall is one that he plays reluctantly. However, despite the means and the differences in intention, the story ends the same (DDTMedia, 2000).

Lady Mary Stewart broke from the tradition of many of her predecessors by taking the story back to a more historically accurate time (DDTMedia, 2000). Stewart makes it clear that she is writing a fictional, not historical, work (Stewart, 1970), but it does use many historical facts (Henriksson, 1997). She acknowledges both her own historical inconsistencies and those of her main source, Geoffrey of Monmouth (Stewart, 1970). Along with Geoffrey, Stewart mentions several other sources including Malory, Nennius, Gildas (Stewart, 1979), and the *Annales of Wales* (1983). As I mentioned previously, Stewart often interwove the historical elements and the legendary ones to build a more believable story. She also included available geographical information, and all of the places in the book are authentic except for Merlin's cave. Perhaps
Stewart's writing was influenced by her belief that Arthur and possibly Merlin were real people (1970). It is her belief that for a tradition to be so persistent there must be some truth behind it (1973). By writing of the legend, Stewart is helping it to persist as well, even though the work is admittedly not a completely "true" form. Stewart understands and admits to historical inaccuracies, but also she relies on them to offer flexibility in fictional writings, as many probably have. Because much of the material that she wrote about is not firmly substantiated by traditional or historic evidence, she takes the opportunity to add her own "flavor" to the story. In many cases, she follows the rule of poetry that what "sounds best, is best" (1970, p. 382). Stewart describes her series as "a work of imagination, though firmly based in both history and legend" (1972, p. 441). With her work of traditional, historical-fantasy, Stewart was to become the second most taught Arthurian novelist, after T.H. White (Fries, 1990).

Part of what makes the story so popular is the way that Stewart makes her characters and the story more realistic by changing the perspective on some of the more fantastical elements. Even though Merlin possesses the Sight, a kind of psychic knowledge that includes precognition, she does not include much magic in her tale. In fact, Merlin himself often tries to convey that he is not a magician, but a humble and learned man, preferring the hills and caves of his youth to the pomp of court life. Many of his feats that were considered magic were products of his knowledge of herbs and medicine, engineering, and disguise. The magic that he does possess is predominantly the "Sight" given to him by God in order to serve his divine will. The power sometimes has more control over him than he does of it, using him as much as, if not more than, he uses it. Also, Merlin's lack of prowess when it comes to war and women makes him the kind of personable character that readers can connect with (Henriksson, 1997). Therefore, Stewart's version of this character, while still powerful and awe-inspiring, is richly human.

Praised by many, Stewart's novels have been immensely popular. The novels have often been praised for their combination of the historical and legendary (Henriksson, 1997) and also for the convincing psychology of their characters. As in White's rendering, Stewart's readers are
given a better understanding of the actions of the legendary characters (Fries, 1990) than in past writers. Stewart (1983) wrote of how she wanted to display the "black villain" Mordred as having shades of gray, thus making him more realistic. She does the same for Merlin by making him a humble and intelligent man with a great gift and burden. These elements have increased the books' popularity among audiences.

But no work is without its critics. Stewart's works have been criticized by some as being less in depth (Fries, 1990) and in a lower key (Barber, 1986) than other Arthurian works. Barber (1986, p. 198) feels that this toning down of the story is somewhat of a disadvantage to the legend because it is the "sheer magnificence of Arthur's achievement which makes his tragedy so overpowering in the traditional account." Also, some critics feel that some of Stewart's characters--especially the women--are less convincing than they are in some other authors' works. However, despite the work's failings, the series is considered to be one of the most popular and most readable of modern Arthurian works (Henriksson, 1997).

**Marion Zimmer Bradley, The Mists of Avalon**

In 1982, Marion Zimmer Bradley published her immense (878 page) new version of the legend (Fries, 1990). *The Mists of Avalon*'s most significant element is the fact that it is told by the women of the story. This feminist novel came at the legend from a new and different perspective than had been tried before. Bradley gave voice, for the first time, to the female characters (Fries, 1990) as something more than just symbols and stereotypes, as they had often been portrayed in earlier works. Bradley also followed a practice similar to that of Mary Stewart and set her work in the fifth century, post-Roman Britain. During this period, several different cultures mixed, including Druids, worshippers of the Mother Goddess, and the young Christian church, all with a spiritual axis running through the isle of Avalon and Glastonbury (Fries, 1990). These cultures, along with her unique approach, provided Bradley with a method by which she could leave her own mark on Arthur.
Bradley's primary characters are Morgaine, daughter of Igraine and Gorlois and an Avalon priestess; Igraine, a follower of the Goddess religion and also the mother of Arthur; Viviane, Igraine's sister and the Lady of the Lake; Morgause, sister to Igraine and Viviane and Queen of Orkney; and Gwenhwyfar, Arthur's Queen and Christianity's primary representative in the novel (Fries, 1990). Other significant characters are Arthur, naturally; Lancelot, Viviane's son; Gwydion (Mordred); and Merlin. Instead of being a single character, "Merlin" is a title held by two different men, Taliesin and Kevin (DDTMedia, 2000), who represent the Druid culture in the novel (Fries, 1990). Arthur is more representative of the people of Britain, caught between religions and between the ways of the old world and the ways that are being forged in the new. The extensive novel follows Morgaine from her childhood and her training as one of the Goddess’s priestesses under the tutelage of Viviane, to her participation in the fertility rites of Beltane (DDTMedia, 2000). It is at these rites that she and her brother Arthur unknowingly couple and conceive a child, a secret arrangement made by Viviane and Merlin to insure Avalon's survival with an heir of their bloodline. When Morgaine discovers the truth, she turns from Viviane and her holy vows and goes to her aunt Morgause, who has her own motives for wanting to keep the child from power. Eventually, Morgaine leaves Mordred in Morgause's care while she joins her brother's court at Camelot. There she comes into conflict with Gwenhwyfar. Religion is the main barrier between the two, and to a lesser degree so is Lancelot, whom both love but neither can have. Morgaine also comes to love the knight Accolon, but is trapped into marriage with his father Uriens by Gwenhwyfar. As time passes, changes continue in the world of Camelot, and Arthur, who had once sought to treat all religions equally, turns away from Avalon to Christianity at Gwenhwyfar's insistence. It is this conflict of faith—a similar theme throughout all Arthurian legend—that contributes to Arthur's downfall (Collver, 1998). As in the tradition, Mordred comes to court under the hand of Morgause, reveals not only his parentage to Arthur, but publicly reveals Gwenhwyfar and Lancelot's affair. His most infamous deed is here as well: he mortally wounds and is in turn killed by Arthur. With the wounded king, Morgaine attempts to
return to Avalon, but is denied entrance. Arthur dies and Morgaine joins her mother at Glastonbury, where she had taken vows after Uther's death. Morgaine finds a spark of hope there that worship of the Mother Goddess continues in the worship of the Virgin Mary (Fries, 1990).

In Bradley's version of the tale, the loss of sisterhood and the betrayal of the oaths that Morgaine and Arthur made to Avalon are the most significant factors in Camelot's downfall. This counters, yet also reflects, the traditional elements of the betrayal of brotherhood, the loss of faith, and the betrayal between father and son that are emphasized in most earlier versions (Collver, 1998). These conflicts are most strongly represented in the persons of Gwenhwyfar and Morgaine, each representative of her own religion. Each struggles against the other to preserve her own beliefs, just as the two religions, as well as the old and new worlds, struggle for dominance. Arthur finds himself trapped in the middle of these religious and personal conflicts. Accepting advice from both the bishop and Merlin, Arthur starts out by attempting to respect both religions as equals, yet, as his rule progresses, he finds it harder and harder to keep both religions happy since they utterly oppose each other. While Morgaine's religion accepts the idea of plurality, Gwenhwyfar's does not, and as conflict increases, Morgaine forgets this importance principle of her beliefs. Thus, through this infidelity of faith and her lack of sisterhood with her sister-in-law, Morgaine commits a greater betrayal of her beliefs (Collver, 1998).

Bradley's work is as complex as it is long. Readers are provided with a unique and interesting perspective on the myth. It has been praised, not just for its originality, but also for its rich, sweeping storyline and its complex characters. However, it does have some failings that may stand as a barrier for some readers. The book's sheer length combined with its verbose and repetitive nature can present a significant obstacle. Some of the anachronistic trends, while at times connecting modern readers with the ancient time, do not suit the nature of the work well (Fries, 1990). Instead of aiding the work, they contradicts its style and Bradley may seem to be forcing a connection between the modern and ancient worlds. Yet the overall work does not suffer much even with its weaknesses, nor is the legend itself harmed in any way.
Arthurian legend by its very nature as a legend and by Arthurian tradition is highly adaptable (Fries, 1990). From the time of his original fame as a local and possibly real hero to his story's current status as a worldwide phenomenon, the legend has inspired several different interpretations, across several different media. Arthur has been the inspiration for books, poems, songs, comic strips, and movies. Many of these interpretations have inspired offshoots of their own. The musical Camelot and a Disney children's film were both inspired by T. H. White's The Once and Future King. Novels have told the original tale, as well as modern stories of Arthur's promised return such as The Forever King by Molly Cochran and Warren Murphy. Authors have created their own characters and told their stories apart from the original. Readers can even make themselves a part of the legend with choose-your-own-adventure type books. Throughout the centuries the stories have shifted and altered, taking on several different coats, yet, the heart of the legend has remained, and it is that heart that has carried the legend across time and culture and held us captivated.

THE HEAD AND HEART OF A LEGEND

From his relatively obscure beginnings to his current status as a mythic giant, Arthur has come a long way, transcending his own time, place, and culture. The stamp of his influence has been seen in great diversity throughout the ages from literature and opera to comic strips like Prince Valiant and political references such as Kennedy's Camelot. Arthurian legend has claimed a kind of influence and a place in the human heart that is held by few others. Evident in ways both subtle and obvious, the myth's themes pervade our everyday lives. But, finally, why? Why is a character over a millennium old, who may or may not have been a real person, still so pervasive in our modern world? Why do we still admire the story and its ideals even if we do not follow them? To understand this phenomenon, we first must understand what underlies both this myth and its creation and myth in general.
According to Joseph Campbell (1971, p. 3), “myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation.” More simply stated, myth is the outlet for human understanding of the world, with fields such as philosophy, art, and religion all springing from this main source. Myth can be viewed as the psychology of human behavior (Campbell, 1971). In this way, myth serves as an explanation and illustration of the why’s and how’s of human thoughts and actions. Myth can also be seen as the putting into words of certain human “rites” (Raglan, 1949), rites both specific and general, ranging from the rites of certain cultures, such as the Muslim journey to Mecca, to the more universal rites shared by all people, for example, a child’s coming of age or mankind’s search for meaning and understanding in the world. At the center of these stories always stands the hero who represents us and acts as our guide on the journey. The hero’s role allows for a certain connectivity—keeping the story at a human level—between the story and its audience. The hero is the one who is able to achieve, within his own lifetime, humanity’s goals of enlightenment (Campbell, 1971) and self-actualization. Therefore, the plot of the myth is the hero’s awakening of his soul (Campbell, 1971), and its primary theme and moral is the fulfillment of the lofty ideals of humanity, such as the winning of religious enlightenment that came with achieving the Holy Grail. Myth, like philosophy, art, and religion, is ever-present because of the constant and universal nature of its themes. We as humans continue to seek that “one, shapeshifting, yet marvelously constant story...together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced” (Campbell, 1971, p.3).

Lambides (1990) feels that the Arthur legend is one that we can consider a “living myth” (p. 309), a story that gives us a place in history and a sense of “glory and cosmic significance.” It not only entertains us, but is also full of its own timeless truths (Dunn, 1997). Its morals are echoed in the dreams and desires that humans share today. The striving for a common good, which is so often present in the Arthurian tales, can be seen in some events of recent history such as the civil rights movement and peace movement (Lambides, 1990). In these tales, there is not
only something of who we are but of who we would like to be (Grossman, 2002). Both Arthur himself and the stories that accompany him bear certain characteristics that are personal and familiar to us, both within our own characters and in our longings. He suffers the conflicts between warring loyalties, such as love and duty, and finds his ideals complicated by his inability to achieve them. The myth often examines this duality of human nature, its realistic and ideal selves, and the stories convey both our dreams and our realities.

Arthur has a certain “everyman” quality that draws people to him (Roberson, 2001). His duality allows him to have both a perfect and imperfect self, existing as one. He is seen, on one hand, as this perfect man (Roberson, 2001) and ruler, a leader who inspires love and devotion in his people and seeks not just to rule them, but also to rule for them. He pushes back their enemies and brings prosperity and justice to their world. We see in him all the things that a king should be (Snell, 2002), representative of the ideal, the perfect king. On the other hand, the stories present readers with a complexly human man who, like all people, is fallible. We know that, in part, his own sins lead to his downfall. He is torn time and again between the ideal and pragmatic worlds, struggling with the same kinds of personal conflicts that real people struggle with. Thus, while Arthur stands as the embodiment of some of humankind’s most prized ideals and virtues (Lambides, 1990), he also remains a person whom people can understand and see something of themselves in. He is imperfect, yet still has the strength to overcome the obstacles in his world. Ultimately, he falls, yet is triumphant in his immortality.

The legend draws us in other ways as well. Not only does the myth teach us a great deal about ourselves, but it also comforts and inspires us. Within the stories are many lessons to be learned—lessons about friendship, about loyalty, about the use of power, even about love. As I have already said, it is in the journeys of the hero and heroine that our own struggles and trials are reflected. The fact that the hero or heroine faces these trials is not as important as the way in which he or she deals with them; here is where the real lessons are to be learned. While the cultural and personal emphases often change with the time and people, the core of these lessons
remains the same, as do the feelings they evoke. The story’s traditional themes are present within the retellings, but the authors may chose to emphasize them in different ways and possibly add new themes. Lambides (1990, p. 316) feels that there is a “Living Arthurian Tradition” that can awaken in us a full range of human emotions. In the opinion of one reader, Arthur is a character whose name alone can inspire people to higher ideals, while another feels that the central Arthurian story is “love and hope for the whole human race” (qtd. in Lambides, 1990, p. 315).

The story can offer us comfort, both with its hope of what we could achieve and with its familiarity and closeness to home, in much the same ways as we find a connection to Arthur as a human character. The legend and other stories like it contain a certain simplicity that helps us to find solace within our disturbingly complex world. A clear-cut morality is often found in stories of this nature (Grossman, 2002), the idea that there is good and evil, black and white, and that the roads to each are clearly marked. In earlier versions of the myth in which the characters often served more as symbols than as humans, these distinctions are made especially clear. Arthur is good; Mordred is bad. All that Arthur stood for—justice, peace, and brotherhood—is good; all that destroyed him—betrayal, broken faith, sin—is not just bad, but evil. While later versions of the story introduced more shades of grey, it is still relatively easy to distinguish between right and wrong. The choice of whose side to be on is typically an easy one, and such certainty comforts us, especially when our own world is so full of ambiguous grays. Our rational and realistic everyday world often seeks out fantasy as compensation for its own harsh realities (Starr, 1954). This trend is apparent, for instance, in the popularity of fantasy-based videogames such as The Legend of Zelda and Everquest. Works that represent people’s desires for simplicity and comfort are both created and sought out.

Two very important groups that have a major influence on the generation and endurance of myth are, naturally, the writers and the audience. The two work back and forth upon one another, each feeding and feeding upon the other. Each group is as important as the other, but the audience is discussed less often because of its elusiveness (Barber, 1986). Working according to
something like the law of supply and demand, writers create for the audience of their age, and the audience learns from what the writers create. Both groups' understanding of the myth comes from the tradition established by those who came before, often from some time and source that predates the written word. This is true of the Arthur legend; we know from historic works that there were indications of his popularity long before his official biography was written. The writers help to keep the story alive by reshaping the myth to fit their own time and culture, creating "masterpieces which have the power to speak directly to [the] reader" (Barber, 1986, p.127). Also, it is usually the author who chooses which morals are presented in his or her particular version. Writers such as Malory and Tennyson and White continue to reinvent the legend because of their belief that the story's traditional lessons are applicable and necessary for any age and generation (Starr, 1954). Of course, the personal interpretation of the lesson is up to the audience. While the writers give the specifics of the tale, the myth is already part of the audience's knowledge. Their attitudes and opinions about the way the legend is or should be strongly influence the way the authors write the stories and the way the audiences read them. The variety of the audience has enhanced the variety of the myth. The standards of some were exacting, usually the scholars, while others simply wanted to be entertained with a story about their favorite hero (Barber, 1986), creating a wide variance throughout the myth's incarnations.

This type of pattern exists as much today as it did in the early years of Arthur's popularity. Currently, people have a "love affair" with the legend. The wide variety of Arthur-inspired vehicles, such as the traditional written word, restaurants, games, conventions, operas, and societies, indicates that the legend's popularity is wide-ranging (Lambides, 1990). Even though Arthur's origins are British and his romantic popularity comes from the French, his influence has carried over into other cultures, some cultures otherwise sharply different from the West. Exploits of the traditionally European and predominantly Christian hero have shown up even in Japanese and Jewish works. We already know that the story has bridged the generations. Recently, other works of fantasy akin to Arthurian legend, like Harry Potter and The Lord of the
Rings novels, have found a surging (or in the case of some, resurgent) popularity. Societies with chivalric themes have been popping up for some time. In one such group, the Society for Creative Anachronisms, members give themselves knights’ names and pursue the ideals of courtesy, chivalry, and proper behavior (Grossman, 2002). According to Lev Grossman (2002, p.90) "popular culture is the most sensitive barometer we have for gauging shifts in the national mood.” If this is true, then Arthur, who has been present in pop culture in varying degrees for several centuries, has been part of the world’s mood for nearly as long as he has existed. Again, the question is why?

Perhaps, as mentioned before, a realistic world simply craves fantasy as a way of compensating or escaping. After all, as the Army commercial says, “every generation has its heroes.” Especially when considering recent events, such as the terrorist attacks in the US and the war in Iraq, we can see how and why people might reach out for someone or something to look up to and to put their faith in. However, all of this seems to be just a part of the broader picture. Yes, humans do seek out heroes to put their faith in during times of need, influenced by the world around them, yet there is another factor more influenced by nature, by the innate. In a more general sense, human beings as a species might simply have an inherent need for and predisposition toward myth. Here we turn, not, as Joseph Campbell said, to the psychology of human behavior, but instead to the psychology of human nature and thought, which, in their turn, influence behavior. Psychologist Carl Jung generated his theory of the collective unconscious and the idea of archetypes, which with their assumptions about myth making and characterization can provide insight into our internal need for legend. According to Jung, the collective unconscious “reflects the collective experiences that humans had had in their evolutionary past” (Hergenhahn and Olson, 1999, p.74) and the “inherited tendency of the human mind to form representations of mythological motifs” (Sharf, 2000, p. 92). Essentially, the collective unconscious is a storehouse of humankind’s evolutionary memories that all people share as a species, a storehouse that influences the way people mentally organize their thoughts and
experiences. Individuals can see, think about, feel about, and react to certain events in their environment in ways similar to all other individuals (Sharf, 2000). Behaviors and thoughts will not be exactly the same for all people; instead, the general tendencies of response to experiences are innate and universal. The product of these collective emotional responses to experience is myth. It was Jung’s opinion that the tendency toward myth making is passed on from generation to generation through the collective unconscious (Hergenhahn & Olson, 1999). This is why, following Jung’s theory, myths and their themes are universal; it is the reasoning behind why “spiritual concerns are deeply rooted and why people in different cultures share certain myths and images” (Myers, 2002, p. 432). An integral part of this whole theory is the idea of the archetype. Archetypes are like cognitive instincts, impulses to perceive and structure experiences in a certain way. Archetype is form without any content (Sharf, 2000). We are the ones who fill it in. There are several different archetypes based on circumstances that people have encountered repeatedly throughout time (Hergenhahn & Olson, 1999). The most significant archetypes in relation to the Arthur legend would most likely be the hero, the wise old man, and power. Certain images form themselves in the mind when each of these words is presented; these are expressions of the particular archetype, which is common to all (Sharf, 2000), in the same way that the word mother evokes thoughts and feelings of nurturing and protection in people across cultures. Arthur can be considered an embodiment of those thoughts and ideas that accompany the hero archetype. The legend has been generated using the human experience and understanding of the world that has built up within us over time, while the name of King Arthur evokes the same emotions and imagery that the word hero does: courage, honor, and nobility. In fact, the hallmarks that define Arthur and his legend fit into the ideas of myth and archetype, aspects of the universal human mind, quite well. In this way, Jung, with his “boldest, most mystical, and most controversial concept” (Sharf, 2000, p. 74), has helped to provide some insight into the reasons why Arthur is still with us.
Psychology can be used to explain Arthur's lasting quality in other ways. Two more concepts that come out of the psychoanalytic perspective (which began with Freud and of which Jung is a part) are projective tests and regression. The former can illustrate how people find something of themselves in the story, while the latter helps to explain that earlier idea of a modern world reverting to a simpler one. In an attempt to understand the inner workings of a client's mind, a psychoanalytic psychologist might use a projective test, which works by presenting a client with an ambiguous stimulus—such as a picture or an ink blot—and having the client explain what he or she sees or thinks is happening (Myers, 2002). One can see a similar process with the Arthur stories. While the story is not considered ambiguous, it does lend itself well to interpretation and provides writers and audiences alike with an outlet for their own mind's working. Therefore, our reading of the tales can teach us as much about the writers and ourselves as it does about the legend. For example, the affair of Lancelot and Guinevere may be read by one person as the cruel betrayal of trust, while another may see it as a tragic tale of star-crossed lovers trapped by obligation. It is what we make of the story and what we expect from it that tells us who we are.

The other psychoanalytic concept, regression, may help to explain people's desire to read tales, like the Arthur ones, about events set in what seems to be a less complex time and place. Regression is the idea that people, in order to reduce anxiety, will retreat developmentally to an earlier and less mature stage (Myers, 2002). For example, a recent college graduate faced with the perspective of entering the job market may respond by returning to his or her old high school job and saying, "I'm too young for a real job." Audiences will go through this process when faced with the world's harsh realities by turning to entertainment centering on what seems to us to be a less complex time and/or place in which right and wrong seem obvious. The Indiana Jones movies, for example, exemplify this concept, as do many children's cartoons, such as the Powerpuff Girls. This concept is especially relevant during times of war and economic hardship.
From a psychoanalytic perspective, people take from legends what they want to and arm themselves with the legend’s simplicity in order to hold their worldly fears at bay.

The Arthur legend has probably endured so long and the myth remains alive in each age because it represents something to us, because we can learn about ourselves, who we are and what we want, and because it comforts us. Most importantly, we seek out this myth and others like it because it is a part of who we are as human beings to create and to desire such stories and the emotional and psychological comforts they provide. Myth lives as a representation of our humanity and Arthur as the ideal of all that humanity entails. It has been implied in some stories that Arthur will return to the world when he is needed, but it seems now more appropriate to believe that he never left, that he has remained alive and well in our hearts, offering us a guide and comfort for when the reality of the world becomes too harsh.

CONCLUSION

Arthurian legend’s persistence and its ability to touch so many and such diverse audiences encouraged me to explore the myth beyond its face value. I sought to learn more about the legend’s beginnings and its most significant incarnations, as well as its lasting qualities. From there, I hoped to gain a better understanding of how a story that started out so humbly could become such a worldwide phenomenon.

In exploring the myth’s origins, I learned a great deal about the complexity of ancient historical sources. It was difficult to find even two sources that agreed with each other exactly (although we might have the same trouble today with modern histories). Even when the works were called histories, they could not be completely relied upon for factual information. Personal opinions about events and people as well as the purpose for writing the work often skewed the way in which the histories were recorded. The only elements that could be considered reliable in any way were those that were common to more than one work. There are enough references to Arthur and events that involved him to provide a basis for the belief that he may have been a real
person, which is a relatively easy decision compared to attempting to specify who he might have been. Even without the historical facts of who and what Arthur was in real life, the fact that he exists in a historical framework at all is compelling. Also, each of these “historical” works, *Historia Brittonum, De Excidio Britanniae, Annales Cambriae*, left its own distinct mark on the legend. Just as significant is his place in literary history, which may, in fact, provide more insight into the legend than history would. The works of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Sir Thomas Malory have had the most profound and lasting impact on the legend, as we know it. After studying these original writers of Arthur, I found similarities between their works and those of the historical writers. The main connection comes back to the idea that each of these writers had his own purpose for writing the story in his own way, and saw something in the legend that he could use to reflect his own attitudes and the world in which he lived. This same element connects the original writers to those who followed.

I chose the four modern writers, Tennyson, White, Stewart, and Bradley, because each of their works was important in some way. I hoped to achieve an understanding of these works and to uncover the reasons for their value. Each work reflects something of its author and of the time from which it was written. Using both style and varying their emphases on theme, the writers called attention to the connection between his or her own time and the past, modernizing the story and proving that it could be brought out of its ancient framework to find a place in the present. Employing various tactics, the writers also help the audience to feel connected to the legend’s characters as humans. In using these strategies, modern writers seek to accomplish what past writers and historians attempted with their works, they use the story as an outlet for their own ideals and as a lesson for those who read it. These four writers, and many like them, have succeeded in showing us that the Arthur legend and its themes are still relevant to us today and will probably continue to be in times to come.

Wanting to understand the reasons why the story is here now and why it is likely to continue to influence us, I turned to my own field of psychology to shed some light on the role of
myth making and legends in our lives. Drawing predominantly from psychoanalytic perspective and looking at myth in general, I sought to uncover the underlying incentives that motivate us to create and seek out Arthur stories. Understanding what myths as a whole represent and their importance in our lives provides insight into why the Arthur legend is so important to us. We use this myth to understand ourselves in much the same way that we use all myths. The events of the story and its characters and their concerns serve as guides in and as reflections of the world that we live in and the challenges that we face.

The Arthur legend has long interested me, and it is an important element in our lives as a means to better understand who we are. Early writers made the legend into what they wanted and needed it to be, and so did the writers that followed. It is as much a part of our human nature to seek out personal meaning in these stories as it is to create them. Understanding this concept can foster our appreciation of the connections and similarities among people of all cultures, places, and times. Arthurian myth has become a part of our everyday lives as entertainment, as comfort, as an expression of our ideals, and as an expression of our own human nature.
REFERENCES


