

ARTHUR THE AGELESS:
MODERNIZATION OF THE ARTHURIAN TALE IN
JACK WHYTE'S THE EAGLE

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Arthur the Ageless:
Modernization of the Arthurian tale in Jack Whyte's *The Eagle*

by

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Abstract

This paper compares of Jack Whyte's *The Eagle* (2005) with two medieval works, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* and Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*. This comparison points to the fact that Whyte demystifies and modernizes the tale, moving away from the magical and religious towards a more pragmatic and realistic story, in order to adjust his telling for his modern audience. The first chapter addresses the general changes Whyte has made to the plotline, and his different approach to the narrative presentation by employing his Lancelot character as narrator. In the second chapter more specific changes are addressed, regarding Whyte's approach to the sword in the stone, the order of knighthood, and the Round Table. The final three chapters look at alterations in the characterization of Merlyn and Mordred, Gwenevere and Lancelot, and finally Arthur.

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“The Arthurian legend is ‘anachronistic’ in the truest sense of the word:
it is timeless.” Morris *The Character of King Arthur*

Chapter One: General Introduction

King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table have been capturing the attention and imagination of readers for hundreds of years. From the ninth century writings of Nennius to modern re-tellings, of which there are new versions practically yearly, Arthur has enjoyed a fluctuating, but never failing, popularity. Throughout this 1200 year span, though, (longer if one includes the indeterminate period of oral tradition, particularly among the Welsh), there have been vast changes in human society as technology, politics and culture have evolved through the medieval and early modern periods into the computer age. In this world, where every year a different style is in vogue, how has Arthur maintained his place in readers’ hearts and minds? The answer, clearly, is that Arthur has also changed. Arthur’s story is no different from any other work of literature, in that, over time, the context in which it is read will be altered dramatically and:

if it is to survive as a living piece of literature, there must be interaction between the text and its changing environment. This can take the obvious form of adaptation of the vocabulary and syntax to current usage, or the modification of the text in accordance with new fashions or with the particular interest of a patron.

(Kennedy 1)

As such, each author who has turned his (or her) hand to the Arthurian tales has given the world a different look at the iconic hero and his following, and has tailored the story to suit the audience of the moment.

The growth of the Arthurian legends covers a wide spectrum of change. From sections of Latin pseudo-historical chronicle and Welsh folk tale, the story has been translated into dozens of languages and rewritten, as both chronicle and romance and as various combinations of the two. Characters and motifs have been added and removed, the setting updated, and the story has been moulded to a dozen different political viewpoints depending on the author and the concurrent political powers. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, only part of which deals with Arthur, is vastly different in scope, style and content from Chrétien de Troyes' romances, or even from other works in the chronicle tradition. Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* from the end of the 15th century contains aspects of, but is very different from, the Alliterative *Morte Arthure* and the Stanzaic *Morte Arthure* of the 14th century, which are equally different from each other. Geoffrey brought Merlin into the Arthurian realm, while the French romances introduced Lancelot, Tristan and the Grail, among other aspects.

Each writer uses a slightly different setting and has a different focus for his work. Geoffrey's Arthur lives in a Dark Age Britain with defined landmarks, Chrétien's Arthur inhabits a High Middle Ages fantasy world, and Malory's Arthur holds court in Late Medieval fashion in geography almost as indefinite and occasionally fantastical as that of Chrétien. The romances focus on courtly love, the chronicles list battles and describe war councils. One thing these writers have in common is the presence of the supernatural and

the religious in their works, and their characters' unquestioning acceptance of this presence. Later Arthurian works by Spenser, Dryden, Tennyson, Twain, and many others, are different again. Some are romance, some satire, some comedy. Many works from the early modern period are not specifically Arthurian at all, but simply lift Arthurian characters or motifs from the tales and insert them into unrelated stories (Taylor 16). Other authors tend to give prominence to a specific character other than Arthur, such as Galahad in Tennyson or Merlin in a number of works (R. Simpson 225, 169).

The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen even more new versions of Arthur's story. Some of these lean more towards the fantastic, such as Stephen R. Lawhead's *Pendragon Cycle* (1987-1999), which combines Arthur's Celtic roots with the legend of Atlantis, or Guy Kay's *Fionavar Tapestry* trilogy (1984-1986), in which Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot make an appearance as people cyclically reborn into the different worlds of the Tapestry as punishment for their sins. Other Arthurian re-writes are very clearly targeted towards or steered by a particular political or social viewpoint. While all the Arthurian rewrites have a certain degree of this political and social influence, this category indicates specifically the more extreme cases, perhaps the most popular of which is Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Mists of Avalon* (1982), an Arthurian tale with a distinct feminist bias, and which ought rightly to be called a tale of Morgan, rather than of Arthur, since the story revolves so clearly around her.

Another group of re-visions of Arthur's tale follows the chronicle tradition rather than the romantic, in that they make some claim to historical verisimilitude. While these texts do not necessarily claim *actual* status as history, as with Geoffrey's *Historia*, they

lean towards the genre of historical-fiction, weaving an alternative history. Many of these texts retain certain elements of the fantastic, manifested in occurrences or artefacts, generally related to the supernatural in some manner, which can best be explained by recourse to magic. This includes such works as Bernard Cornwell's trilogy, *The Warlord Chronicles* (1995-1999), which invokes the 'old magic' and the legendary "Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain," or Catherine Christian's *The Pendragon* (1978) in which mystical religious experiences occur, although the main protagonist questions the reality of these experiences throughout. A number of the more 'realistic' texts that take Arthur back to his conjectured sixth-century roots have been accused of sapping the romance from the tales and leaving only barbarism and brutality, such as Peter Vansittart's *Lancelot* (1978) (Taylor 309). It is not easy to strike a balance between the 'realistic' violence of sixth-century Britain and the romance of High Medieval Arthur, without including mysticism and magic, but it can be done. This, I believe, is what Jack Whyte has achieved in his Arthurian series "The Camulod Chronicles," culminating in *The Eagle* (2005).

Whyte's goal in his books is to present the 'real' story of Arthur, Lancelot, and the Round Table—the story from which all the other versions have been derived (Whyte, *The Eagle* x). As such, he offers the reader a fictional but matter-of-fact look at sixth-century Britain that is neither entirely brutal, nor romantic and supernatural, but can be perceived as simply 'realistic.' His presentation relies at least in part on the fact that while people's inclinations can go to both extremes, from the overwhelmingly mystical to the utterly barbaric, human nature tends to be balanced somewhere in the middle.

Whyte's 21st century Arthurian tale is, obviously, very different from earlier versions, since he changes a number of aspects in order to modernize the work for his audience. In looking at Whyte and how he has changed the Arthurian story, I will be comparing his work to two medieval versions: Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* from the middle of the medieval period, and Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur* from the very end of the Middle Ages, on the verge of the early modern era. In looking at three works separated by such a lengthy span of time, authorial changes to plot and character for the sake of modernization are readily apparent. Geoffrey and Malory have both been discussed in detail by numerous critics already, as has much of the Arthurian canon, but both Whyte and the notion of change over time have been largely neglected. *The Eagle* itself has received no academic attention at all to date, and changes or modernizations of Arthur have only been addressed on a very narrow scale.

A number of period overviews are available, such as Roger Simpson's *Camelot Regained* (1990), which look at multiple works, but not in great detail. Those studies which do address an individual work in detail, such as the majority of the essays in *Re-Viewing Le Morte Darthur*, or other similar books, are generally concerned more with a theoretical or textual study of that work in particular, and do not necessarily look at how it differs from other works. When an individualised study does look at these changes, it is often more in order to discuss the political or social impact of the work on the world of the time, as with Bradley's much-discussed *The Mists of Avalon*, than for the sake of studying the text itself. The majority of individual scholarly articles on the Arthurian subject are focused on one thematic, symbolic, or character-related aspect from one

particular Arthurian tale—such as courtly love in Malory's work (Moorman)—and relate very little to other works. Some articles mention earlier works only briefly, and then look at a character's changes across the works of one specific author. Peter Noble's article looking at the character of Guinevere in Chrétien is one such. James Noble, on the other hand, looks at changes in Arthur's character over several different works including Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*, but all of the works in question emerged within seventy years of each other. The way in which a modern novel relates to, and modernizes, its medieval predecessors is a development which requires attention.

The need to change Arthur's story over time is self-evident. As human culture has evolved, so has literary taste, and what was appropriate, indeed desired, in the 11th century is not what a 21st century audience wants to read. The most obvious change is the language in which texts were written, which, in Britain alone, shifted from Welsh and Latin, to the vernacular Middle English, to Modern English, with numerous subtle changes in between those broader distinctions. The social landscape has had an equal impact in shaping the tale, with fashion and the quotidian being reflected in the characters, settings and action of the works. Hence, a feast described by a 12th century writer like Geoffrey reflects what one would expect from a feast in the keep of a 12th century feudal lord, Chrétien's descriptions of Arthur's court sound much more like the French court with its focus on *l'amour courtois*, and Malory's knights are a reflection of late medieval practice rather than of the 6th century origins which are put forward for Arthur. Later writers, into the early modern and modern periods, continue this trend of social modernization, although in many modern works it is not so much the physical

surroundings and appearance of characters and setting that are updated as it is their social and psychological orientation. Modern works tend to reflect modern viewpoints, particularly of notions like feminism, economics, or democracy. Each writer who approaches the Arthurian saga creates a tale that is suited to his or her own time and chosen audience, thereby reflecting something of the culture and ideology of the time. As such, any discussion of Arthurian works requires a certain degree of connection with their cultural contexts and audiences, since those contexts are key factors in authorial changes to the tale.

Geoffrey, writing in the mid-12th century, became very popular both in England and on the Continent. His work was originally written, though, for a much smaller audience, although exactly who that intended audience was is not entirely certain. There is debate among scholars as to whether his primary intention was to write for his fellow clerics or for the, still relatively new, Anglo-Norman rulers of the country. The content of the tale indicates that the aristocracy would be his primary target (Crick 10, Curley x), as does the argued dedication to Robert of Gloucester (Crick 5), and it is certain that the tale gained great popularity among that audience. The original language of the text, however, and that in which it “enjoyed major and lasting success” was Latin (Crick 10), whereas the language in which the Normans would have been reading “has traditionally been regarded as the vernacular” (Crick 10). Despite this discrepancy, though, there clearly existed a large Latin-reading audience to receive his work, an audience which is conjectured to be scholarly (Crick 221, 222) or clerical (Knight 40). This latter suggestion is supported by the dedication of the prophecies in the middle of the tale to the

bishop of Lincoln (Crick 5). Whatever the dispute over language, the argument of the dual dedications to Robert and the bishop (Crick 5) lends credence to the idea that Geoffrey intended his work for both a clerical and an aristocratic audience. Certainly, it would be odd for Geoffrey not to intend or hope for the Norman aristocracy to read his work, given that he writes in the period when the Normans are beginning to take a "keen interest in the past history of their newly-acquired domain" (Geoffrey xv). Thus, aspects of Geoffrey's work are tailored towards one or both of these sets of readers, offering to the Normans the tales of battle and mythical deeds, and to the clerical audience the religious aspects and the narrator's shared religious viewpoint.

Malory's intended audience is much more clearly determined, both by study and by his own authorial asides. In his closing words, Malory speaks to his readers, addressing them as "all jentylmen and jentylwymmen that redeth this book of Arthur and his knyghtes from the begynnyng to the endynge" (Vinaver 1260). As P. J. C. Field points out, this indicates not only that Malory is writing for the gentry, his "own social class," but that he is writing specifically for "that part of the English gentry who are enthusiasts for Arthurian romance" (Field 21). Malory makes this clear by addressing only those who have read his entire book. Thus, he writes not for those who have a passing interest, but those who want all the details and who already have some knowledge of the tales which he incorporates into his work, as well as the ones he leaves out. Malory, also, is writing in a period when interest in chivalry and courtly love is still high, and drawing on a number of French sources which rely heavily on chivalric and courtly tales. As such, his work must incorporate aspects of chivalry both because of his

sources and because it is what his audience has come to expect from their own previous Arthurian readings. The other key aspect of Malory's work is the heavy religious undertone running throughout, even more so than in Geoffrey. This is in keeping with the general trend of medieval writers attempting "to redeem Arthurian chivalry by infusing it with religiosity" (Archibald and Putter 6), an attempt which is marked by Malory's religious symbols, events, and narratorial commentary. Whether he wrote in this manner because it was what he felt his audience would want, or because he felt it was what they *needed*, much of Malory's text is filled with religious, unmistakably Christian, miracles and lessons.

Laying aside, for the moment, the issue of religion, there are still numerous differences between a medieval audience and the 21st century audience that Whyte addresses in *The Eagle*. One can draw certain conclusions from his text, as with the earlier authors, and conjecture that, with the views and insights Whyte expresses, he does not address a particular social class or religious group but, rather, many. In his attempt to present a realistic Arthurian world, one can deduce that he speaks to a modern, inquiring audience, who may be entertained by the mystical, medieval approach to Arthur, but who cannot believe it. Thus, Whyte aims to present to this audience a believable basis for the Arthurian legend, an Arthurian society that can be perceived as real, whether or not it ever was. The sharpest distinction between the earlier authors and Whyte, of course, is that Whyte is still alive and able to state for himself his intended audience, thus relieving those who would read and study him of having to rely solely on conjecture. His words confirm the above speculation, and offer far greater insight into his thoughts and his

intention for his books. The target audience is those whom he likes to consider as “enlightened,” not necessarily in the spiritual sense, but as readers like himself. The people he writes for are, first of all, “literate and educated,” as they must be to turn themselves to reading such a large collection of writing on a historical topic. More significantly, though, Whyte writes for an audience that is “intellectually curious” and “mentally restless” (Whyte interview). This is what marks the key difference between his audience and that of the medieval writers. Medieval audiences may or may not have actually believed the mystical aspects of the Arthurian tales, although one assumes that the more overtly religious miracles would have been accepted at face value, but, believed or not, the medieval audience did tacitly encourage a magical approach. Audiences tended to expect mystical, Otherworldly elements in such tales and that is what they received. Whyte, though, writes for an audience with interests similar to his own. His discerning modern audience wants full accountability and doesn’t want to be fooled, and so Whyte respects their intellect and offers a ‘real’ inside look. Reflecting his own thoughts on reading Arthurian works, he creates a story specifically for those who are “driven to find out more about stories they had always partially known, and interested in broadening their understanding of things past...[and] perhaps frustrated by their own feelings of failure to assimilate and understand some things that ought to be straightforward” (Whyte interview). Thus, to those events which, in medieval texts, would be simply called ‘magic’ and dismissed—particularly the sword in the stone—Whyte grants special explanation. Whyte recognizes that his intelligent audience, like himself, cannot simply accept ‘magic’ as the answer, and knows that “something real and

seminal,” not mystical and Otherworldly, is concealed behind that label (Whyte interview). Whyte writes for a modern audience that does not want the mysticism of the medieval works, but rather wants to see and understand how the Arthurian world could have actually existed, as reality rather than as a fantastical Otherworld.

Whyte’s de-mystification of the Arthurian world in favour of a more realistic and socio-political core structure, ties into the continuous shifting balance of belief and politics in the expanding Arthurian legend. Church and state, the two great forces in Western society, have always had an impact on Arthurian works, particularly in the medieval and early modern periods when the church still maintained close control over peoples’ hearts and minds, and the system of patronage held sway over their purses. In those eras, any writer could be expected to cater to the views of the writer’s patron and the church with his work, before considering any wider audience. Many of the early medieval works were, unsurprisingly, written by churchmen such as Layamon and Geoffrey, and thus one expects to find the influences of the church in their writing. This is due not only to the vast temporal power of the church, but also to the fact that belief was, if not more widespread in the medieval era than today, certainly more strongly felt and expected among the general populace. This is vastly different from the modern tendency towards a more cynical outlook, as well as the diversity of religions and beliefs which are practiced and endorsed in the modern world.

The influence of the state can be more subtle, as in Malory’s parallel between Arthur’s continental campaign and Henry V’s wars in France (Vinaver xxxi); however, it is easy to see Geoffrey’s attempt to curry favour by endowing “the new Norman kings

with a British heritage,” and Malory’s promotion of Arthur as an ancestor of the Tudor house (Taylor 34). As time passed, the rule of both church and state became less prominent and rigorous in control of individual authors, and the system of patronage died out, making works of literature less restricted. Where authors were once constrained by the need to curry favour with or meet the requirements of a given patron or governing system, they gained greater freedom to write as they chose. The political aspect of most earlier works consisted of praise for a particular government or leader, but many later writers moved towards criticism of governments and society at large, such as Peacock (1829) and Twain (1889)—Twain particularly, since he critiques both the medieval world and the modern (Taylor 169). Novelists from the post-Civil War American South used Arthur’s story for both political aspects. Relying on the close association of chivalry and knightly ideals with the Southern way of life and the Confederacy, writers “alluded to medieval legend to glorify their fallen leaders and vanished way of life” (Taylor 163), simultaneously critiquing the Union.

While religious and political aspects alike have impacted the Arthurian story throughout the years and through its many iterations, and have been commented on by those iterations in turn, within the story itself religion and belief have been the dominant force. Religion, and its counterparts in the realm of belief—the supernatural and magic, have been prominent and, indeed, central to Arthurian re-tellings, appearing in spiritual encounters, the simple mention of everyday life, grand quests, and general concerns. On the same basic quotidian level within the story, the political and governmental fades into the background. Arthur’s story has been used as a tool of politics, but within the story

itself politics has taken second place to supernatural forces. It has always been clear that magic is significant, that the church and faith hold an important place in the minds of Arthur and each of his knights, but the more realistic and worldly aspects of the realm have been neglected. Whether in romance or chronicle tradition, the questions of who runs the day to day affairs of the kingdom, how Arthur holds his power, and where exactly the non-knightly figures fit into the world (for they must exist, even if they are rarely acknowledged in earlier works), are not even addressed.

This is where Whyte's interpretation of the Arthurian story differs. He is not the only writer who acknowledges non-chivalric characters or the gritty detail of daily life—there are numerous others who do this. The difference is that Whyte establishes Arthur's realm from the ground up throughout his series, catching his readers' attention not with mystical experiences, but with the depth of detail that is involved in creating and maintaining a thriving, secure community in post-Roman Britain. Thus, by the time one gets to *The Eagle*, Whyte's Arthurian world is fully developed and at its peak. Whether or not the reader has encountered the earlier novels in the series, he is easily submerged in the layers of detail in society, government and military structure that exist within the tale, which create not a fairytale realm, but a solid, realistic world where nothing is left to the supernatural or the Otherworld to explain and where the real magic is found in the pride, determination, and vision of the characters.

Although he reaches for a believable and non-magical explanation for the Arthurian world, and gives his thinking audience a functional Arthurian society, Whyte does not deprive his audience of the romance of the tale in favour of pure barbarism, as

Taylor accuses Vansittart's *Lancelot* of doing. That Whyte can remove magic, but not lose the romantic charm of the Arthurian story, rests in his recognition that his intellectually curious audience does not require mystical occurrences to enjoy an Arthurian tale but is, rather, "grounded in a common appreciation of the marvels of literature, and the ways in which a great story can be endlessly retold without loss of value" (Whyte interview). Whyte changes the Arthurian story to suit his audience, that modern, inquiring audience that wants to see a 'real' Arthurian society that does not have to rely on mysticism to exist, but is tangible and detailed enough that it could actually have happened, not in some alternate world, but in the actual physical past. No longer is the audience given a story that relies on wizards and fey folk to hold together its strands; rather, they are shown responsible, functional government—perhaps the most mystical element of the story—and a Camulod that is a political power in a solid and believable Arthurian world. In this Whyte recognizes that where "truth can be stranger than fiction," it can also be just as enthralling, compelling, and magical, if not more so. I am not making a claim that Arthur actually existed, as that is a discussion that is outside the scope and interests of this paper. I am simply saying that Whyte's version of Arthur's story has been crafted to be as ordinary and humanly realistic as it can be, in that it can be perceived as 'real.'

It is not enough simply to acknowledge that Whyte has changed the Arthurian story and tried to give the world something different. His work needs to be compared in detail with the two medieval texts I have chosen—Geoffrey's *Historia* and Malory's *Morte Darthur*—to show how it has been changed and why. A comparison of these works

in their entirety would be far too comprehensive for the current study, but an analysis of certain key aspects of the Arthurian tale in relation to the balance of the spiritual and the political, focal points which make the tale what it is today, will give a sufficiently detailed and accurate depiction of Whyte's changes and their significance.

First of all, I will address the more general changes to the Arthurian landscape as a whole in Whyte's work--the setting, narrative perspective, and plotline. This will involve a look at omissions, changes, and additions which he makes to the plot in comparison to the medieval works, as well as a brief discussion of the 'real' world setting. Narrative perspective needs to be addressed in some detail, since the first person narrator is different from medieval versions of the tale, and also Whyte assigns the narration in *The Eagle* to Lancelot, which in itself has a number of interesting consequences for the story.

After this general discussion, I will look specifically at the changes Whyte has made to the more significant motifs and characters, starting with the sword in the stone, a particularly important detail for Whyte, and then looking at Whyte's interpretation of the knights and the Round Table. Three separate sections will be devoted to alterations in characterization, the first for Merlyn and Mordred, who have both been part of the Arthurian story from its earliest iterations and whose roles in Whyte have been changed in a number of ways. The second section will discuss Gwenevere and Lancelot, two characters whose lives are so closely intertwined that it is best to discuss them together.¹

¹ Given the changing nature of the spelling of characters' names across the three texts, and even within Malory's text, some clarification seems necessary here. I am using the 'Merlyn' spelling throughout as it is the spelling used by Whyte and also frequently by Malory. I am using 'Gwenevere' as my spelling for

This section will also touch on aspects of Arthur, since his character is so closely linked to both Gwenevere and Lancelot. The final section will focus on Arthur's development as a character and on his roles as knight and king. While it may seem odd that only one female character is included and that Lancelot is on this list, despite his late addition to the Arthurian cast, this seems to be the most effective grouping of characters to study.² Lancelot, while absent from Geoffrey since he had not yet been added to the Arthurian realm at that early point, is the central character in both Malory and Whyte, and therefore requires a detailed discussion. All of these characters and motifs, when carefully analyzed in relation to the balance of the religious/spiritual aspect of the tale with the cynical/political will present a clear picture of Whyte's changes to the Arthurian story as a whole, and how he has tailored it to fit the outlook of his modern audience and to reflect modern sensibilities.

Arthur's queen, as it is one of the more standard of the numerous spellings available, except she is 'Gwinnifer' when I refer to Whyte's text. For Lancelot I am using the standard spelling, except when discussing Whyte's character, whose proper name is Clothar and whose nickname is Lance.

² The only other female character who has held any great sway over Arthurian matters would be Morgan le Fay, who is not included here for several reasons, one being her absence from Geoffrey, but the more significant being her almost total absence from Whyte. Although a similar name is mentioned at several points, and is significant for Mordred's background, Morgan simply does not exist as a character.

Chapter Two: Altered Plotline and Narrative Perspective

The general changes that have been made to the Arthurian story over the years are very broad and cover every conceivable aspect of the tale. In Whyte's effort to create a more historically realistic story, he has made significant changes to the setting, plotline and narrative perspective by eliminating some aspects and adding or changing others. Under the category of things eliminated fall the majority of the more mystical or supernatural elements which are present in the medieval versions of the tale, aspects that would be difficult to explain in a non-magical way or that are simply not relevant to Whyte's version of the tale. Whether these elements are presented to the medieval reader as supernatural in the sense of being a 'miracle' in the Christian sense, or sorcery of some kind, is rarely specified and not of great importance. Their significance lies in the fact that whether Christian, pagan, demonic or otherwise, the supernatural is a constant presence in the medieval Arthurian texts.

Probably the most obvious example of the supernatural in the Arthurian saga is the Grail. While not present in Geoffrey's *Historia*, by the time of the *Morte* the Grail is a central part of the Arthurian story, and Malory devotes 200 pages to its discussion. The Grail story, added by French writers, is the most specifically Christian of all the supernatural elements, and the majority of it is devoted to miracles, dreams and visions had by the questing knights, and the interpretation of these events by the apparently inexhaustible supply of hermits and recluses who populate the Arthurian landscape. These various holy persons make it clear to both knights and reader that everything that happens while on the Grail quest functions as a test of one Christian virtue or another, the

emphasis seeming to be on chastity, followed by charity and humility. In Whyte's tale, the Grail and its associated miracles and moral lessons are completely omitted. His Arthurian world has no place for the fantastical adventures of the Grail quest, and the heavy emphasis on Christianity and morality does not fit with his pragmatic world view. Through this elimination Whyte also ensures that his tale appeals to *all* of his audience, regardless of their belief system, rather than appealing only to the practicing Catholics to whom the medieval texts were targeted. Religion has its place in *The Eagle*, but it is not allowed to take over the storyline.

Some other significant supernatural or miraculous elements that are also completely omitted from Whyte's tale include the Siege Perilous motif, the magical chair, apparently constructed by Merlin (Vinaver 906-7), that only Galahad may sit in without being destroyed (860). Also in Malory, but absent from Whyte, is the Chapel Perilous, with the miraculous healing cloth and sword that are guarded by a "Sorseres" and what appears to be a swarm of undead knights, and the Questing Beast with the noise in its belly "lyke unto the questing of thirty coupyl houndes" (42), which makes two brief appearances. These fantastical elements have no place in Whyte's realistic world. In the *Historia* the supernatural elements are much less elaborate, due to the brevity of the section that is devoted to Arthur, but Geoffrey still manages to include several incidents, including a very folkloric description of Loch Lomond as having sixty islands, sixty rivers inflowing, and sixty rocks each with an eagle's eyrie (Geoffrey 161). Another digression, told in relation to this by Arthur, describes two other lakes of an apparently miraculous nature (162-3). All of these elements are missing from Whyte's version

simply because, while they function in the medieval texts to help create the mystical backdrop for Arthur's tale, Whyte avoids such mysticism in his efforts to create for his audience the believable world he feels they crave and instead inserts places and adventures of a more solidly realistic nature, threats like poison (Whyte, *The Eagle* 331-2), or the Huns (647).

Aside from eliminating these supernatural motifs from the story entirely, Whyte makes a number of changes to other aspects, in order to make Arthur's tale more 'realistic' and to move away from doing the same thing as his predecessors. One of the changes that differentiates the *Eagle* from the medieval texts in question is the setting. Whyte is much more specific and detailed in his approach to setting than either Geoffrey or Malory, giving the reader a realistic world in which to place the story, as opposed to the more hazy or unbelievable setting of the *Historia* or the *Morte*. Malory is guilty of having a particularly hazy geography, in that the places where most of his knights' adventures occur are unspecified, and occasionally do not even seem to exist in the same world. Much of his tale is vaguely situated in a forest, or near a river, or is not even given a particular description at all. In relation to time, Malory is equally unspecific, something not helped by the patchwork nature of his collective work, giving its chronology an equally choppy presence.

What description Malory does provide for his setting places his work not in the sixth-century world expected for Arthur, but in the courtly and chivalric world of the Late Middle Ages. This is evident in his descriptions of the court, and also in other simple anachronisms such as his mention of the Tower of London (Vinaver 1227) which was not

actually constructed until the 11th century. Geoffrey's Arthur, on the other hand, lives in a more well-defined post-Roman Britain, with numerous place names and lengths of time usually specified, if somewhat generalized, a fact which cannot be helped with such a compact presentation of Arthur's tale. Whyte's story, also set in post-Roman Britain, is even more specific than Geoffrey on many points of geography. Where Geoffrey's setting is indicated, Whyte's is described, giving not only place names but also details on the difficulty of the terrain and the time necessary to travel it, the lay of the land, and paying some attention to the solid Roman roads that other writers take for granted (Whyte, *The Eagle* 566-8). Whyte also steers away from Malory's tendency to insert mystical boats, chapels, or roadside crosses into the landscape, a choice which, along with the elimination of the more mystical elements mentioned above, makes Whyte's Arthurian world seem much more realistic and less like a fairy tale and depends less on the credulity of the audience. Other changes that Whyte makes to the circumstances of his tale that add to this believability include the fact that while, in Malory's Britain, knights often ride alone, or virtually alone, through all kinds of unexplored or hostile territory, Whyte's knights rarely travel alone, recognizing and respecting the dangers of travel, from terrain to hostile forces (179). If they do travel alone or lightly armed, they stay well within the bounds of Camulod's network of farms and guard posts (232-3).

The other key component of setting for the Arthurian tale is, of course, the people who populate the landscape, an aspect which is altered radically in the different versions of the Arthurian story. While Whyte's story focuses on Arthur and his Knights Companion, there are many others who play a role who have no title or claim to nobility.

This strikes a sharp contrast with earlier works like the *Historia*. In the *Historia*, aside from knights, enemies and obvious figures like the Pope, very few people are mentioned. In Arthur's rampant slaughter of the Scots, the common folk are mentioned only insofar as they are the group he is slaughtering, and the only individuals who actually appear are the bishops. In the same way, during Arthur's conquest of the Scandinavian countries, Geoffrey's narrator mentions that the Britons scattered "the country folk" (Geoffrey 165), and the citizens of Paris, as a collective, submit themselves to Arthur after his defeat of Frolo (167). Of individuals there are few. Bedevere encounters an old woman, Helena's nurse, on Mount St. Michael (180), but as a general rule, a person is only individuated if he has a sword or a title, preferably both.

The presentation of the ordinary people is much the same in Malory, despite certain scholars' claims that "Arthurian society as depicted by Malory was a society of equals" (Taylor 3). The knights could be considered equals among themselves but they, and the occasional damsel or priest, are the only 'equals' who are given names and sometimes voices. For the most part, damsels fulfill typecast roles of jailer, enchantress, or provider of opportunities for worship, and are almost always of some noble blood if their identity is specified. For example, the damsel Lynet who appeals to Arthur in the "Tale of Sir Gareth," is both of noble blood and requires a knight to undertake a quest, and dame Brusen, another significant female, is called "one of the grettyst enchaunters that was that tyme in the worlde" (Vinaver 794). This typecasting also extends to the hermits and recluses, who are usually unnamed and seem to exist solely to interpret visions and help heal wounded knights (1076), and also to the more fantastical caricatures

of giants and dwarves who function both as part of the mystical landscape and as the people who populate it.

Giants appear in both Geoffrey and Malory, specifically one particular giant that Arthur battles single-handedly on Mount St. Michael at the start of his continental campaign, a giant whose ferocity and liking for ravaging maidens are emphasized, with Malory adding that it eats Christian babies. Both Geoffrey and Malory mention that this is the second giant Arthur has defeated (Geoffrey 181, Vinaver 204-5) and Malory also includes other giants in his tale (Vinaver 193, 271). Dwarves, which appear frequently in the *Morte*, do not share the same barbaric type-casting as the giants but, rather, fill the role of the common people. They are represented as messengers and escorts for damsels, and outside of their specific roles are generally ignored, such as Gareth's dwarf who is only mentioned when specifically needed for the plot, otherwise apparently being no more than a part of the baggage (302). In Whyte's work there are no dwarves mentioned at all, although there are a number of abnormally large men, including Arthur himself, most particularly Lance's cousin Brach, who is described as being frankly enormous (Whyte, *The Eagle* 651-2). These men are, however, simply presented as large men, blessed or cursed with great bulk and strength much of it gained by their lives as warriors. While these men could be described as 'giant' in size, Whyte never claims that they are giants, with the unbelievable and exaggerated qualities that are associated with mythological giants.

Whyte eliminates these exaggerated types both as part of his general elimination of mystical elements and because they are not necessary in his tale to fill out the

population. He already pays more attention to the 'lower class' people of the Arthurian world than his predecessors. With an eye to realism, prompted and influenced by modern ideas of equality, Whyte manages to show how integral all the people of Camulod are to its functioning, without taking them for granted and overlooking them in favour of the more romantic and adventurous knights. As such, the reader encounters characters such as Lanar, functionally a slave, but also a skilled linguist and valuable and cunning ally (Whyte, *The Eagle* 95-6, 572-7), or Dynas the quartermaster, of simple birth and "barely literate," but who keeps an accurate tally of all Camulod's goods and assets, and is as trustworthy and dependable as any knight (107-110). Besides these and other 'lower class' people who have significant roles and defined personalities, there is also the general populace who, while not necessarily individuated, are a presence nonetheless. The families of men killed by raiders, who have to be relocated (109), unnamed kitchen workers in Camulod who quietly do their jobs to help the community function (135), sailors in the Irish fleet, and servants in Pelles' court are all anonymous, and unimportant on the surface of the tale. Whyte's careful attention to detail in mentioning them, though, reminds the reader of how much work and how many people it takes to make society function, and that while an important part, the knights are not the only occupants of Camulod. It takes more than just warriors for a community to flourish.

Whyte's broader look at the people of Arthur's realm, along with his elimination of the more mystical elements, ties in with his more realistic and politically based presentation of the tale. Although his work is weighted much more heavily towards this pragmatic representation of Arthur's realm, religion and spirituality still have a role to

play. Eliminating them entirely would create, in itself, an unrealistic representation of a society, given that, however much it may be altered from what it once was, spirituality of some form still exists in any given society. In this instance, though, we turn specifically to the presence, or absence, of Christian belief and doctrine. In the works of Geoffrey and Malory, the presence of Christian doctrine is somewhat more expected. Theirs were periods of an arguably more fervently religious nature than the modern era, when belief was widespread, restricted to one approved doctrine and enforced by Crusade and Papal Bull alike. Both writers could depend on their readers, particularly those of a clerical nature, to relate to and endorse the Christian aspects of their tales, at least to some degree. The multitude of doctrines and freedom of choice which are found in the modern Western world, along with the tendency towards secularism and atheism, can make Christian doctrine a more difficult and less desirable subject for writers like Whyte, since to espouse a particular viewpoint risks alienating all others. Aspects of Christian belief are present in Whyte, but are given different weight and are approached from a different viewpoint, more open to debate and negotiation, in order to appeal to the varied nature of his modern audience.

One aspect that can be considered under this heading is the notion of barbarism, the subject of which comes up in Clothar's narration as he considers how to prove to the world that Arthur's enemy, Connlyn, is dead. At the suggestion that they take the head along as proof, Clothar is repulsed, and reflects that "violence in war was justifiable, given just cause and sufficient provocation, but barbarism never was. Civilized Christians did not indulge in barbarism, and pickling a head was barbarism, plain and simple"

(Whyte, *The Eagle* 590). While not a distinct feature of Christian doctrine, barbarism, or the lack thereof, is certainly included in the notion of “love thy neighbor,” one of Christianity’s principal tenets, and thus one can easily see how Clothar connects the two. The interesting point here is that barbarism, in general, is more directly connected to notions of civility than to any specific religion. Indeed, Geoffrey’s and Malory’s texts, with their greater religious grounding, each feature beheadings, specifically that of the giant killed by Arthur. Granted, the giant is presented as sub-human, even demonic, in appearance and habits and thus violence can be justified from a Christian standpoint of smiting evil, but the fact remains that in both texts Arthur, after killing the creature, orders Bedevere to chop off its head, give it to a squire, and have it delivered to their camp and set up on a post (Geoffrey 181, Vinaver 204). In Geoffrey’s text it is even described as “a raree show for sightseers” (181), which does not seem like the act of a charitable Christian, whatever the reality of warfare at the time. One wonders what Whyte’s Clothar would have made of this situation.

It is interesting to note that Clothar’s initial reflection is qualified as “*civilized* Christians.” Indeed, much of Whyte’s portrayal of Christianity is a portrayal less of a religion and more of a civilized human nature. The contrast between barbaric Saxon/pagan invaders and Arthurian Christians which is present in all three texts is sharply defined in Whyte, simply because Whyte’s characters have a more modern sense of civility and are presented as much more level-headed and considerate of all life. This can be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that Whyte is writing for a modern, predominantly Western audience, for whom the conventions of civilized society dictate

that beheading and its like are to be looked on as horrifying atrocities rather than facts of war. The medieval writers, writing long before modern rules of war, do not have to worry about their audience being distracted by such conventions and can have their characters employ beheading as a method without debating its morality. For these writers, other conventions take priority, such as chivalry. Malory's knights, for example, are very respectful of life, so long as it is the life of a damsel or an identified fellow Round Table knight and countryman. If the person in question were a foreigner or a 'Sarysen,' not all the charity in heaven could save him from Arthur's knights. While these foreigners and 'Sarysens'—a term I use with some reluctance as Malory uses it with no regard for specifics, as a kind of general blanket term for most of Arthur's enemies—are portrayed as mortal enemies of Arthur in both Geoffrey and Malory, and thus some violence might be expected, barbarism and excess are both unnecessary and unjustified on the part of a 'Christian' army such as Arthur's. Yet, that is what is displayed, and in some cases also shrugged off, by the narrator as a matter of course.

In Arthur's conquest of Scotland in the *Historia*, for example, his army sets upon the Scots and Picts with great brutality. It is true that the Scots and Picts had provoked him by besieging the city of Alclud, but that hardly seems grounds for Arthur to pursue them into the wilderness, besiege them on the islands of Loch Lomond for fifteen days so that many of them starve, and then turn his thoughts to "doing away utterly" with their races (Geoffrey 161). Putting down an uprising is entirely justifiable, but attempted genocide is a very un-Christian response to any act. The narrator of the *Historia*, somewhat biased by Geoffrey's position as a churchman and desire to please other

churchmen, agrees with this assessment of affairs, and refers to Arthur's treatment of the Scots and Picts as "cruelty beyond compare" (161). Arthur had previously employed similar tactics of besieging and starving against the "Paynim" Saxons at the forest of Caledon, but these he released after a promise of hostages and a payment of tribute (157-8). While their later breaking of that promise could explain Arthur's more brutal treatment of the Scots and Picts—at least some of whom, it should be noted, were Christian—even betrayal by one enemy is not grounds for a massacre of the next one to come along. That is not justice; it is lashing out in anger and revenge, and rather than reflecting Christian mercy seems to represent the more Old Testament idea of retribution.

Malory's narration reports similar barbarity and excess on Arthur's part, particularly in his early years on the throne, and lacks even the mitigating censorious tone of Geoffrey. This brutality of Malory's Arthurian knights is particularly apparent during the campaign on the continent against Lucius. After taking umbrage at Lucius' demand for tribute, Arthur responds by assembling an army and proceeding to conquer the entirety of modern France and part of Italy. Lucius' army is described as consisting largely of the previously mentioned giants, and of a large number of 'Sarysens', which seems to indicate anyone who cannot be included under the heading of 'Roman,' perhaps because the Romans are more civilized by reputation than the barbaric 'Sarysens.' In one particular battle, for example, Malory describes a "grete slaughter...on the Sarysens party" (Vinaver 215) and mentions, in an offhand manner, that "mo than fyve thousand" of them were killed and those who fled were pursued by Arthur's knights who "slew downe of the Sarezens on every side" (216). This casual slaughter of fleeing foes can be

contrasted with the accounting, immediately afterwards, of the dead Arthurian knights, of whom six are specifically mentioned and wept over by the king. A civilized Christian king might be expected to spare a thought for the thousands of slaughtered enemies his conquest has produced, and the families that they doubtless had at home, but given that Malory makes sure to specify that these enemies were 'Sarysens' it seems that non-Christians are unworthy of charitable thoughts.

These blanket terms of 'Sarysen' in Malory and the similarly used 'Saxon' in Geoffrey do not indicate all of the enemies that Arthur has in those works. In Malory Arthur also has to deal with threats at home from minor British kings, and in Geoffrey there are threats on the continental campaign from the various armies that they meet. Those other enemies receive much more attention as individuals, however, and the tone of the works when referring to them is very different. The Saxons and 'Sarysens' are generalized, even demonized, and the enmity, bordering on unbridled hatred, which Arthur and his knights feel toward them, does not have a counterpart in Whyte's work. Just the fact that these peoples are generally not individuated in any way, but represented entirely as monstrous and despised gives their treatment by their respective authors a tone of rabid bigotry. While there are Saxons in *The Eagle*, this term is not used as a catchall for those who are invading Britain. Whyte's characters and his narrator, when speaking of these non-British folk, make a point of specifying nationalities. Thus, the largest of the groups who have settled along the Saxon shore are identified as actually being Anglians (Whyte, *The Eagle* 417-8). Even more interestingly, Arthur's folk, at least those like Arthur and Clothar who have an informed outlook on the world, recognize that these

"Outlander Anglians," as a general rule, are much like themselves, looking only for a peaceful place to raise their crops and families (136). Among the more warlike of the non-Britons, the ones that manage to slip past Camulod's defences are not Saxons either, but turn out to be Danes (200). While it makes little difference to those who end up being attacked and having their homes burned who it is that did so, the fact that at least the leaders of Camulod recognize the cultural differences is an important indication of their way of thinking. The peaceable Anglians are acknowledged as like-minded neighbours, and the Saxons and Danes are viewed as individual enemy threats, rather than simply being othered and despised under one general title.

This difference in portrayal of enemies from one work to another is in large part due to the cultural background of the author. Geoffrey is writing in the period when the Normans were beginning to take a "keen interest in the past history of their newly-acquired domain" (Geoffrey xv), and thus a vilification of the rampaging Saxon horde, from whom the Normans had just taken rule of the country, is a career-building move in that it emphasizes the Saxons' supposedly evil nature and brutish strength, thus praising the Norman conquerors. For Malory, writing over three hundred years later, the Saxons are no longer a topic of choice. With speculation that his Arthur is a tribute to Henry V (Vinaver xxxi) and an awareness of the warlike deeds of both Henry and his predecessors, the continental war would hold more interest for Malory and his target audience. Also, the lengthy history of crusading which precedes Malory makes the 'Sarysen' a much more viable and easily stereotyped character, since it is already present in the popular imagination.

In Whyte's work, the enemies are more individuated. The Saxons, as discussed above, are given a little more development and, while still enemies, are not vilified with the same enthusiasm given the subject by Geoffrey. Where the medieval authors present generalized enemies who are exaggerated almost into folktale villains by the racism and religious bigotry exercised by the authors—whether or not this reflects their personal thoughts or simply the perceived desires of the reader—the enemies portrayed in Whyte's work who are vilified are all individuals, each with their own particular style of rule and their own way of aggravating and threatening the protagonists. These include the oft mentioned but never encountered Claudas, the self-serving poisoner Baldwin, the notoriously elusive Connlyn, and the nominally allied Symmachus. Where Geoffrey and Malory save their most self-righteous anger for generalized enemies, Whyte's most biting narratorial commentary is reserved for these individuals who each represent an insidious, often unrecognized, internal threat for a kingdom, which boils to the surface causing death, strife and betrayal. These betrayals, an interesting parallel to the betrayal by Mordred in Geoffrey and Malory, are the acts of the enemies whom Whyte portrays as the most significant, the vilest and the most hurtful to Arthur and the others involved. In keeping with his modern audience's 'enlightened' nature, Whyte provides enemies who affect the protagonists on a personal level, and have faces and voices of their own, rather than giving Arthur a stereotyped, faceless group of enemies to fight. The individuated enemies also steer the Arthurian story away from the racism and religious fanaticism which occasionally rises to the surface in the medieval versions. Whyte's tale is less concerned with race or religion, and more focussed on Arthur's goal to protect his people,

and on the basic human right to live in peace. This reflects not only Whyte's recognition of modern social mores which state that such stereotyping is distasteful at best, but also his Western, specifically Canadian, heritage and audience. In a multicultural society such as Canada, especially, a generalized labelling of enemies based on religion or race is best avoided if the author wishes to avoid offering insult, whether on principle for his intellectual readers, or because the reader happens to share the race or religion in question. The vilification of individual enemies by the narrator and other voices which focuses on their betrayals, greed and in some cases on personality clashes as well, creates enemies against whom all readers can support Arthur, rather than potentially alienating those readers.

The changes that Whyte makes to the narratorial voice regarding Arthur's enemies reflect his overall movement towards a different narrative approach. Unlike Geoffrey and Malory—or, indeed, the majority of medieval Arthurian rewrites—Whyte's tale is presented in the first person, narrated by a character in the story. Whyte has this in common with many modern novels, which opt for the more personal and often psychologically insightful form of first person wherein the narration doubles as an exploration of the narrator's thoughts and emotions, drawing the reader deeper into the story and forcing her to connect on an emotional level with the narrator. Whyte's movement away from the third person voice of the medieval chronicles and romances is an indicator of his effort to modernize the tale, but it is his choice of narrator that is most intriguing. Where some modern rewrites of Arthur are narrated by a childhood companion like Bedevere providing anecdotal evidence of youthful exploits, by a more

distant source like Derfel in Cornwell's trilogy who provides a common soldier's view of Arthur or, more rarely, by someone like Morgan in Bradley's work who provides a female perspective, Whyte gives his narration to Clothar.

Making his Lancelot character the narrator is a significant move on Whyte's part since Lancelot is traditionally an outsider in Arthur's court. It is not that he is necessarily treated as one who does not belong by those around him in any of the Arthurian works, but the fact remains that he is introduced to the Arthurian canon as Lancelot du Lac, the French knight. Given the context of the invading outlander Saxons in earlier works, and the ongoing English/French rivalry which colours later works, Lancelot's place at Arthur's court, as the French knight, is a peculiar one. In Malory, one discovers fairly late in the work that Lancelot is a powerful lord and landowner in his own right, with sufficient resources and troops to withstand a siege by Arthur and his men easily—the same Arthur who had earlier conquered the majority of the continent. That this is not revealed until the end, despite Lancelot being essentially the main character of the story, is peculiar, and whatever Malory's intention with this secrecy, it is due in part to the nature of the narrative voice and its somewhat distant third person perspective. This revelation does lead one to wonder what such a powerful lord has been doing trotting around England jousting when all the time he has had his own kingdom across the Channel, and how the English knights feel having him stealing all the glory. It is clear that Gawain's brethren, at least, are not happy about it (Vinaver 1161). In Whyte, though, the outsider Frankish knight Clothar, a king without a kingdom, is given the narratorial voice, a fact which has several interesting effects on the storyline besides simply giving

the reader insight into Clothar's own background. The first of these is that it provides a great deal of insight into Arthur's kingdom, since it is seen and presented to the reader through an outsider's eyes. As such, the reader is introduced to it from the outside in along with Clothar, and the customs or approaches of Camulod which he finds different, such as its governing system, are commented on by him and explained.

By placing the narration in Clothar's hands, Whyte is also allowing himself further play with one of the key themes of his work, perception. The notion of perception is one which is referenced and discussed multiple times throughout *The Eagle* and plays an important role in Whyte's approach to the religious and magical aspects of the faith versus skepticism and politics dichotomy. It is Clothar who most frequently brings up the notion of perception within the text, introducing the idea to Arthur, and Clothar who defines and discusses it and how it can be put to use, particularly in regard to Excalibur and the knights of the Round Table, which will be discussed in more detail later. Also, the fact that Clothar is narrator means that the entire story is somewhat coloured by his own perceptions of the people and events around him, a bias that is mitigated by his self-reflective nature which allows his narrative voice to step back from the scene and consider it differently than his character's initial reactions. The end result, though, is still that it is Clothar's perceptions of his surroundings that are transmitted to the reader, and thus his views of his fellows and his relationships with them that the story portrays, a portrayal that is sometimes quite different from traditional perceptions of the tale.

The second effect of Clothar's narration is the fact that Clothar's position as narrator gives the story a uniquely Canadian perspective of the small (nearly singular)

French presence existing within a larger English whole. Clothar's differing heritage is never forgotten; indeed the majority of the populace refers to him as "the Frank," both because referring to one another by first name was not customary, we are told, and also because they had no desire to attempt his "foreign, alien-sounding name" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 26). Clothar seems to have no problems with this, though, and appears to be treated with respect, a fact which is doubtless a result of his proven prowess as a warrior, and of his favour with Arthur. One thing that is not seen is any enmity between Clothar and Arthur's other knights, as there is in Malory's account. Clothar, while consistently acknowledged as an outsider—much more so than Lancelot—is accepted as part of the community. This acceptance is not solely out of respect for his prowess, as seems to be the case with Lancelot on occasion when his name alone grants him passage, but also is out of genuine friendship. Clothar remains 'the Frank,' but he is an essential and well-loved member of the British community.

The emphasis on French/English relations within the text, brought about by Clothar's position of narrator, make an interesting commentary on modern Canadian French/English relations. This can be seen in the close friendship between Arthur and Clothar, a friendship which allows for teasing and friendly mockery without insult. Clothar's different heritage is an ongoing source of jokes between the two. Arthur, in moments of friendly raillery, calls Clothar a "Gaulish fool" (545), and he mocks Arthur in turn by claiming to be "nothing but a foreigner, lacking the proper awe of [his] status and stature" (6). Behind their mock-formal bantering of "Seur King" and "Seur Frank" (207) lies a deep bond of friendship which encompasses their differing cultures and

upbringings. Such good-humoured self-mockery says something about the potential for people of disparate backgrounds to forge strong bonds of friendship and suggests the multi-cultural context from which Whyte writes. Whyte reflects his Canadian background and Canadian readership by inserting such cross-cultural co-operation into his tale as a reflection of Canadian heritage and, through his exploration of it in Clothar and Arthur's easy friendship, seems to suggest to his readers that such co-operation should be more widespread.

In the same way, Whyte's revision of Arthur's continental campaign embraces the idea of different cultures working together in a symbiosis. In this case it is not only the traditional English/French divide which is bridged, but also the English/Scottish division, since the mutually beneficial alliance that is forged, through Clothar, with Pelles' Frankish kingdom could not have been brought about without both Clothar's French connections and language skills, and the assistance of Connor's Scottish fleet. In this case Clothar's Frankish background allows Whyte to bring both his Canadian and Scottish cultural influences into play in a complex and highly successful partnership which profits all three groups—Camulodians, Franks and Scots alike. Whyte's approach strikes an interesting contrast with the traditional Scottish view of the Arthurian legend, which tends to be resentful of its support for English sovereignty, a dis-ease and suspicion which was mutual (Purdie and Royan 5). This mistrust shows itself in Malory's portrayal of the Scottish knights as a major factor of the downfall of Arthur's kingdom, in the persons of Gawain and his brethren, and also in the other knights who are recruited to capture Lancelot and are subsequently killed. The jealousy and competition in general

between Gawain and his kin and Lancelot and his supporters in Malory also show cultural conflict, between English, Scottish and French, since it is the squabbling of the Scottish and French knights which brings about the end of Arthur's rule. This both showcases an inability of different cultures to work together, and betrays the beginnings of an English imperialist viewpoint, since Malory places the blame squarely on the non-English characters. Whyte's use of Clothar as his narrator, on the other hand, not only steps away from the possibilities of imperialist overtones, but also helps him to completely reverse the cultural conflict of his medieval predecessors, and re-write the story for his modern multi-cultural audience. The multiculturalism of Whyte's own background and that of his audience is thus brought into the story through Clothar's different cultural background, and given a prominence and emphasis that it might not otherwise have had through Clothar's position as narrator. These changes also allow Whyte to refocus the conflict of the story on the powerful outside forces which seek to undermine Camulod, like Symmachus and Connlyn, rather than getting caught up in petty cultural squabbles.

Chapter Three: Altered Motifs: The Sword in the Stone and the Round Table

The main aspect of Whyte's refocusing of his Arthurian tale, helped in part by Clothar's narrative role, is in his move away from the magical and supernatural towards a more practical or skeptical outlook on the Arthurian tale. To those elements which would be chalked up to 'magic' in other versions of the story, Whyte gives simple, rational explanations. The position of Excalibur in the tale is an excellent example of this re-evaluation of the mythical as reality seen through the lens of perception.

In Geoffrey's version of the story, one sees the simple beginnings of Excalibur's legend. We are told that Arthur is "girt...with Caliburn, best of swords, that was forged within the Isle of Avalon" (Geoffrey 159). When he charges into battle, "whomsoever he touched, calling upon God, he slew at a single blow, nor did he once slacken in his onslaught until that he had slain four hundred and seventy men single-handedly with his sword Caliburn" (160). While this passage is unclear as to whether it is Arthur's great prowess, God's will, or Caliburn's might which should be credited with such an unrestrained slaughter, the tone of the passage and of the arming scene previous to it are both reminiscent of the early Celtic myths where Arthur originates (Green 61), and of the Icelandic sagas. Caliburn's position as the "best of swords" and its origin in Avalon imply that it is Otherworldly and magical, and thus the credit for great deeds in battle is owed, at least in part, to it. It makes sense for Geoffrey to emphasize the magic of the sword, since he is both working from Celtic legends, rife with the supernatural, and working within the historic-epic genre where magical weapons are generally accepted. As

such it would be odd if he did not place emphasis on Caliburn's magical properties, and would run counter to what his reading audience would expect.

While Excalibur's mystical origins and empowering role in battle are established early on, the complex story interweaving the sword in the stone and the Lady of the Lake come later. By Malory's time these elements have been fully developed, and Excalibur's position in the tale has become much more prominent. It is no longer simply a tool of war or a symbol of Otherworldly power, but plays an active role in multiple episodes and is a key driving force for the plot. In the power vacuum left by Uther Pendragon's death, Merlyn promises the lords a miracle and gathers them in London where they find the sword, pierced through a stone and anvil, with gold letters reading "Whoso pulleth oute this swerd of this stone and anyyld is rightwys kynge borne of all Englonde" (Vinaver 12). While the lords cannot remove the sword, young Arthur can, and does so on several occasions, the first time unaware of its significance and seeking only to find a sword for his foster brother to bear in the tournament (13). This marks the beginning of Excalibur's extensive influence over Arthur's life, an influence which blends with the many other magical aspects of the tale as a part of Malory's overall reliance on the mystical, as his readers would expect in keeping with the chivalric tradition. Although Excalibur eventually breaks, it is soon replaced with another magical sword given him by the Lady of the Lake, also named Excalibur, meaning "Kutte Stele" (65). It is unclear whether Malory means these two Excaliburs to be taken as two different swords or if he has included two origin stories of the same sword. In either case, the sword's magic and its extensive influence over Arthur's life is undoubted and is reinforced throughout the tale,

particularly during the battle between Arthur and Accolon, in which Arthur nearly dies when Accolon wields Excalibur against him (142-4).

In keeping with his desire to present the 'real' story of Arthur, Whyte's Excalibur is a very different sword. While many elements of the story remain, they are altered to provide Whyte's desired explanation for the sword which relies not on magic, but on a logical sequence of events that the reader can believe could actually have taken place. The Lady of the Lake, in Whyte's books, is a statue made of ore retrieved from a meteor strike in a lakebed. This statue is later melted down to create Excalibur, the name of which the creator (Merlyn's great-uncle) derives from the process of casting the hilt (Whyte, *The Eagle* 51-9).³ All of this happens many years before Arthur is born, providing the sword with a somewhat complex, but very solid and believable history. As with Arthur's story as a whole, Whyte represents Excalibur as a weapon with a perfectly natural and non-magical, if perhaps unusual, origin, and blames the public's ideas about it being magical on their own misperceptions and exaggeration over time. Where, in the medieval works, Excalibur's 'magic' is taken as a matter of course and expected by the readers, Whyte reveals this expectation for the superstition it is, and treats his readers as intelligent, skeptical people who can, and wish to, see beyond the illusion. The medieval readers, in Whyte's interpretation of the Arthurian world, are one and the same as the misperceiving public who create Excalibur's, and other, magic out of nothing but their own mistaken beliefs. Only the passage of time and misinterpretation or misperception by

³ The actual sequence of events involving finding the meteor and the creation of the Lady of the Lake is described in *The Skystone*, and the creation of Excalibur occurs in *The Singing Sword*.

those hearing the tale could make Whyte's tale of Excalibur seem mystical, or make the very solid Roman ex-legionnaire Publius Varrus appear as an Otherworldly smith.

The momentous turning point in Arthur's career, the drawing of the sword from the stone, is also addressed very differently by Whyte, although unlike the Lady of the Lake, it is deliberately manipulated by the characters to appear magical. It is the sword-in-stone moment that Whyte's Clothar uses to explain to Arthur the importance of perception, and to uncover exactly why Arthur's men see him as invulnerable and his sword as magical. In Whyte's version of the story,⁴ Excalibur is inserted by Merlyn into a carefully chiselled hole in the altar stone, and covered by a cloth. As such, when Arthur, informed ahead of time of what to do, pulls it forth, it appears to the thousands of common people, soldiers and religious persons assembled for the event that the altar cross has miraculously transformed into a sword. Although Arthur knows ahead of time what he is to do, he does not know about Excalibur, whose existence had been a closely guarded secret for sixty years. The result, predictably, is astonishment on Arthur's part at the sight of the glorious new sword he is to wield, giving the whole 'miracle' a more genuine appearance. The watching thousands are awed as they witness their new king draw forth a shining blade from what appears to be solid stone, in the glow of a brilliant sunbeam which had conveniently appeared only moments before. While Merlyn, of course, had no control over the sun, and could only be happy that it had cooperated so nicely, the rest of the charade is orchestrated entirely by him. Arthur is concerned ahead

⁴ The sword-in-stone moment in Whyte's series occurs in *The Sorcerer: Metamorphosis* (pages 319-50), which is narrated by Merlyn.

of time that the whole affair is merely a ruse, and that he will be laughed at, but Merlyn reassures him that the ceremony will be a symbol of "Britain's cause," saying that "People need symbols to direct their beliefs" (Whyte, *The Sorcerer: Metamorphosis* 323). Merlyn knows full well the power of the performance they are conducting.

While Clothar was not at the coronation ceremony, and did not meet Arthur until sometime later, by the beginning of *The Eagle*, he is sufficiently trusted that he knows all the details of the ceremony, both the public version, and the secret involvement of Merlyn, chiselling out a hole in the altar stone and substituting sword for cross in the middle of the night (348). As an educated outsider, though, Clothar approaches the situation from a different point of view than Arthur. While Arthur, as one who was partially informed, takes it for granted that the events of that day were orchestrated by Merlyn—and were, therefore, perfectly natural, if somewhat surprising—Clothar has had to learn of those same events both from Arthur and from others. He admits that he doesn't "know the truth of it" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 16), and as such he is more inclined to grant credence to others' accounts—not necessarily believing that they saw what they say, but believing that they perceived it as such. Clothar knows that the whole affair was staged, "mere mummery, designed by Merlin for effect," as Arthur puts it (16), but Clothar, unlike Arthur, also recognizes how it must have appeared to the common people and to Arthur's assembled army.

Clothar's position as Arthur's close friend in *The Eagle* allows him to force Arthur to open his eyes to the strength of Merlyn's symbol, and the power granted by peoples' misguided perceptions, and his position as narrator allows him to do the same

for the reading audience. Rather than being presented with the story from the viewpoint of Arthur's skepticism or other peoples' belief in the magic of the ceremony—which would be more in keeping with the point of view of the medieval narrations—the reader, in keeping with Whyte's desire for a more realistic tale, is given an inside look from an outside viewer. Clothar's insight into the reasons behind and the import of the ceremony and the sword provide Whyte's inquiring audience with not only an entirely credible real-world explanation for the sword in the stone, but also with the political motivation behind the ceremony. While Whyte eliminates magic from the tale as being unrealistic and superstitious, and not fitting into the believable historic world that he wants to present to his readers, the fact remains that the people of the time in question would have been more inclined to believe in such miraculous happenings. They would have wanted to see magic and miracles in the world around them and, wanting to see them, would have convinced themselves that they did in fact see them, whatever may actually have happened. Their perceptions of events would have been coloured by their beliefs and desires. Whyte's presentation of the 'magic' of Excalibur, then, draws on this, providing the modern inquiring reader with a legitimately believable explanation that the story of the sword's magic arises from a few clever men playing on the beliefs of the masses and using public perception of events to create a symbol to strengthen a new king's reign.

“Your men,” Clothar tells Arthur, “saw you endowed with that magic sword... They saw it come into your possession miraculously.” To Arthur's protests that it was only trickery, he responds that “It worked better than well, for it convinced the world” (Whyte, *The Eagle* 15). Arthur, well-educated and informed by the ever-questioning

Merlyn, prefers to think that his men, like him, saw nothing miraculous in the events of that day. To Arthur there *was* no miracle. Clothar, though, recognizes that the reality of the situation was not as important for the men's lasting impressions, as was their perception of events. Excalibur serves much the same purpose in Malory, except that there it proves, as well as sanctions, the young king's claim. The key difference between the presentations is that Malory's medieval narrator puts forth the episode as an actual miracle—Christian or otherwise—and his readers, whether believing this or not, tacitly accept it as true by reading and wanting such tales, in the vein of the chivalric tradition. The magical sword fits with the type of tale popular at the time. Whyte's audience, the inquiring modern minds, may find such notions diverting, but recognize that such magical swords could not, in fact, exist historically. Magic in the modern world is relegated to magic tricks—so called because everyone realises, like Whyte's Arthur, that magic is merely trickery. For his audience, Whyte provides a down-to-earth, logical and eminently practical political explanation, without resorting to magic. For Whyte's purposes the 'magic' of the sword in the stone lies in Merlyn's recognition of the need for a powerful symbol to help rally support for his new king and, later, in Clothar's recognition of how Arthur can make use of that symbol again to strengthen his rule further and bind his men closer to him.

In an effort to make Arthur see this, and see how significant Excalibur's legend is for his role as king, Clothar states baldly that because of the ceremony with the sword Arthur's men think he is "more than simply human" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 17). Clothar sees and emphasizes to Arthur, and to the reader, that while the sword itself has no power, its

name and history, and how they are perceived, make it a very powerful talisman, that Arthur must learn to use. "Perceptions," Clothar points out, "can shape destinies, my lord" (19). It is for this reason that, in his later years after Arthur and Camulod are no more, Clothar keeps Excalibur secret. Although he has inherited the sword from Merlyn's keeping, and has it in his home, he pretends to questioners that it is his own weapon from his youth, knowing that if he revealed the true owner, "they would know its name and that would cause nothing but more grief. And so it is no longer Excalibur, the magical sword born of a flashing, fallen star and forged for a great King. It is simply a magnificent sword, fit to be worn by a champion" (686). People's perceptions of the magical Excalibur and its supposed properties would lead to covetous claims and violence, but as long as the sword remains unnamed and its true owner unacknowledged, it is nothing but a particularly shiny piece of steel. This drive to hide the weapon and keep others from claiming its perceived power is also found in Malory's work when Arthur tasks Bedevere with casting the sword into the lake (Vinaver 1238-40), although, as with the sword-in-stone affair, in Malory's case the sword is treated as being actually magical, rather than being merely perceived as such.

The magic of Excalibur in all three versions of the tale, the power that makes it so impressive and coveted, is that it is perceived as making Arthur invulnerable. Excalibur's power as a magical weapon is literal in Geoffrey and Malory, as already discussed, and in Malory it is made clear that it is the sword and not the wielder that is key, as in the challenge between Arthur and Accolon. There it is the possession of Excalibur, and its magical sheath, that literally makes the difference between life and death. Excalibur's

sheath is disregarded by Whyte and the mythical properties of invulnerability are entirely focussed in the supposedly magical sword. For Whyte, though, it is peoples' perceptions, not literality, which is the key. Rather than leave this to the readers to decipher on their own, Whyte has his narrator explain to the readers and Arthur as one how this can be used to their advantage and in doing so sets up the realistic basis upon which Whyte will build another Arthurian mainstay, the Order of Knights. Clothar points out that it is possession of Excalibur that makes Arthur's men see him as super-human, and that as long as he continues to wield it, they will see him as one who leads "a charmed life, unable to be injured" (20), despite Arthur's protests of his own vulnerability. The obvious course of action, to Clothar's mind, is to make use of this public perception. His idea is for Arthur to acknowledge to his men that he *is* blessed, despite his belief otherwise, and to tell them that he will share his 'gift'—not his kingship, but the "mantle and the aura of power vested in [him] through Excalibur" (21). He describes it to Arthur as blessing them with its power.

Clothar's insight into the source of the power of Excalibur convinces Arthur that rather than continuing to deny it, Arthur should embrace the perception of it as magical and use it, as Merlyn did in the original ceremony, to empower his reign and to bind his men closer to him in fellowship. Thus the idea is born which leads to the creation of the "Order of Knights Companion to the King" (71) a way to promote select officers in their own eyes and the eyes of the rest of the soldiers (56), by endowing them with a part of Arthur's 'magic.' That the whole idea is a somewhat Machiavellian plan to use the men's misguided perceptions for political gain must be granted—even Arthur recognizes it as

being ridiculous but recognizes that it “might just be sufficiently nonsensical” to please his detractors (36). Although the order of knights is created essentially as an elaborate deception, its purpose is well-meaning. The people may be misguided in their beliefs about Arthur’s and Excalibur’s magic, but rather than futilely trying to convince them otherwise, Arthur, Clothar and Merlyn set out to create a tool which will help the kingdom. It starts out as a fabrication, a means to an end, but since the people and the men perceive it as real, and perceive Arthur’s magic as genuine, the ceremony and the status of the knights it creates take on a new significance. Clothar admits to a “blissful ignorance” on all of their parts as to what the end result will be, but an awareness that it will be something “unique and extraordinary” (72). Arthur and Clothar use their political savvy to take the erroneous perceptions of the populace and create a new order for the betterment of their society, and those same perceptions are exactly what help to validate and secure that order and the knights in the hearts and minds of the people as being something extraordinary and legendary.

Thus the magic of Excalibur and the legend of the Order of Knights are presented by Whyte as an elaborate political manipulation of peoples’ perceptions for the purpose of maintaining control, boosting morale, and offering to outsiders another level of mystical power to consider before thinking of striking against Camulod. This political explanation of both sword and knighthood could be seen by some as mundane and even somewhat distasteful next to the romanticized fantasy realm offered by earlier writings, but the true magic of Whyte’s interpretation lies in the men involved. Arthur and his key advisors are clever enough to see in peoples’ perceptions of Excalibur the solution to

their problems with morale. Not only do they make use of Excalibur to solve those problems, they also manage to make the Order work as an entity in itself, both as an institution for military promotion and as a symbolic ceremony behind which the common people can rally, to the point that it becomes equally as romanticized as Excalibur itself. In Malory the knights are romanticized outright by the narrator, and the political advantages for Arthur in keeping such men close to him and promoting them, making them both feared and revered throughout the land, fades into the background behind magical exploits, religious quests, and chivalric trappings. For Whyte, however, the magic lies in the fact that the characters create the Order of Knighthood knowing that it is merely a political tool, but the idea is romanticized by the people to such a degree that even those directly involved, such as Clothar, come to feel a certain spirituality in the ceremony. Malory gives his audience the knights of chivalric tradition that they expect, knights who follow romance traditions before all else and who live and breathe religious devotion and magical quests for worship. Whyte, on the other hand, presents an entirely practical and political Order of Knighthood which, despite its mundane reality, still becomes legendary even in its own time, simply because of the calibre of men involved. Malory's knights are incredible, exaggerated, and often given their own magical qualities. Whyte's knights are merely men—men whose advancement as knights and whose acclaim by the people rely on martial talent, loyalty, intelligence, and gruelling practice, men whom the modern reader can appreciate as warriors and leaders, while still being genuine and realistic. They are heroes in their own right, and Excalibur's mantle of perceived power serves only to emphasize this.

Aside from the direct issue of the magic of Excalibur in the creation of the Order of Knights, the overarching issue of religion, specifically Christianity, must also be addressed. As part of Whyte's movement away from the religious toward a more practical and realistic political presentation of events, the religious elements surrounding Excalibur and the Knights are altered. Whyte's Order of Knights, while created under the banner of Christianity, is largely secular. Although the knights are blessed by bishops, and spend the night before the investiture ceremony in the church praying—or, alternately, contemplating how impossible it is to pray for an entire night without years of training (72)—the heart of the ceremony is less about Christian belief than it is about the peoples' superstitious beliefs about Arthur and his sword and the political gains to be made with the Order's creation. The banner of Christianity is invoked for the same reason that it was a key in Arthur's coronation: the Church, although still relatively new and challenged in Britain, is a source of power that Arthur wants on his side. If the knighthood ceremony is enveloped "in the mantle of the Church's sanctity" it is given an added level of legitimacy (55) which is necessary when one is creating a new order, rite, and ceremony out of nothing. The end result, though, is not so much a religious order as it is a religious endorsement of an elite warrior class.

Even the fact that Whyte's narrator points out the impossibility of praying all night undermines the religious aspect of the ceremony, making it less about Christianity and more about self-knowledge and contemplation. This meditative reflection is more in keeping with Whyte's overall movement away from the religious and is more suited to Clothar's self-reflective intellectual character. It is also more believable for the reader

than the idea of a hardened warrior and skeptic spending an entire night in the throes of fervent religious devotion and maintains Clothar and his fellow knights as characters to whom the modern reader can relate. Spending an entire night in prayer may seem excessive to a more secular reader, but a night of self-evaluation and exploration is a concept both much more believable and more useful. This movement away from strict religious contemplation is also a sign of how Whyte tailors the tale for his modern audience in recognizing not only the more secular nature of modern society, but also the fact that, unlike the medieval readers of Malory, his readership consists of many different faiths and beliefs. By moving away from a more Catholic moment of prayer and transforming it to self-contemplation Whyte takes nothing away from the ceremony, and encourages all of his readers to relate.

The supposed ability for any lay person to spend an entire night in prayer leads one to think of Malory's devout knights, for whom such a contemplative moment would be given explicit religious overtones. While Malory's knights have no specific religious ceremony associated with their initial, individual knighting, their position as knights of the Round Table specifically, along with their roles throughout the tale, are fraught with religious context and demands. Upon the formal institution of the Round Table, Arthur has the knights swear an oath that is, functionally, a distillation of the chivalric code. The oath commands them, among other things, never to commit murder or partake in a wrongful quarrel, to grant mercy to those who ask and to avoid treason, and to "do ladyes, damsels, and jantilwomen and wydowes socour: strengthe hem in hir ryghtes, and never to enforce them" (120). Arthur makes it understood that the punishment for

breaking these chivalric commandments is death, as regards the behaviour towards ladies, or “forfeiture of their worship and lordship of kynge Arthure for evermore” in the other cases (120). Aside from the clause regarding ladies, which seems to be drawn straight from chivalric values, the other points reflect, along with chivalry, straightforward Christian values, from ‘Thou shalt not kill’ to ‘Love thy enemy’. It is these points, as well as other Christian values of humility and chastity, upon which the knights’ reputations are built and on which they are tested, particularly during the Grail quest. These are their knightly duties, and the only real demands that seem to be placed upon them since, when Arthur is not bent on conquering Europe, the knights spend their time focussing on seeking worship in random adventuring, or competing in tournaments for the same purpose.

While Whyte’s knights have much more solid military demands placed upon them—they are, first and foremost, advisors to the king and leaders of his men in combat—there is no particular code of conduct imposed upon them. Arthur trusts them to continue with the behaviours and abilities that prompted the knighting in the first place. An idea of the ideal knight, if not for Whyte personally then for his narrator, is presented in Clothar’s description of Ghilleadh, the personification, in his mind, of what the knights are striving to be. In his narration, Clothar describes Ghilleadh as “strong, yet generous and gentle, upright, forthright, straightforward and trustworthy to the death, a faithful friend and a relentless champion of rightness, incapable of lying and totally free of corruption, cowardice or calumny” (521). Although some of these could be called Christian values others, like “straightforward,” are more specifically about the military or

social aspects of the knights' role. All of these, though, are traits that a self-reflective man of any age or creed would embrace in seeking to improve himself, and are traits that Ghilleadh, and others, already possessed, prompting Arthur to value them and grant them their title of 'Seur' in the first place. These traits are not part of a chivalric or religious code to which the knights must conform, but rather a summary of their collective qualities which Clothar and Arthur value. This valuation is as much a result of their classical educations and moral upbringings as it is of any religious belief. Thus, for Malory, knighthood comes to be defined under very Christian and chivalric terms, while Whyte's more pragmatic approach presents an Order that rewards men for exemplary service to their king, and encourages a classical ideal of betterment of self and self-knowledge.

This creation of the Order of Knights brings us to the other major motif which Whyte alters: the Round Table. The Round Table, while not present in Geoffrey, is introduced soon after by Wace, and becomes, like Excalibur, an essential part of Arthur's realm. The general ideas that emerge about the Table are that "it is thought to seat all Arthur's knights; that its roundness equalises them all; that Arthur sat at it; that it was unique and made especially for him," despite the fact that many of these traits are only introduced in a few works (Morris 124). Malory has only a limited number of knights seated at the table at a given time—the capacity is 150 (Vinaver 98)—and nowhere does he claim that the knights are equals. In Malory, the Table is a part of Gwenevere's dowry, and her father, Lodegraunce, explains that he had received it as a gift from Uther (98), although Malory later explains that Merlyn made the Table originally (906), thus

explaining its magical nature. Each seat at the Table has magical lettering that names its occupant (99), save the Siege Perelous, mentioned previously, which, remains blank, save for the prophecy that appears in time to announce Galahad's arrival and ownership of this final place at the Table (855). Although knights are periodically killed off in combat, on adventures or by treachery in the case of Pellinore, the numbers at the Table are easily maintained, since every knight wants to be one of the select few who have a seat—an eagerness for promotion which is also reflected in Whyte's Order of Knights and the motivational force that Arthur intended it to be.

The relation of the Round Table to Christianity is another important factor to consider in its discussion. Not only is the Round Table a Christian artefact through its relation to the knights and their previously discussed vows, it is also seen by many to be a representation of the Last Supper. Pictorially, through the medieval period, the Last Supper was portrayed as taking place at a round table, unlike the long table introduced by later artists (Loomis 776, 781). Thus, Arthur's Round Table is not only 'magical' through the portrayal of the lettered chairs, whether this is interpreted as a Christian miracle or as pagan magic, but it also functions as a powerful Christian symbol for the people at the time when Malory is writing.

Whyte's approach to the Round Table motif is very different from Malory's, or any of the other medieval versions. Just as he moves away from the religious underpinnings of knighthood, using Christianity more as a ceremonial endorsement than anything else, he also steps away from the symbolic Christian element of the Round Table itself, by eliminating the table. In doing this, Whyte follows in the tradition of

those scholars who believe that the Round Table, even when first introduced, was meant as “an institution or fellowship and not as it later became, a real table” (Williams 77). For those among the Arthurian imitators in the later Middle Ages and after, “a *table ronde* meant not an artefact but a tourney,” and the Table’s significance lay in “the excellence of the knights who adorn it” rather than in the Table itself and its magic or symbolism (Morris 125-6). Whyte embraces this aspect to a certain degree, in that his focus is on the knights themselves, and their importance, rather than the furniture, but he approaches it from a slightly different angle. For him, the Round Table concept is less about the knights’ prowess and showing off in a tourney—tournaments being particularly rare in Whyte’s pragmatic Arthurian world—and more about the knights’ interaction with each other and their king as an informed and organized governing body. Whyte’s Round Table is a round-table in the political or organizational sense: it is a meeting of peers for discussion.

When Arthur decides to have his knights meet in council on a regular basis to discuss military matters, he is not introducing a new idea within Whyte’s world, but rather modelling his council of knights on the pre-existing council which is in charge of Camulod’s day to day affairs. That council grew out of the beginnings of Camulod, which Whyte describes as a colony, founded by a few enterprising men banding their lands and forces together to survive the Roman withdrawal with some modicum of civility and comfort intact. These landowners, and those who joined later, formed the first council (Whyte, *The Skystone* 477) and they and their descendants over the many years of the colony’s existence are the ones in charge of administration for all the farmers and

artisans who make up the bulk of Camulod, and any other non-military aspects (Whyte, *The Eagle* 175-6). Whyte makes certain that the reader understands that this council, or more specifically the council of knights which is modelled after it, is his equivalent of the Round Table, by having the councillors alter its format and dub it the Round Council (Whyte, *Singing Sword* 479). This occurs after an argument over precedence and elitism forces the counsellors to re-think their approach, and re-arrange their chairs in a circle to eliminate further bickering over who sits in the front or the back of the room. On this same occasion a system is instituted to make sure that the position of moderator is left to chance, as in the ancient Roman Senate, rather than favouritism or elitism, further equalizing the members (476-7). Thus, the inception of the Round Council, essentially the origins of the Round Table for Whyte's purposes, occurs roughly sixty years before Arthur forms his order and council of knights, before Merlyn is even born, at about the same time that Excalibur is being forged, through an entirely plausible and mundane set of circumstances.

Arthur's council of knights functions as the governing body for military matters in and around Camulod. The final verdict in all military affairs rests with Arthur as the High King, or perhaps more importantly as the inheritor of the long-standing position of Legate Commander of Camulod (Whyte, *The Sorcerer: Metamorphosis* 319), but he insists on first discussing those affairs with his knights. Although he dictates the division of battle groups and the responsibilities of a commander, the knights—the commanders—act on their own instinct and initiative as leaders in the field, and bring their own voices and ideas to the discussion. Arthur, according to Clothar, “truly believed in the usefulness of

open discussion for the common good" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 175) and, as such, all those knights not out on patrol at a given time "would meet together every fifteenth day to discuss affairs common to all" (177). These round table discussions "at which every man's voice was equal" are deliberations on policy and procedure for the governance of the kingdom (177), which allow Arthur to tap the intellect and insight of each of his knights, all intelligent and accomplished men, rather than relying solely on his own reasoning and judgement. This concept, aside from being eminently practical, appeals to modern Western readers' values of democracy, free speech and open discussion. Unlike Malory's monarchical system and knights squabbling for superior worship, Whyte's knights actually *are* equals—differently talented and with different views, but all equally valued by Arthur for the insight and balance they bring to the metaphorical table.

While the people of Camulod choose to romanticize the idea of the Knights Companion meeting in council, much like medieval writers romanticized the Round Table in general, the true value of Whyte's Round Table lies not in romantic mysticism, but in the 'magic' of functional, responsible government. For example, despite Arthur's initial trust of Connlyn (77), when Clothar and Merlyn present to him and the other knights their concerns based on Clothar's experiences in Connlyn's lands, Arthur listens to them and to the opinions of the other knights (178-81). In doing so, and acting on their advice, Arthur takes the first step in what turns out to be a long and wearying war against a wily and treacherous foe (413), a war that they could easily have lost had they not deduced Connlyn's betrayal and acted when they did to move against him.

This, then, is the real power of the Round Table in Whyte's work. Rather than focussing on magical notions or the knights' deeds in pursuit of worship in tourneys, Whyte's 'table' has a much more tangible effect on Arthur's realm. Like Excalibur, it is still romanticized by the people, who are intrigued by the whole concept, but it is at heart a very practical forum for discussion, that is key for the continued solidity of Arthur's rule and success of his military campaigns. Rather than having a king presiding over a troop of knights vying for acclaim in a never-ending sequence of tournaments, as in Malory, Whyte shows Arthur and his knights as intelligent warriors, taking council together and fighting to defend the people and the dream of Camulod. This is a notion that is both realistic and believable, and also more appealing for Whyte's modern audience for whom the tournaments and posturing of the chivalric tradition are a trend long past its prime. Just as Excalibur's real power is shown to lie in public perception of both Arthur and the sword, and in how Arthur chooses to employ it, so the power of the Round Table and the knights rests not in mystical powers or beliefs, but in Arthur's being clever enough to recognize the assets with which he is graced, and choosing to employ them in the most effective way possible. Rather than having him rely on Otherworldly talismans and magical aid, Whyte shows an Arthur who relies on his own intelligence and instinct for governance, and on the intellect, loyalty and courage of those who follow him.

Chapter Four: Merlyn and Mordred

Two characters who are most closely and constantly linked with Arthur throughout the tradition of his tale are Merlyn and Mordred. While these two men play very different roles in Arthur's world, and their roles and characters change from adaptation to adaptation, their central position within the tale and in Arthur's life remains largely constant, certainly across the three works under consideration here. What changes is the exact relationship between the two men and Arthur and how their characters are portrayed, two factors which weigh heavily on certain events and the overall impression of characters and story alike.

The Merlyn of the *Historia* is a peculiar character who is addressed in more detail in the separate works also attributed to Geoffrey, the *Prophetiae Merlini* and the *Vita Merlini*. In the *Historia*, though, Merlyn is a creature of mystery and superstition, made only slightly less mysterious, and somewhat more fearful, by the discussion and conjecture of his parentage. When he is first brought into the tale as a ritual sacrifice, he is chosen as the candidate because he "had never a father" (Geoffrey 113). When Vortigern quizzes the boy's mother, a nun of royal parentage, she admits that "one appeared unto me in the shape of a right comely youth" who embraced and kissed her, and it was after this that she conceived (114). The verdict reached by the King and his advisors is that the boy's father must have been an incubus. The uncanny knowledge that the boy then displays, accusing Vortigern's wizards of trickery and correctly predicting the true problems with the construction of Vortigern's tower, leads witnesses to think "that he was possessed of some spirit of God" (115); and the twenty pages of prophetic

raving which follow shortly after do nothing to disprove this assumption. Leaving aside the apparently conflicting notions of a demonic father and a divine possession occurring in the same boy, a sure recipe for psychological issues, it is clear that the basis of Merlyn's origin for Geoffrey rests in a Christian belief system. The juxtaposition of demonic father and nun as mother can be seen as a balancing of the evil and good natures, so that the boy is a more benevolently neutral character than one might normally expect of one supposedly sired by a demon, and his gift of prophecy, deriving from a "spirit" which teaches him (138), can be viewed as originating in either or both parents, demonic and holy. Whether the incubus purposely chose a daughter of a king to bear his child who turns out to be a vehicle for prophecy and magic, is open to debate. Merlyn's mother *is* a king's daughter, though, a fact which doubtless makes Merlyn's prophecy seem more attractive both to Merlyn's royal audience and to Geoffrey's. Aside from this small indicator of the largely noble audience Geoffrey would have been writing for, Merlyn's origin is much more a matter of mystical notions than political.

In Malory, Merlyn's origin does not receive any real discussion. Merlyn simply walks into the story as a fully formed character—his existence and powers are assumed and acknowledged by Uther and his men as though he is something that simply *is*, as though he were more a fixture than an individual. This is likely due, at least in part, to how familiar his character would have been to readers by this point in the Arthurian development. The only hints of Merlyn's origin lie in the one brief reference to "hys mayster Bloyse that dwelled in Northhumbirlonde" to whom he journeys and recounts all of the battles that had occurred for Bloyse to record. This mention is the only clue that is

given to Merlyn's origin or life outside of his direct contact with Arthur and his knights, although by the numerous references made to 'God,' presumably the Christian God, in Merlyn's prophecies it can be assumed that he has some kind of divine contact or blessing in his past history, if not the same dramatic birthright as the Merlyn of Geoffrey's version.

Whyte's Merlyn has a parentage and history which complement Whyte's pragmatic approach and socio-political framing of the Arthurian story. Whyte's Merlyn (full name Caius Merlyn Britannicus) is the son of a Pendragon king's sister and Picus Britannicus, the son of Camulod's key founding member and a Roman soldier of high standing. Merlyn was raised as a warrior and a scholar by his Roman and his Celtic families alike and was personally responsible for raising Arthur, his own cousin, from infancy. The only vaguely mystical notion that can be connected to Merlyn's origin is the fact that he and his cousin Uther were, to the best of everyone's calculations, born on the same day many miles apart (Whyte, *Singing Sword* 574). Aside from this fact, Merlyn's parentage and upbringing, while fortunate and better than most, were very solid and down to earth. Although the magic and mystery of the medieval Merlyns suited those texts, Whyte's version is more realistic and believable, tailored for his modern inquiring audience. Thus the 'mystery' behind Whyte's Merlyn is of a different nature.

Regardless of his origins, perhaps the best established and most important aspect of Merlyn as a character for the Arthurian story is the role he plays in Arthur's birth and upbringing. Generally, throughout the variations of the Arthurian story, Merlyn can be seen as the primary reason that Arthur exists, and this holds true for the three specific

versions in question. Geoffrey and Malory both tell much the same tale of Arthur's conception, Malory following the tradition that Geoffrey establishes in his *Historia*. Uther sees Igraine and falls in love—or lust, the difference is immaterial under the circumstances. Some rather unfriendly manoeuvrings follow and Merlyn is called in as being the only one who can solve the problem. In Geoffrey's magical and folkloric version, Merlyn is “moved at beholding the effect of a love so exceeding great” in Uther, and promises the use of “arts new and unheard of” to help him (Geoffrey 148-9). Malory's somewhat more religiously grounded text has a Merlyn less moved by emotion, who will only help Uther after he has sworn “upon the four Evangelistes” to fulfill Merlyn's “desyre,” which is that Uther give to Merlyn the child that he will beget on Igraine that night (Vinaver 8-9). Whether this ‘desyre’ is motivated by a need to fulfill his prophetic role and ensure the future king's childhood follows the necessary path, or whether it is a more selfish move on Merlyn's part, he is clearly not overly concerned with what Uther wants. Malory's Merlyn is also less concerned with emphasizing the newness of the arts involved, and focuses rather on giving very direct orders and expecting Uther's obedience. Geoffrey's kindly Merlyn and Malory's difficult and demanding Merlyn both accomplish the same thing, however, through their respective arts. In both cases, Uther, in the guise of the duke of Tintagel, enters the castle, impregnates Igraine, and leaves again, unsuspected (Geoffrey 149, Vinaver 9).

Arthur's birth in Whyte's version follows a slightly different chain of events. Uther and Igraine's meeting, the love between them, and Arthur's conception all take place far from Merlyn, who has no knowledge of the events, and is not even fully aware

of himself at the time, having suffered a serious head injury,⁵ a mundane accident of war which would never occur to Geoffrey or Malory's magical Merlyns. Merlyn only begins to learn of these events peripherally as he pursues his cousin across the countryside on an unrelated matter, and only pieces it all together in his mind after he has learned of Uther's demise, and found the infant Arthur and his dying mother on the shoreline. It is only then, when the child Arthur is already roughly two months old, that Merlyn comes to know of his young cousin, and begins to think of his bloodlines and the potential the infant might have to be the culmination of his family's generations of hope and planning. Taking it upon himself to educate the boy in everything he will need to be a good ruler, Merlyn's importance for Arthur in Whyte's tale begins at this point.

Where Geoffrey's Merlyn vanishes from the story after his role in Arthur's conception and aiding Uther in battle, Whyte's and Malory's versions have Merlyn playing a larger role in Arthur's life. Malory's Merlyn, after acquiring the infant Arthur from his father, gives him to Ector to be raised (Vinaver 11), and only returns years later when it is time to see to Arthur's coronation and the consolidation of his reign. At this point he becomes one of Arthur's key advisors, first arranging the sword-in-stone drama to prove Arthur's claim (12) and then aiding Arthur in the wars which directly follow his coronation, both by advising him and by gathering to him his father's loyal knights (15, 19-20). After this initial period, Merlyn periodically appears at court and elsewhere to offer lessons, prophecies and bits of knowledge to both Arthur and his knights, and

⁵ These events occur in *The Eagles Brood* told from Merlyn's point of view, and also in the stand alone novel *Uther* which recounts Uther's side of the story.

occasionally to provide something more tangible as he does when he arranges for Arthur to acquire a new sword or when he sets up the sword which will be pulled from a stone later by Galahad (52, 91). Although Merlyn remains a part of Malory's story for some time, he still departs fairly early in Arthur's reign, through the rather undignified demise of being imprisoned beneath a rock by the manipulative and unscrupulous Nynaeve (126). Whyte's Merlyn, unlike Geoffrey's or Malory's, actually outlives Arthur and plays an active role throughout his reign. He manages the king's affairs when he is away on campaign, is one of Arthur's key advisors and, even towards the end of Arthur's reign, when Merlyn is becoming increasingly old and infirm, he continues to travel throughout the realm and act as a source of intelligence and local opinion (Whyte, *The Eagle* 467).

Geoffrey's Merlyn plays the "dual role of prophet and wizard" and functions as "the linchpin of history. He reveals history, he shapes it, and yet he is its creature, merely tracing its preexisting shape" (Rider 2); he is Geoffrey's *deus ex machina* (Paton 90). Malory's Merlyn has a similar function in that he ensures Arthur's conception and also the manner of the child's upbringing, as discussed above. He is also prone to prophetic pronouncements although, unlike those of Geoffrey's Merlyn, his tend to be considerably less symbolically baffling and more straightforward and immediate in nature, such as his prediction of Lancelot and Tristan's fight (Vinaver 72). Malory's Merlyn, on the other hand, acts as a chorus, explaining events as they progress, as when he reveals Torre's true parentage or tells Arthur about Mordred's conception and the threat he presents (100-101, 44). For both writers Merlyn embodies magic and mystery.

Whyte's Merlyn, on the other hand, has a character of his own, with his own strong opinions, as seen in Clothar's descriptions of Merlyn's letters (Whyte, *The Eagle* 421, 518) and his own personal foibles, such as his love of beeswax candles (161).

Whyte's Merlyn, if he must be cast in a particular role, is not a plot device, but rather a teacher. Whyte needs his Merlyn to be a realistic and believable character that the modern reader can accept as part of Arthur's Britain, rather than a magical apparition. Whyte's Merlyn is a natural teacher; he takes every opportunity that presents itself to help edify those around him. This can be seen in his conversation with the already well-educated Clothar in which they discuss Connyln and what his presence in the north means for Camulod. Rather than appearing suddenly with a prophecy as Malory's Merlyn would, or even simply telling Clothar what he thinks and has deduced as one might expect of an intellectual advisor, Merlyn uses the Socratic method to allow Clothar to follow his train of thought and arrive at the logical conclusions along with him (169-74).

As well as educating Clothar a little further in the arts of logical thought and political intrigue, this approach also allows Merlyn to have his thought process and conclusions verified by another intelligent mind before approaching Arthur with the disturbing possibilities, something which Geoffrey's and Malory's Merlyn characters would not have done. This rests in the fact that Geoffrey's and Malory's Merlyn characters are functions of the storyline before they are characters and that they both have a certain Otherworldly backing. Geoffrey's Merlyn is apparently possessed by a spirit and Malory's Merlyn cites God as his source of knowledge on several occasions (Vinaver 36-7, 119-20). They cannot be wrong, in the context of their respective tales.

Whyte's Merlyn is a strictly human character with human flaws and failings. His presentation by Whyte's narrator eliminates the air of infallible magical knowledge one expects from the medieval Merlyns, and shows a human being, not all-knowing, simply confident in his own abilities—a well-grounded self-confidence which is rare enough to seem magical in and of itself. Although his apparent ability to know things before anyone else makes people suspect magic,⁶ Merlyn is a creature of vast intellect who lives a long life of seeking the logical path. The general opinion, as voiced by Gwin to Clothar, is one of bewildered acceptance. "You're asking me to tell you how Merlyn knows what Merlyn knows?" Gwin exclaims. "I don't think even 'e knows that" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 523). The average soldier or farmer in Whyte's tale may indeed see Merlyn as magical and sorcerous, but because Whyte places his narration in Clothar's hands—someone who knows Merlyn well and is disinclined to believe superstitions—he ensures that his reader gets to see the real, human Merlyn. The fact remains, that whatever the fickle and misconceived perceptions of the general public might be, Merlyn is, and has always been, the clever sort of man who thinks of things that would occur to no one else, such as the subterfuge with the sword in the altar stone, and acts on them, which is exactly why he is Arthur's most trusted and invaluable advisor.

It cannot be denied that these same misconceived public perceptions are what make Merlyn such a formidable character in any version of the Arthurian story. For

⁶ Even Merlyn himself has suspected prescience on several occasions which occur in the earlier novels, in which he has strange and often very confusing forebodings. The fact that these forebodings occur in dreams and are never understood until after the fact, however, makes them very suspect from any prophetic viewpoint. Even the most normal person can have the occasional odd dream that seems prophetic after the fact.

Geoffrey's Merlin, it is King Vortigern's and his advisors' perception of him as being one fathered by an unearthly being and possessed or touched by God that begins his career as a prophet and miracle worker. If Vortigern and his advisors had not seen Merlyn thus but had, rather, perceived his symbolic ramblings as the ravings of a madman, Merlyn would not have garnered the same reputation among the people. Years later, when Uther needed help getting past Gorlois and his army to Igraine, Uther would never have turned to Merlyn for help without the already existing perception of Merlyn as a wizard and a prophet. If he were seen simply as a madman, he would likely not even have been around at that later date, as raving madmen lack, in the public eye, even the few redeeming qualities possessed by dangerous wizards and Merlyn would have long since been driven from the country rather than being brought in to consult with a king.

The same can be said for Malory's Merlyn. In Malory's version of the tale, although Merlyn's history is not discussed, his reputation precedes him. It is this preexisting perception of Merlyn's power that brings Uther to ask for his help and agree to his demands in return, and which also brings the Archbishop, lords of the realm, and Uther's still living, still loyal knights to listen to Merlyn and agree to take the young untried Arthur as their king. It cannot be denied that the rather theatrical sword-in-stone moment helps in persuading all of these parties, but the fact remains that it was Merlyn who summoned them all there, and Merlyn who saw to it that the sword and stone were there and were respected. In the same manner, it is Merlyn's long-established reputation which gives him such sway with Arthur and those around him during his reign. Without the perception of Merlyn as a wise and magical being it is doubtful that so many kings

and lords would have followed his advice so blithely and willingly, even to the point of turning over large groups of men to his control during the early wars (Vinaver 24-5). Where the kings and Arthur's loyal knights value Merlyn as a source of advice and guidance, the opinion of those not favoured with Merlyn's well-wishes—and possibly the secret opinion of some of those same kings and knights—is summed up in the words of warning from one unnamed knight to another: "Beware...of Merlion, for he knowith all thynges by the devylles craffte" (118). The key in both Geoffrey's and Malory's presentations of Merlyn lies in the fact that their narrators, by describing and not questioning Merlyn's magic, tacitly accept it as true, thus portraying it as truth to the reading audience. Whether those readers believe this magic or not, they also tacitly accept it as true and encourage it, by expecting such magical occurrences in the tales. This in turn causes the writers to include magical episodes and characters like Merlyn in their works, thus closing the circle and perpetuating the tacit acceptance of magic in the Arthurian—and other—tales, regardless of whether author or reader actually believes any of it.

The general public's perceptions of Merlyn in Whyte are much the same as in the other works. Merlyn, the narrator explains, is "accustomed" to peoples' fearful reactions to "his supposed sorcery" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 46). Even Clothar, when caught off guard, reacts instinctively with fear to Merlyn's presence, although he "immediately [feels] foolish for having demonstrated [his] sudden, childish fear so unmistakably" (46). For Clothar, who knows Merlyn well by this point and who has been well educated besides, fear of Merlyn is acknowledged as "superstitious" and "a fleeting thing," although he still

admits to finding Merlyn's presence "intimidating" (51, 531), a fact which could be as easily attributed to Merlyn's appearance or towering intellect as to his reputation for sorcery. For others, though, who do not know Merlyn so well or who are less well-educated and perhaps more prone to superstition, the initial pervading perception of fearfulness is not so easily shaken off. Besides the heavy black sorcerer's cowl and the bizarre tales from Merlyn's youth, there are also the rumours of leprosy, about which people speak "in hushed, dread-filled whispers" (53). For someone easily impressionable like young Mordred and his friend Rufus, meeting the formidable Merlyn for the first time is a terrifying event (531), while the more pragmatic Gwinnifer, who has known Merlyn for a short while, refers to him as being "as sweet and docile as a child's pony, if you treat him properly" (537). Admittedly, though, Gwinnifer is far from being an ordinary member of the populace in rank or intellect and for most people the perception of Merlyn as a fearful being remains their sole or primary thought on the subject.

Although it is impossible to say to what degree the mysterious and supernatural personae of Geoffrey and Malory's respective Merlyns are self-aware, due to the nature of the narrative, Whyte's Merlyn has a persona that is carefully cultivated not merely on the level of narrative, but by the character himself, through his appearance and public perception. Perception, and the power it confers on the informed, is a concept of which Merlyn was well aware long before Clothar explained it to Arthur (Whyte, *The Eagle* 19). He knew when he arranged for the sword in the altar stone what effect it would have on the people who witnessed the proceedings, although the final outcome, the creation of the order of knights, has to be credited to Clothar. Merlyn is also fully aware of the public

opinion of him as an individual, and he works hard to maintain the reputation he has earned. A judicious use of disguises, poisons and explosive powders, along with a concealing black cloak and a talent for moving quietly, earned Merlyn the reputation of sorcerer in the wars of Arthur's youth, as he moved undetected among the enemy leaving death, destruction and, most significantly, fear, in his wake.⁷ In his later years, this reputation, and the heavy cloak and cowl, serve multiple purposes. The concealing clothing hides both the disfigurements from a fire, which would be somewhat discomfiting for any who saw them, and also the slowly increasing signs of Merlyn's leprosy which, if seen, could result in his being chased from the community by fearful citizens (53). By embracing the public's perception of himself as a sorcerer, Merlyn actively conceals his disease, and this enables him to continue working with Arthur in their goal to preserve Camulod and a civilized way of life. The public perception of sorcery also directly helps this goal, in that there are very few people who would openly cross Merlyn Britannicus, simply through fear of what he might do. The carefully cultivated sorcerer persona serves to increase people's respect for Merlyn, and also acts as a barrier to keep antagonists at a distance and gives his words more weight with the more troublesome of Arthur's allies or enemies. Thus Merlyn, the practical intellectual, uses his reputation as a tool for his and Arthur's political advantage.

Whyte's emphasis on the perception of Merlyn by others, and on Merlyn's use of those perceptions, is part of Whyte's overall movement away from the mystical and supernatural towards a more realistic and pragmatic world, both intricate and believable,

⁷ These events occur in *The Sorcerer: Metamorphosis*.

for his inquiring readers. For Whyte, the magic of Merlyn rests not in prophecy and miraculous works, but in the leaps of intellect and great deeds which can be accumulated over a long life. Merlyn is fascinating simply because he works within and cultivates public perception, purposely creating an image of himself. His 'magic' is that of the extraordinary, but not Otherworldly, man. He is cleverer, wiser, and more insightful than the average man, or even most above-average men. That one man could have so much influence and use human nature to such advantage is Merlyn's magic and is, doubtless, part of what makes him seem intimidating and sorcerous to those less intelligent or capable. The truly 'magical' and astonishing aspect of Whyte's Merlyn, which makes him more appealing and more impressive than the medieval versions, is that he performs his feats of intellect and sleight of hand *without* relying on magic. Rather than asking his readers to believe that a man can magically disappear, change someone's appearance, or predict the future, Whyte draws on the wonder and magic of ordinary life and shows his readers a realistic, but also extraordinary intellect working to better itself and those around it. It is part of Merlyn's demystification, then, that leads Whyte to have him grow old and fragile, to struggle with a debilitating disease and, finally, rather than disappearing or being magically sealed under a rock, to die of his illness and extreme old age. Even the greatest of men and deeds can be undone by the simplest of things—this is the nature of life, and a fact that Clothar as narrator and Whyte as author recognize (Whyte, *The Eagle* 621). What *is* momentous about Merlyn's passing is the very fact of his long and influential life, and the role he played in attempting to achieve the dream of a safe and secure Britain.

Mordred, like Merlyn, is a character who has been part of the Arthurian story from its earliest days but his character and position within the story are quite different. Where Merlyn is almost entirely a mystical being in Geoffrey and particularly in Malory, appearing, disappearing and performing miraculous deeds at every turn, Mordred is simply a man. He does not have a motif like the magical strength of Gawain or opportunities for magical healing, like Lancelot in the incident with Sir Urry. He is not even mentioned in the two hundred pages that Malory devotes to the Grail quest. Mordred is, quite simply, a man. This begs the question of what Whyte would wish to change about his portrayal of Mordred in his bid for a more realistic and practical Arthurian world, since Mordred is already possibly the most un-mystical character available to him, but Whyte's rewrite of Mordred takes a different approach.

The first issue is Mordred's parentage, since it is so closely tied to his position and role in the final portion of the tale. While Mordred has been a part of the Arthurian story from very early on, it is Geoffrey who first names him as Arthur's nephew, and who is also the first to recount that the battle of Camlann "was the climax of his revolt against Arthur" (Varin 167). Later sources add that Arthur was also incestuously his father, so that by the time of Malory, Mordred is the misbegotten offspring of an incestuous relationship who will destroy Arthur, and whom Arthur attempts to have killed as an infant, an attempt which includes the murder of numerous other children, since Mordred's identity could not be easily established (167). The interesting factor here is that in the earliest references to Mordred, in Welsh folktales, he is not only not named as a relative to Arthur, but the "references are neutral or complimentary" in nature (174). It

is not until Geoffrey links them as family that Mordred is also labeled as an enemy. The closer the relationship becomes—from negligible, to nephew, to son—the more volatile Mordred becomes as a character. What this says about family is not terribly complimentary, but it has been traced by some to the folkloric origins of the story, and a story pattern where “the final form rests on a story in which the climactic death was that of Arthur's father or stepfather and the important birth that of Arthur's son” and Arthur is only an intermediary issue (175). If this is indeed the root of the parallel development of Mordred's familial relationship and conflict with Arthur, then here is one clear indication why Whyte would change Mordred's portrayal in his story. If one wants to have Arthur as the key figure in the story, one cannot devote a large portion of the tale to Mordred's enmity in a folkloric revenge tale.

Whyte's approach to Mordred's parentage and birth has several small but significant differences from these earlier versions. While he follows the developed tradition of making Mordred Arthur's nephew/son of an incestuous relationship, the relationship itself and Mordred's upbringing are altered. As opposed to Malory's version, where Arthur's sister is married with four young sons when she comes to court and Arthur begets Mordred on her (Vinaver 41), in Whyte's version Arthur and his sister are both little more than children who fall in love, and when she must return to her home they are both heartbroken (Whyte, *The Eagle* 155-6). Where, in Malory, Arthur's sister lives a long life and is later murdered by her own son, Gaheris, when he catches her in bed with Lamorak (Vinaver 612), in Whyte Arthur's sister dies the same day that Mordred is born, stricken with guilt over the revelation of the sin she has committed (Whyte, *The Eagle*

457). Whyte's more innocent version of Mordred's conception and birth is further developed by the fact that, rather than being raised by strangers and coming to court as an apparently bitter young man (Vinaver 55), Whyte's Mordred is raised by his loving grandmother and an extended family of good-humoured uncles. As a result, the boy has been raised "properly and appropriately" and has "a wondrous sense of humour" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 465). Whatever the complexities of his conception and birth, Whyte's Mordred is, essentially, just a normal boy. He is even more ordinary than in Malory, since Whyte's Mordred is not dogged by malign prophecies and attempts on his life. For Whyte, Mordred's incestuous origins do not necessarily have to mean that he will be an angry and bitter man, or an enemy, nor do they necessarily mean that he is a tool of vengeful gods. Whyte opts to shift Mordred's character entirely in its nature and presentation.

Mordred's character in Geoffrey is not very well developed. Indeed, Arthur's other nephews, Hoel and Gawain, receive considerably more attention throughout the tale. Mordred begins to play a role only when Arthur departs to attack Rome and makes "over the charge of defending Britain unto his nephew Mordred and his Queen Guenevere" (Geoffrey 178). The next that is heard of Mordred is when Arthur receives word that his nephew has "tyrannously and traitorously set the crown of the kingdom upon his own head, and had linked him in unhallowed union with Guenevere the Queen in despite of her former marriage" (196). Mordred's villainy and treason are compounded further by the revelation that he has invited the recently defeated Saxons back into the country as allies (197). The one good thing that can be said for Mordred out of this sordid tale is that even Geoffrey must begrudgingly acknowledge his abilities as a soldier and

commander. He describes Mordred, during this campaign, as “of all men the boldest and ever the swiftest to begin the attack” and depicts him marshalling his troops and speaking “words of encouragement” to them, committing himself to one final battle, “preferring rather to conquer or to die than to be any longer continually on the flight in this wise” (198-9). To a churchman, this fatalistic last attack may seem a poor choice; nonetheless it speaks volumes of Mordred’s pride of self, belief in his cause, and determination, not to mention his leadership abilities. However “accursed” he may be (199), Mordred is portrayed by Geoffrey as a strong leader.

In Malory’s tale, Mordred receives much more attention, although it is not terribly complimentary. After his unfavourable birth, the attempt to have him killed—an act which serves to lend credence to the superstitious prophecy by showing that Arthur believes it—and his subsequent childhood away from court, Mordred enters the Arthurian world as a moderately strong and virtuous knight. He is portrayed early on as the stereotypical Arthurian knight. He fights in tournaments, and is feared and respected as a knight by men like king Bagdemagus, as are the majority of Arthur’s knights. When matched against Lancelot, however, Mordred manages only to break his spear, while Lancelot drives Mordred off the back of his horse and stuns him (Vinaver 263). Although this scene is meant to demonstrate Lancelot’s prowess, the end result for Mordred is that, despite Bagdemagus’s respect and his own good intentions, he ends up handily defeated by a superior knight and looking fairly foolish, a trend which continues throughout Malory’s story. Mordred is bold in tournaments and rides on adventuring quests, but is persistently portrayed as slightly less powerful than other knights, often in story segments

that focus on the development of those knights. It is as though Malory uses Mordred as the scapegoat for demonstrating the prowess of those around him. He is constantly being defeated or defended by other knights, whether it is La Cote Male Tayle (464), Sir Persides (536), Sir Dynadan (615) or Palomides (663), all of them acknowledged as paragons of prowess who still functionally eclipse Mordred, so that he always comes out appearing to be only second best.

Even at the beginning of the end, when the plot is hatched to catch Lancelot and Guenevere together, Mordred is overshadowed by Aggravayne. Whether this is due to Mordred's position as the younger brother or not is debatable, but he remains in second place, and he is the one who runs away, bleeding, to Arthur after the others have all been killed, implying that he was at the back of the group. It is no wonder that Lancelot labels him as "passyng envyous" (1204), a label which is just as denigrating to Mordred's character as the rest of Malory's portrayal. Mordred's over-shadowing extends to the accusations of murder against him, which lead to his being deemed a false knight. He is paired with Aggravayne in the narrator's foreshadowing of their murder of Sir Dynadan during the Grail quest (Vinaver 615), an event which is never recounted in full and the more infamous and premeditated murder of Sir Lamorak implicates all of the brothers, except Gareth. Even in his villainy, a role to which his character in Malory is eminently suited, Mordred is out-classed. Geoffrey's Mordred at least was a worthy enemy for one such as Arthur. Malory's Mordred is presented as a second class villain who functions more to make others look good than as an actual enemy. In success, Mordred's villainy is still small and petty, as when he is accredited the dubious honour of being the one said to

have struck the death blow to Lamorak "byhynde hym at his bake" (699), a deed which marks the peak of Mordred's bad reputation.

Mordred comes into his own in Malory's tale only when he finally rebels against the absent Arthur and usurps his crown and kingdom, a move which marks the beginning of his fulfillment of the prophecy of Arthur's downfall. Mordred, likely driven as much by prophetic forces as by his own volition at this juncture, still cannot even manage to tame Guenevere, who tricks him and escapes to lock herself in the Tower of London (1227). The fact remains, though, that Mordred somehow manages to win over the hearts—and soldiers—of the people (1228-9), providing a glimpse of the military man described by Geoffrey. Whatever else can be said about Mordred by Malory, the fact that he manages to gather sufficient support among the people to nearly repel his noble father's landing party, and then to bring him to battle multiple times across the countryside, are strong indicators of his leadership abilities. His intellect, which receives little attention, is seen in his mistrust of Arthur when he says to his men "I know well my fadir woll be avenged upon me" (Vinaver 1235). This statement could be attributed solely to mistrust if not for the reader's knowledge of Arthur's attempt to kill Mordred as an infant, a fact which would make anyone cautious.

Mordred is finally vindicated as a villain when, after the last clash of armies, Arthur disregards his knight's advice to walk away and charges at his rebellious son, thus proving Mordred's fears of vengeance justified. He is described at this point as standing alone in a "grete hepe of dede men" (1236), evidence that he has finally proven his prowess in battle. The final confrontation between father and son which follows is brief

and decisive, and fulfills Merlyn's prophecy. This fact may explain why Malory finally grants Mordred some credit as a warrior, since he would not want Arthur to fall to an inferior man such as Mordred had been portrayed throughout the tale.

Perhaps the most complimentary description of Mordred's abilities is, rather oddly, best summed up by Shakespeare's famous line in reference to the thane of Cawdor: "nothing in his life/Became him like the leaving it" (*Macbeth* I.iv.9-10). Where Geoffrey's Mordred falls as one of many, leaving his Saxon allies to continue the fight, and Arthur receives his final wound afterwards, Malory's jealous and vengeful Mordred sees his rebellion through to the end, whether this is a product of prophecy or not. Not only does he succeed in striking the death blow against Arthur, but his own death is described in such a way that one cannot help shuddering with horror and at the same time applauding his determination and his strength. Malory describes Mordred as dragging himself up Arthur's spear with his dying breath to smash Arthur in the head with his sword so hard that it cleaves through helm and skull to pierce the outer layer of the brain (1237). Malory's Mordred is much more developed than Geoffrey's if less valiant on the whole. He shares with Geoffrey's Mordred the rebellious nature and the leadership abilities, and also the capacity for treachery—a capacity which is manifested in Geoffrey's Mordred by bringing back the Saxons and in Malory's Mordred by murdering good knights. The major difference between the two depictions, aside from the amount of detail, is that Malory's Mordred comes into his redeeming strength only at the end of the tale, after a long history of being not quite good enough. This comes as another stage in

the process of demotion throughout Mordred's evolution from ally to enemy to a less respectable enemy.

Whyte's changes to Mordred's character alter this evolution and give him a very different image. It can be argued that Whyte's Mordred is a different kind of man than the Mordred presented by earlier writers simply because of the changes Whyte makes in his birth and upbringing. Whyte's Mordred is raised by a loving family and, when told about his father, has it made very clear to him that he was not abandoned or ill-done, and that his father knows nothing of his existence (Whyte, *The Eagle* 459), a stark contrast to the baby-drowning episode which marks Mordred's infancy in Malory. It can also be argued that the fact that Whyte's Arthur openly and tearfully accepts Mordred as his child, both for the boy's own sake and for the sake of his lost and much-loved mother, has an impact on Mordred's growth. Being acknowledged and beloved by his father, rather than remaining separate as in Malory, would, if nothing else, have a positive effect on the boy's self-esteem. This begs the question of whether Whyte's different portrayal of Mordred is entirely due to Arthur behaving towards him in a loving manner. This is where one must consider the fact that Mordred's different nature appears to have existed even before he learned of and met his father.

One other important factor must be considered in conjunction with Mordred's nature. This, of course, is the difference in the narrative voice used in Whyte, as opposed to in the earlier works. Whyte's narrator is his Lancelot character. Thus, everything which is related in the tale is filtered through Clothar's point of view, even the opinions and observations of Mordred. This is significant because, in Malory, Lancelot and

Mordred have, at best, a volatile relationship which culminates in the ambush at Guenevere's chamber and subsequent violent days, although the issues begin long before. Even as early as the adventures of La Cote Male Tayle, when Lancelot appears on the scene, Mordred quickly leaves (Vinaver 467). Later, the enmity escalates, and Lancelot admits his knowledge of and some concern over Mordred's (and Aggravayne's) desire to catch him with Guenevere (1046). As further evidence of strife, Mordred and Aggravayne are the only two in the court who are displeased when Lancelot returns safely to court after an unexplained absence of several months (1092).

This ongoing tension between Lancelot and Mordred in Malory is completely absent in Whyte. For Whyte, Clothar and Mordred are perfectly friendly with each other, and it is Clothar who finds Mordred, takes him into his care, and eventually escorts him to Camulod to meet his royal father. Unlike Malory's wary Lancelot, Clothar is full of praise for young Mordred and defends him against all questioners. He judges that Mordred "has no misconceptions" about his father before coming to Camulod, that he has a "wondrous sense of humour" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 465), and that he is "level-headed and would be nobody's fool" (469). For Whyte, enmity between Clothar and Mordred would merely detract from the tale, and he certainly has no need for the folkloric, prophecy-ridden Mordred portrayed by Malory. Whyte wants a more dynamic and realistic, and also likeable character, rather than a pawn of vengeful gods. The striking difference between Malory's and Whyte's Lancelots in their opinions of Mordred is best summed up in their own words. Malory's Lancelot, upon leaving court for his own lands, says "For ever I drede me,...that sir Mordred woll make trouble, for he ys passing envious and

applyeth hym muche to trouble" (Vinaver 1204). Compared to this, then, are Clothar's words to Connor in Whyte's version: "Connor, I like this boy. Mordred is a gentle and trusting soul, entirely lacking in evil or in discontent" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 466).

There could not be a sharper contrast between these two opinions, or between the portrayals of Mordred offered by the earlier authors and Whyte. Where Geoffrey's Mordred is a rebellious soldier and Malory's is a sullen, bitter "false knyght" (Vinaver 647), Whyte's Mordred is "a sunny lad, with a ready grin and a sharp wit" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 472). Once he has grown older and entered manhood, Arthur tells Clothar that Mordred "has grown into a real Pendragon." Although he describes his son as more of a "hothead" than he himself was as a youth (671), Arthur does not seem overly concerned, since throughout it all Mordred abides by the colony's laws about dueling—using only practice weapons. Having finally lost one fight Mordred becomes "more circumspect", showing that he has the capacity to learn and grow as an individual, and has also become good friends with the youth who beat him (672), another stark contrast with Malory's bitter Mordred. Whyte's Arthur's attitude towards Mordred's hotheadedness and fighting shows that he considers it nothing more than youthful exuberance, something that a taste of real warfare will quickly alter. Clothar is equally unconcerned with Mordred's fighting, and is pleased with the youth's defeat at young Lionel's hands, saying "I have known some close and enduring friendships grown from ill beginnings" (672), a reference to how he and Arthur first met at the end of *Clothar the Frank*. Throughout all this Whyte has his narrator emphasize Mordred's humanity and show that he is both fallible and capable, and grows as an individual, unlike Malory's Mordred who functions

as a foil and a tool, or Geoffrey's Mordred who is largely undescribed. Thus, Whyte's Mordred is presented to the reader as a character who is likeable for both his charms and his imperfections, and is believable as a functional person.

The ultimate difference between Geoffrey and Malory's portrayals of Mordred and that offered by Whyte is the final outcome of his life. Whyte has no desire to make Mordred into a foil for his father, a role which is as predictable as it is traditional in folklore and the Arthurian saga alike, and which places as much emphasis on Mordred as it does on Arthur. For Whyte, the crux of the story lies in Arthur's dream and Camulod's struggle to preserve a way of life. This is a goal which, for the modern reader, is both believable, as opposed to the fairytale quality of Malory's realm, and admirable, as opposed to Geoffrey's conquering overlord. As such Mordred's role in the tale is secondary, and he is a part of Arthur's downfall only in that he does not mature as a soldier and a leader fast enough to take his father's place. Although in Whyte's version we only learn about the end of Arthur, Mordred and Camulod second-hand and in various versions, there is no doubt in Clothar's mind that Mordred had no hand in his father's death. Having known Mordred as a child, and seen the love between father and son when they finally met, Clothar firmly believes that "such malice simply could not have existed within the boy" (553), a belief that the reader is happy to accept, since Clothar has proven to be a reliable judge of character throughout the tale. Clothar equates all of the stories of Mordred's part in Arthur's end with the tales of Mordred's affair with his stepmother, something that he *knows* to be untrue. He states in his narration that these tales are nothing more than "nonsense spawned by self-important, pompous, petty little men who

know nothing of the truth and vomit up whatever spiteful, bilious pap they have been fed by the last person to whom they spoke" (553), which is as accurate a description of rumour-mongering as one could hope to find.

Chapter Five: Lancelot and Gwenevere

This rumour-mongering and the way that stories change and are distorted through repeated transmission are key points in Whyte's approach to the Arthurian story, and also tie directly into the changes in the Arthurian saga over time from author to author. Whyte establishes in his introduction that he is writing what he wants to see as the 'real' versions of events and characters, which have been distorted by time. This 'reality' is, of course, still fiction, continuing the unavoidable tension between real and mythical that has existed throughout the history of the Arthurian story. In Whyte's move towards a 'real' story, he presents Clothar, who, over time, becomes the Lancelot of legend, described by writers "who have heard of his fame and his exploits but have lost awareness of his real name" (Whyte, *The Eagle* x). In his narration, Clothar himself several times notes this transmutation of 'reality' over time and retelling, and recalls Arthur's musings "about people saying and believing what they wanted to say and believe, irrespective of the truth involved" (687); the 'truth' becomes once again merely a matter of perception. Thus, Clothar the skilled lance-caster becomes Lancelot the legendary heroic warrior. In the broader Arthurian context, changes over time are a result of what the authors want to say and believe and also, more significantly, a result of what an audience wants and expects to hear. The characters most centrally concerned in the rumours of which Clothar speaks, and most centrally located in what, according to the multitude of story versions, audiences want to hear, are Arthur, Gwenevere, and Lancelot.

The immense popularity of this love triangle, which arises from the romance tradition where Lancelot is first introduced, has very little to do with Geoffrey's earlier

masculine and militaristic historical approach, although there are a few elements of interest there as well. Geoffrey's work does give an interesting, if meager, look at the relationship between Arthur and Gwenevere and a view of their characters which leads into the later versions. For the most part, however, the convoluted relationship between Arthur, Gwenevere, and Lancelot is a later medieval Arthurian development, which grew to be one of, if not the, most popular and familiar aspect of the tale for later audiences, with a constant need for tales to have some kind of love interest. This fact likely results from the development of the courtly tradition. Lancelot's advent is, in itself, an indication of how the Arthurian tales were altered over time to suit the needs of new audiences. It is because of the nature of the close relationship between these three core characters that it is difficult to discuss them separately, since so much of one is linked to the other two. As such, this chapter will attempt to address both their individual aspects and the connections among the three, beginning with Lancelot, given that, although he is absent from Geoffrey, he is a central figure in the other two works under discussion.

In Malory's work, Lancelot is a paragon of knightly prowess and virtue. This is the first and lasting impression that one receives of his character. Malory is credited by some as being the author responsible for granting Lancelot his position of supremacy in the Arthurian saga (Dichmann 883), making him the greatest knight in the land and establishing his prowess from a very early stage. Having proven himself initially in Arthur's continental campaign, even up to capturing the Emperor's standard (Vinaver 216-7, 220), young Lancelot then naturally takes to the knightly adventuring lifestyle to continue to win worship, although he is already acknowledged as being the best young

knight in the land and highly favoured by Gwenevere as such (253). He then pursues a lifetime of retrieving prisoners and rescuing damsels, whenever he is not sallying forth into a tourney and beating his opponents into the ground.

Early in the *Morte*, Lancelot's prowess and fame as a knight have reached the point that he is a household name (308, 316) and is the comparative example held aloft by anyone when speaking of knightly greatness, so much so that Lancelot begins disguising himself when out seeking worship (653, 1057), because most knights would rather not fight him, due to the futility of the venture. Whyte's Clothar, while also a paragon of prowess in his own right, is slightly less exaggerated as a warrior. There is no doubt about his abilities, which he proves time and again in skirmishes guarding Arthur's back (Whyte, *The Eagle* 33-4, 197), in the one grand tournament that he helps organize for the purposes of demonstrating Camulod's horsemanship to foreigners (506-11), and in the volatile situation when he kills Pelles' poisoners and their guards (333-9). This last is the closest to the deeds of Malory's Lancelot, in that Clothar is alone and outnumbered, relying solely on his training and abilities, and he has entered this situation well aware that something is wrong and with precautions in place.

The simple fact that it is Clothar's training that is emphasized, here and elsewhere, is the key difference between Malory's and Whyte's representations, since Malory's Lancelot seems to have been born fully-armed and blessed with martial skills. Clothar feels fear, experiences uncertainty—occasionally cripplingly so (311)—and relies on the training of his youth and his time at Camulod to keep him alive in difficult situations. When faced with multiple opponents he does not simply charge in, sword

swinging, but studies their movements and attempts to spot weaknesses that can be used to his advantage (506-510). As such, Clothar is the more realistic warrior, since Malory's Lancelot has a tendency to ride into battle without forethought, a habit which could very easily get him killed, were it not for his position as a hero in a fantastical realm. Clothar is also a hero, but he is a believable, rather than mythical, hero, a man who worked hard to become the warrior he is and who is aware of his own mortality. This fits with Whyte's goal to present a realistic story to his readers, and gives the modern inquiring reader a believable inside look at the warrior. While the people around Clothar may perceive him to be the same kind of mythical hero as Lancelot, the reader, informed by Clothar's narration, knows that he is still just a man. Malory's Lancelot does show signs of being an intelligent and thoughtful warrior at times, particularly in his use of scouts in the continental war (Vinaver 212-3), his mistrust of the duplicitous king Mark and of Mordred (609-10, 700, 1204) and his ongoing ability to identify knights in tourney and elsewhere, despite the inability of Arthur and others to do so. At other times, however, Malory's Lancelot seems oblivious to danger, a hazardous quality in a warrior. Besides his tendency to ride blindly into battle relying only on his strength to keep him alive, he also commits the serious mistakes of sleeping in a random pavilion in the forest, resulting in a hard battle (259-60) and, more seriously for the kingdom in general, he foolishly puts his trust in Mellyagaunce's dubious honour, and falls into his trap, a ruse that nearly results in Gwenevere's death (1134-7).

On the other hand, Whyte's Clothar is a consistently contemplative knight, and is not tricked into trusting others on the grounds of chivalry as Lancelot is with

Mellyagaunce. Clothar spends a great deal of time thinking about and analyzing potential threats, from the vague unease he feels after conversing with Morgas and the instinctive mistrust of Symmachus (Whyte, *The Eagle* 118, 59), to the enemy's war chariots and the 'illness' of Pelles (8-9, 299, 331). Where Malory's Lancelot is represented to the reader as primarily a creature of brawn, with brains apparently coming second, Clothar is revealed as a cunning warrior, a dichotomy which is partially explained by Lancelot's reliance on chivalry in others, as opposed to Clothar's outright suspicion. The difference is further emphasized by the insight given into Clothar's actions and thought processes through his position as narrator. While, in Whyte, as in Malory, the Frankish warrior has by the end become a household name, his warrior prowess is presented to the reader as something hard won and involving training and mental focus, rather than simply being a matter of riding in and knocking people off their horses. Whyte's Clothar is a thinking protagonist for a thinking audience and is a much more human and realistic warrior than the bold and brazen Lancelot of Malory with his tendency to charge in regardless of danger. Clothar is a great warrior, where Lancelot is an archetype.

In both Malory's and Whyte's works, Lancelot's knightly prowess, while integral to his character, is not the only factor in his personality or in his relationship with those around him. Both writers portray a character with a sense of humour and an ability to present himself as a source of entertainment for others. Clothar, in discussing Mordred, gives some insight into his view of the value of humour, when he says "God save us all from humorless men, for they are also merciless and implacable" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 466). Lancelot's humour in Malory is only occasionally seen, and tends to involve Sir

Dynadan, who brings out the sense of humour in most people. While the unflattering lay which Lancelot allows Dynadan to write about king Mark is a rather spiteful and politically motivated one, and an instance of Lancelot's humour (Vinaver 617), the best example occurs during the tournament where Lancelot actually dresses up as a woman to joust with Dynadan, much to the amusement of both Gwenevere and Sir Dynadan, who is a good sport about the whole affair (669-70).

In Whyte, while Clothar refrains from wearing women's clothing as a tourney gimmick, he does not hesitate to offer himself as a source of amusement or to make jokes, but in a much more personal manner. For Clothar, most examples of humour are found in his private or semi-private interactions with Arthur. This is part of the dynamic between Clothar and Arthur which exists in Whyte but is absent from Malory's work. Clothar, relying on his close friendship with Arthur, feels comfortable enough to tease his king about his royal role and supposed privilege, a teasing which Arthur cheerfully encourages with his own mock-dignified posturing (Whyte, *The Eagle* 6). Clothar also plays up his position as "nothing but a foreigner" (6), and exaggerates his supposed oafishness and his Frankish gestures on numerous occasions, knowing that this foolishness amuses Arthur (546). This self-ridicule combined with occasional witty remarks (546) are the core of Clothar's humour, and are directed towards Arthur's amusement as his dearest and closest friend.

This is very different from Malory's portrayal, in which Lancelot is acknowledged as a valuable member of the court and it is stated that Arthur "loved hym passyngly well" for his noble deeds (Vinaver 1163), but the relationship between knight

and king is presented in a much more formal manner. Why Lancelot stays in Arthur's court rather than returning to his own kingdom is unclear, although the educated guess would be that he stays for Gwenevere and for the thrill and worship of tournaments, two things about which he is consistently enthusiastic and passionate (Vinaver 270). Clothar, though, stays in Camulod for one reason: Arthur. Arthur is, of course, his king, to whom he has sworn loyalty and service but, more importantly, Arthur is Clothar's best friend. In altering his Lancelot's humour, Whyte also changes the relationship between him and Arthur, creating a closer, more personal, bond and allowing his characters to have moments of being simply good friends sharing a laugh. Rather than being trapped in chivalric codes and trying to maintain a heroic façade throughout, Whyte's Clothar and Arthur are realistic and human and the reader can easily see and appreciate the closeness of their friendship.

Along with his relationship with Arthur, Lancelot's role as a leader of men is also an important aspect of his character that is significantly altered from Malory's presentation to Whyte's. Malory's Lancelot is a leader of men throughout the saga, beginning with his pledge to bring 20,000 men to Arthur's continental war (Vinaver 189), a number which is exorbitantly high for a sixth-century war and likely indicates an anachronistic insertion on Malory's part to make the story more current for his own time. Although much of Lancelot's campaigning during the core of the Arthurian story is done alone or with a small group of fellow knights, this initial number of men-at-arms that he can call upon in need indicates his position as a lord in the Arthurian world. This position is easily forgotten until near the end of Arthur's reign when one is reminded that Lancelot

is, in fact, a king in his own right, a responsibility that he bears very lightly, given his absentee rule, similar to that of Richard Lionheart. It is only through occasional references to his large following and family prowess that one is even reminded that Lancelot is more than just a martially talented man on a horse (Vinaver 516-17, 694, 700).

In contrast to this, Whyte's Clothar spends most of his military life in the company of large contingents of both cavalry and foot soldiers, men who can only be considered 'his' in that they are loyal to him as their commander, but whose first loyalty is to Arthur as king. Rather than having a group of liegemen to call upon in times of war, Clothar has a rank and position in Arthur's standing army, a system whose discipline, organization and maneuvering capabilities reflect both the Roman background of Camulod's founders and modern military systems. Where Malory's Lancelot fights most of his battles alone, but has a small army of family and loyal knights available to him at need, Clothar has only three knights who could be considered 'his' in any capacity, in that they have travelled to Britain and stayed there through loyalty and love for him, and yet he commands Arthur's troops on a regular basis and has a close bond of mutual respect with them.

This same dichotomy exists between the two characters' approach to kingship. Malory's Lancelot seems to take his kingship for granted, in that he leaves his realm for years and then returns to find it apparently exactly as he left it and available for him to stock up for a siege. Clothar, on the other hand, who by the laws of heredity should be king of Ganis, has been kept from his inheritance first by usurpation, then by his own

choice to stay in Britain. Upon returning and finding his cousin has dealt with the usurper and now rules Ganis as part of his own realm, Clothar completely refuses any claim to the throne, declaring "You are their king...and they have no need of me...Besides, I have no wish to be a king" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 382). He repeats this same refusal to Arthur when questioned later, saying that he is "perfectly content" without the stresses of kingship and that his cousin Pelles is "a far better king" than he would be (632). Rather than taking kingship for granted like Malory's Lancelot, Whyte's presentation of Clothar creates an emphasis on the trials of kingship, and the dedication and sacrifice that it entails. Instead of Malory's casual approach to kingship with Lancelot, Whyte presents, through Clothar's views, a sense of the need for responsible leadership and accountable government, a need which is appreciated by the modern audience. Clothar has no desire for such responsibility and is quite happy to continue his dedicated service to the king, to whom he has sworn himself, indefinitely, rather than claiming his inheritance and doing a mediocre job. In choosing thus, he exhibits clarity of thinking and a lack of ego that could actually make him appear more attractive as a leader to Whyte's readers. Kingship in Whyte is given a much more realistic level of difficulty than Malory's presentation of Lancelot and his cavalier approach would lead one to believe.

Lancelot's leadership role, in Malory at least, is much more a case of leadership by example than actual commanding. The example that Lancelot sets as a paragon of chivalry is one that is very difficult, if not impossible, for many knights to match, but it is one to which the vast majority aspire. Where Clothar holds up Ghilleadh as his ideal example of knighthood, it is Lancelot who is the ideal knight in Malory's work,

excluding the holy Galahad who falls into a category all his own (Davies 356). Lancelot is chivalrous to a fault. He several times refuses tournament prizes because he feels others deserve them more (Vinaver 535, 762), and has his attempts at anonymity undone by chivalrous demands of hospitality (776-9). His name becomes, essentially, a synonym for chivalry, since he is the example that is always used for comparison (417). Indeed, Bagdemagus points out to Lancelot that his chivalry is his undoing in the conflict with Arthur since he refuses to fully commit to battle with him (1211-12), and even stops Bors from killing the king in the field, setting Arthur back on his own horse and courteously bidding him good day (1192).

While polite to virtually everyone and very conscious of the deference due to rank, Clothar is less emphasized as a paragon of chivalry. Clothar has a nobility of character and is a good person, but remains dubious of such qualities in others until they have proven themselves. This suspicious nature, in opposition to Lancelot's blindness to others' faults is, as discussed earlier, a strength and asset on Clothar's part. The difference in presentation is due in a large part to the fact that Whyte is not writing for an audience steeped in the courtly love tradition of medieval France, but is giving his story a much more realistic presentation. His modern audience will find Clothar's suspicion much easier to believe in a warrior than Lancelot's oblivious chivalry, and the portrayal of Clothar as a thinking protagonist gives him added credibility.

In his role as ambassador, Clothar maintains the expected political decorum in dutifully paying his respects to monarchs, in the persons of Pelles and Thorismund (Whyte, *The Eagle* 350, 371, 642), but quickly reverts to his natural frankness in both

cases. He becomes good friends with Pelles, particularly after their familial relationship is discovered (385-6, 401), and succeeds in creating a chillingly polite scene in Thorismund's throne room after being rather impolitely rebuffed (642-3). This latter incident, while not terribly chivalrous in that he embarrasses the king publicly, does have the benefit of getting Thorismund's attention and accomplishing the trade agreements that Clothar desires (643-4).

Regarding the aspect of chivalry which relates directly to the treatment of women, Malory's Lancelot and Whyte's Clothar are much closer than in other aspects of their presentation. Lancelot's constant courtesy and care for the women he encounters and often rescues is legendary, and occasionally gets him into trouble, as when his chivalrous endeavours result in his being caught up a tree, unarmed, by an enemy (Vinaver 282-3), or when Gwenevere accuses him of devoting too much time to other women and flies into a jealous rage (1045-7). Throughout his career as a knight, Lancelot is courteous to every damsel, and vigilant of both his honour and the honour of the ladies involved, refraining from any action that could cast a shadow of dishonour upon them. Chaste kisses of gratitude in payment for release from prison are all that he will allow before his sense of chivalry stops him. Clothar is also constantly considerate of and courteous to the women he encounters, as his concern for the women found in Ushmar's fort indicates (92-3). Even during his initial meeting with the acerbic Morgas, Clothar remains polite (Whyte, *The Eagle* 97-103), although he does speak sharply to her when her tone becomes overtly hostile (98). His interactions with other women, particularly with Elaine and Gwinnifer, are, like his interactions with the men mentioned above, also painfully

polite until he becomes more comfortable with them. Even then, his conversations with Elaine remain awkwardly courteous due to the underlying attraction between them and the combination of Clothar's virgin uncertainty and his conscientiousness in his role as the king's representative (242-4).

Concern for the honour of the women involved does not seem to be the main focus for Clothar; rather he is simply concerned with being polite and courteous, which is his instinctive mode of interaction with women. This may be due in part to Clothar's monk-like education in Germanus' school, but could just as easily be due to how he was raised as a child, given the worshipful adoration with which he treated his aunt.⁸ This difference in authorial treatment of Lancelot and Clothar reflects, to a degree, modern views of women. While a reader approaching Whyte from a feminist perspective may find the tale lacking, Whyte does avoid having his male characters tip-toeing gently around female honour and acting as valiant defenders. He has the delicate task, in this case, of balancing modern attitudes towards women and equality with the realism that he is attempting to portray. Realistically, a true reflection of sixth-century Britain is not going to meet with modern standards of equality. As such, Whyte does the best he can, in moving away from the chivalric obsession with ladies as figures to be set on pedestals. The one point where a woman's honour does become an issue for Clothar is when Arthur asks him to take Gwinnifer to Gaul to keep her safe from the impending war. At this point Clothar becomes concerned about what people will say if he and the queen leave

⁸ Clothar's childhood, relationship with his adoptive parents—his aunt and uncle—and his time at the bishop's school are recounted in *Clothar the Frank*.

the country together, and his concern is as much for Arthur's honour as for the queen's. Arthur, though, tells him not to worry about it but, rather, to concern himself with keeping the queen safe (Whyte, *The Eagle* 681). This episode is reminiscent of Malory's Lancelot and his consistent efforts to keep Gwenevere from situations of reproach, an effort made difficult by her constant emotional outbursts which result in situations like the affair with the poisoned apple and his being forced to ride in tourney wearing her favour (Vinaver 1046-51, 1103). In either case, Gwenevere is the woman with whose honour and well being Lancelot and Clothar are most concerned.

Malory's Lancelot and Whyte's Clothar are even more similar in their professed fears of women or, rather, the effect women could have upon their lives. When confronted with his alleged relationship with Gwenevere and its consequences for any other woman who might wish to seek his love, Lancelot side-steps the initial accusation and replies that marriage disagrees with him, since it would mean he must stay at home and "leve armys and turnamentis, batellys and adventures" (Vinaver 270). This sentiment is echoed by Clothar when he tells his cousin that he is glad he did not try to settle with Elaine as he has "no tolerance for the domestic stability she represented to me. The thought of settling down in one place and staying there for twenty years to raise a brood appalls me" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 660), an unenlightened, but sadly realistic, reflection of women's role in sixth-century—or later—society.

When it comes to taking a woman as a lover, rather than as a wife, Malory's Lancelot expresses a "drede of God" that taking a paramour would result in punishment for sin, through loss of happiness and success in war, and probably being overcome by "a

sympler knight" (Vinaver 270). Whyte's Clothar, as part of Whyte's move away from the religious emphasis of the earlier tales, has a less specifically Christian focus for his fear. In his contemplative narrative he reveals that he simply is afraid that loving or 'knowing' a woman "might prove the undoing" of him in some undefined way outside of his understanding (Whyte, *The Eagle* 226). However Freudian and superstitious this fear might seem, it apparently springs solely from Clothar's virginal nature, since, once he has had relations with Elaine, his fears of women seem to vanish and his later relationship with Pelles' sister is unhampered by any superstitious thoughts (401-2). Lancelot's fears, likely initially expressed more as an excuse to avoid discussing Gwenevere and his real reasons for not wanting involvement with other women, do not fade with time, although he does pursue a physical relationship with Gwenevere, apparently without divine retribution affecting his knightly abilities. In his later years, though, particularly after the Grail quest, he becomes more religiously conscious of his sinful nature (Vinaver 1046) and finishes his life as a holy man in recompense.

The opinions on marriage expressed above do not hold true in the long term for either version of Lancelot. Clothar, after Arthur's fall, eventually marries Gwinnifer and they raise a family, despite his previous youthful protests (Whyte, *The Eagle* 687). Lancelot, when he seeks out Gwenevere after Arthur's fall, appears to want the same, to take her away to live with him. His religious devotion arises only after she tells him that she wants to remain in the cloister (Vinaver 1253). Thus, in both cases, the fears of a woman as lover prove to be merely virginal paranoia or flimsy excuses, which are quickly overcome, and the derogatory opinions on marriage, for both Lancelot and

Clothar, are the words of adventurous youth. The opinion on marriage changes when the potential arises for Gwenevere as the prospective wife. While Whyte changes the outcome of the relationship, he keeps the sentiment and fear of relationships with women the same. This, quite simply, is because, once the overtones of religious dread are removed, what remains from Lancelot's protests is the very realistic, and even somewhat expected, youthful fear of being tied down or being domesticated. For the young warrior—whether Lancelot or Clothar, medieval or modern—this is anathema to the adventurous life. Tempered by age and wisdom, and the realization that war and travel are a hardship rather than an adventure, these fears are set aside. Thus, while Whyte could have changed this aspect of his Lancelot character, it was unnecessary to do so. With the fear of God removed, the youthful fears already reflect a sentiment that the modern audience can believe and to which they can relate.

Unlike Lancelot, Gwenevere plays a role in all three of the texts under discussion, although her presence in Geoffrey's account is minimal and passive. She functions more as an image of a woman than as a woman in fact. She is mentioned only a few times throughout Geoffrey's tale, and only once in a manner which suggests that she made an active decision. This contrasts rather sharply with both Malory and Whyte. Malory's Gwenevere, although fulfilling the archetypal role of queen for large portions of the work, is a much more lively and active character than Geoffrey's and, as a result, seems much more human. She seeks Arthur's permission to go to tourneys (Vinaver 653), she goes Maying and whimsically demands that her knights dress the part (1120), she is alternately weepy and joyful, generous and jealous, and is clearly, passionately, in love

with Lancelot. While at times her portrayal can be annoying to modern enlightened sensibilities, in that it tends to follow the stereotyped hysterical-female vein of unpredictable mood swings, at other times she is a very level-headed and sensible person. Malory demonstrates this when Gwenevere calmly deals with her kidnapping by Mellyagaunce by first sending a child for help, then insisting that her knights remain with her at all times, thereby ensuring both their safety and her honour (1123). Her reactions here, as well as her quick and clever actions in escaping Mordred and protecting herself from his attempts to take her as his wife (1227-8), contrast with her almost constant need for Lancelot to rescue her from disaster and her apparent inability to keep herself out of trouble, thus redeeming her character from being merely a damsel in distress.

Where Whyte's Gwinnifer departs from Malory's portrayal is that Gwinnifer as a character brings with her her own personality, and she is less of a hysterical female stereotype than Malory's character. Indeed, Gwinnifer is far from hysterical, and is shown repeatedly to be a sensible, intelligent and eminently practical person. Her emotions rarely get the better of her and when they do it is on occasions of great emotion for all, as when Arthur and Mordred meet for the first time (Whyte, *The Eagle* 553-4), or when she realizes that however much of a monster her father is she cannot ask that he be killed (541). Gwinnifer is described by Arthur several times as "passionate" (680), and her joy in life is evident in the delight she takes in simple things like gently tormenting Clothar over his feelings for Elaine or in demonstrating for young Mordred her skill with casting lances (627-8). The lance casting, in itself, is a prime indicator of Gwinnifer's strength and capabilities, and prompts Mordred to exclaim "I had thought to be your

protector when I grow older, but perhaps you might be mine" (630). While she is no warrior, Gwinnifer certainly has talents and strength which create a stark contrast to the other depictions of her character. Where Geoffrey's Gwenevere is passive and barely present, and Malory's can be spiteful and capricious, Whyte's Gwinnifer is vibrant and predominantly cheerful despite her stern upbringing. She may not be the female ideal that members of the modern audience seek, but she is a strong and intelligent woman, and not a hysterical, jealous harpy.

Gwenevere's position not simply as a character, but as a queen, within the Arthurian tradition, as with many other aspects of the tale, is influenced in part by the time period and writing style of the author. Geoffrey's one description of Gwenevere is that she "did surpass in beauty all the other dames of the island" (Geoffrey 164). While this is flattering, and possibly even true, it quickly establishes Gwenevere's position as ornamental and passive, and later references to her do nothing to change this. She is described at the Whitsuntide festival essentially as simply a part of the décor, being led to the church, going to feast with the other women and being generally another feature of the glory of Arthur's court (170). Arthur marries her because she is pretty and she fulfills her queenly role by sitting at the high table and looking pretty. Even her eventual betrayal of Arthur is passive, in that Mordred is the one described as *taking* her as his wife. The only active role Gwenevere plays consists of taking the veil when she hears of Mordred's initial defeat after Arthur's return, although the precise reason for her "despair" is unclear (198). The lack of development given to her character can be blamed, at least in part, on the fact that Geoffrey writes in a pseudo-historical vein and is very restricted in terms of

the space he has for the story; describing Gwenevere as woman and queen would, given his historical period and choice of writing style, be of considerably less importance for his readers than highlighting more of Arthur's deeds, and Gwenevere functions quite well as a trophy marking Arthur's achievements.

The amount of time Malory devotes to Gwenevere is in sharp contrast to this neglect on Geoffrey's part. Much like Geoffrey's narrator, Malory's Arthur initially describes Gwenevere as "moste valyaunte and fayryst that I know lyvyng" (Vinaver 97). Thus, although Malory's Arthur, like Geoffrey's, marries her for her beauty, at the very least he also recognizes that Gwenevere has other qualities. The greater role Malory gives her, due at least in part to his use of sources in the romance tradition that lay more emphasis on the female characters, further enhances her position. Malory's queen is not merely decorative; she fulfills the courtly position and political demands of the role of queen. She is obedient to her husband, first and foremost, as he is not only her husband, and therefore her master as far as the time period is concerned, but he is also her lord and king. Besides this, though, Gwenevere is also a judge of valour and decency among the knights (Vinaver 108-9, 119, 660-2), shows favour to those who earn it by their deeds (253, 662), and generally acts as a public relations officer for the court by attending and judging at tourneys (346, 528, 653) and throwing dinner parties, however badly they might turn out (1048). She is the decorative female, but also the dutiful, chivalric queen.

Whyte's presentation of Gwinnifer enforces the power and influence of the position of queen even more. Arthur's initial opinions of Gwinnifer in Whyte's version differ considerably from those of the earlier writers. For his Arthur, Gwinnifer is initially

“pleasant and personable” in conversation. She reveals herself to be astonishingly “impersonal” and “dispassionate” for one so young, in considering the political position of their unexpected marriage and the threat of her father’s duplicity and ambition (Whyte, *The Eagle* 425). After she is given time to grow in the less oppressive environment offered by Camulod, Arthur comes to describe her as a “passionate young woman” (680). While she is equally as dutiful as Malory’s Gwenevere in her queenly role, Whyte’s Gwinnifer is portrayed more as a powerful force within Camulod. There is no doubt that Malory’s Gwenevere holds a position of power within the Arthurian world, since she has a great deal of influence with the king which can be used to support a knight or a cause as she deems fit (Vinaver 460), but Whyte’s Gwinnifer is so thoroughly confident in her position and her abilities that even Merlyn is willing to follow her lead. Only a supremely confident person could expect Merlyn to comply with their choices without hesitation, or could refer to him as being “sweet and docile as a child’s pony” (Whyte, *The Eagle* 536-7). Whyte’s portrayal of Gwinnifer is not necessarily meant to show her as a ‘modern’ woman in the sixth-century Arthurian world, although he does give her a strength and attitude toward life that could be deemed modern. She is still answerable to her husband, as king, although she stands above everyone else, unless her personal safety is in question. She is very clearly not the sort of woman who would abase herself in any matter before anyone—something that Malory’s Gwenevere does do when pressed (Vinaver 1052). Whether this strength is meant to show her as a modern woman or merely to demonstrate her position as queen is unclear. If she were not queen, it is quite likely that Gwinnifer, while still a strong woman, would have to remain in a more

submissive role. Whyte's Gwinnifer may not be a modern woman, but she is certainly a three-dimensional character, with a strong and determined intellect.

Just as Arthur's initial opinions of Gwenevere differ from author to author, so their long-term relationship differs among the three versions. Geoffrey's Gwenevere, barely mentioned, is trusted sufficiently to be left in charge of the country jointly with Mordred when Arthur departs for his continental war (Geoffrey 178), as is Malory's Gwenevere, jointly with Baudwen and Cadore (Vinaver 195). It must be noted that the phrasing, in both of these cases leaves it unclear as to what degree it is a case of Gwenevere being left in charge, and to what degree it is a case of her being left nominally in charge but under strict supervision. When Malory's Arthur leaves the country for the second time, after Lancelot and Gwenevere have been caught together, Malory makes it very clear that Gwenevere is left with Mordred "undir hys governaunce" along with the rest of Arthur's realm and possessions (1211). Evidently whatever trust there had been between them has been lost. Although Whyte's Arthur never leaves the country, he does send Gwinnifer herself away. This incident in *The Eagle* is somewhat reminiscent of the incident in Malory in which Arthur, having sentimentally brought his new bride to war with him, suddenly finds it too dangerous for her to be present and sends her away on a convenient barge (129). Whyte's Gwinnifer, similarly, is sent to Gaul to be kept safe from the impending war which Arthur knows will be his last (Whyte, *The Eagle* 677, 685). While being sent away to safety may not sit very well with a modern perspective, where women are a growing presence in military forces around the world, it is very realistic and practical on Arthur's part. Gwinnifer is a strong woman, but she is not

trained for war and, more significantly, her presence would hamper Arthur's leadership—both in that he would be distracted by concern for her safety and in that one of his key antagonists is her mentally unbalanced and unscrupulous father, who would not hesitate to seek to harm or use her. The practicality and realism of the situation is how Whyte turns what could otherwise be merely the removal of an unnecessary female presence into a pro-active plan of action, as well as an act of love.

Both of these incidents of sending his wife away demonstrate Arthur's love and care for her, but in Whyte this action also demonstrates trust, and on a greater and more personal level than in the other authors. While Whyte's Gwinnifer is trusted to manage much of the mundane handling of the kingdom during Arthur's illness, it is when she is sent away, under the sole care of Clothar, that the trust between her and Arthur is most evident. The king has no fears about his wife's faithfulness, and even brushes aside Clothar's concern for public opinion. Gwinnifer's sense of loyalty and honour are sufficient to keep her faithful to her husband while he lives. This is an interesting contrast with the other versions where Gwenevere does prove unfaithful, with Mordred and Lancelot respectively. Whyte's Gwinnifer, rather than being the wife who proves unfaithful, is a loving and devoted partner—Arthur's word for their relationship (539)—who only comes to love and marry Clothar after Arthur has been dead for several years (687).

Whatever her portrayal, whether passive and ornamental, dutiful and unfaithful, or politically savvy and loyal, Gwenevere's relationship with Arthur is a key to who she is as a character. Malory, however, drawing on the romance tradition, makes

Gwenevere's relationship with Lancelot the central point of her character and, indeed, of the tale itself. Where the adulterous relationship with Mordred in Geoffrey could be seen as the precursor to the later literary development of the relationship with Lancelot, it is difficult to think of Geoffrey's Gwenevere as being passionate about anything, a fact which may say more about Geoffrey than it does about the development of the Arthurian saga. Whatever the case, Malory's Gwenevere and Lancelot and the development of their relationship are central to his approach to the tale. Their connection begins as nothing more than a chivalrous relationship of a good knight being honoured by a queen. He does great deeds in her name (Vinaver 253) and acts as her defender against any challengers, in line with the courtly tradition. The ties between Gwenevere and the worshipful young Lancelot apparently grow quickly, however. While the true growth of their emotional attachment is difficult to gauge, the growth of rumour at least gives an indication of how their interactions must appear to others.

Rather than drawing on a courtly tradition, Whyte's approach to the famous relationship begins with a youthful encounter. Gwinnifer and Clothar first meet before either of them ever encounters Arthur, when Clothar is a young man travelling through Britain for the first time and Gwinnifer is a silent and overlooked child of twelve. It is her curiosity over Clothar's casting lances and his kind treatment of her, recognizing her loneliness, that initiates their acquaintance and leaves a lasting impression—on Gwinnifer, especially, as she retains fond memories of him and refers to him as “*her Spearman, her Hastatus*” (Whyte, *The Eagle* 423).⁹ While there is no doubting that a

⁹ Gwinnifer and Clothar's first meeting is recounted in *Clothar the Frank* on pages 533-556.

bond formed between the two characters at that initial youthful meeting, and that Clothar's appreciation for, and astonishment at, Gwinnifer's adult beauty is undeniable, neither is the fact that they are simply friends for most of the novel. Friendship is what Gwinnifer remembers fondly from their first meeting, and what she seeks from Clothar as an adult (533-4). This friendship, apparently a deep and lasting one, is the beginning of their relationship and there is a passage of years before it becomes anything else.

In Malory's version of the tale, the initial, formal, chivalrous relationship apparently transforms into something more serious within just four pages, when Lancelot is accused of loving only Gwenevere. The threat that is uttered against him on that occasion is that he "shalt hir love lose for ever, and she thyne" (Vinaver 257) implying that Gwenevere returns his love. This is rumour and conjecture on the part of the accusers, and Lancelot denies it, but later, still within the same tale of Lancelot's youthful knightly endeavours, a new rumour arises, that Gwenevere has in fact enchanted him so that he can never love another (270). This progression of rumours transforms Gwenevere from a courtly lady, to a lady emotionally unfaithful to her lord, to a knight-devouring enchantress in less than twenty pages of story development. By the time Tristram and his famous love enter the story, Gwenevere and Lancelot are acknowledged as the other great pair of lovers in the land (425).

While backed mostly by rumour at this point, it is clear that there must be something in Gwenevere and Lancelot's interactions which says 'illicit love' to those watching. While it may seem odd that this relationship, which is later fully revealed to the reader as one that is both mutual and deeply passionate, can be so openly the subject

of rumour without becoming an issue at court, it must be acknowledged that this is in keeping with the idea that it is the disclosure of the relationship and not its suspected existence, that is the key in this medieval text. "The sin that mattered was the loss of the lady's honour" which would occur were the affair made public (Davies 361). Since anyone who openly accused Gwenevere and Lancelot would then have to face Lancelot's responding challenge to duel and the inevitable defeat accompanying it—a fact acknowledged by Arthur when, in finally pursuing the affair, he insists that a duel must be avoided as a completely biased form of judgement—Gwenevere's honour is safe from reproach and the relationship is safe to continue to blossom into its final passionate and physical form.

It is this concern for honour, and for rumour, which marks the beginning of the shift for Whyte's characters from deep friendship to something more. As mentioned above, Clothar is not overly concerned about honour, except for when Arthur asks him to take Gwinnifer to Gaul for safe-keeping. Then he becomes concerned, thanks to the power of rumour, over what people will say. At this point in the relationship, it is only rumour that could be brought against Gwinnifer, as her relationship with Clothar is still purely friendship, and she remains, as previously noted, loyal to her husband while he lives. Not only is she—and Clothar—loyal, though; it must be noted that Clothar as narrator himself explains that only after Arthur and all word from Britain are long gone, after three years, do they "come to know and love each other" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 687). Rather than publicly denying the rumours which do indeed circulate, Clothar's narration dismisses them all as nothing but foul words, unworthy of attention.

Rather than following the trend, carried over by Malory from the romance tradition, of the passionate illicit romance and its fateful repercussions for the kingdom, Whyte allows his tale to follow a much simpler and less exaggeratedly tragic path, in keeping with his effort to create a more realistic tale. There is no torrid illicit romance; rather there is lasting friendship which eventually becomes love, complete with marriage and children. There is no jealous and vengeful explosion of affairs into a catastrophe that destroys a kingdom; rather there are the simple unavoidable facts of a wounded king, an heir unready for his role, and a growing tide of invading outlanders which can no longer be stemmed. Where Geoffrey's Gwenevere is a passive follower and a decoration, and Malory's is an adulterous and emotionally violent tragic heroine, Whyte's is a far more realistically human, intelligent, faithful and "passionate young woman" (Whyte, *The Eagle* 680) who makes the best of what life has given her. Whyte's Gwinnifer is a character whom the modern reader can both believe as a human being, and grow to love.

Chapter Six: Arthur Rex

The relationship between Gwenevere and Lancelot has a huge impact on their mutual relationship with Arthur which, in turn, impacts how Arthur governs his kingdom. He is, of course, the key character in any discussion of the Arthurian saga since he is the driving force behind its existence, although he may not be, in the strictest sense, the main character in either of the two later versions under consideration here. Where Geoffrey's account follows Arthur's exploits quite closely, only deviating from him for an occasional update on what enemies are doing at the same time, Malory and Whyte both spend large portions of the text away from Arthur, focusing more on the exploits of Lancelot or other knights. It cannot be denied, though, that however absent he may be from the advancing plot, Arthur is the catalyst and driving force of both stories. While Malory centers most of his tale around Lancelot, Tristan and the Grail Quest, the story begins and ends with Arthur, and it is Arthur as king who builds up his court and attracts and maintains the multitude of knights who populate the pages of the *Morte Darthur*. For Whyte, although Clothar's position as narrator focuses *The Eagle's* plot specifically on Clothar's deeds, including his years spent many miles away from Arthur in Gaul, Arthur is the pivotal point of the story. He is one of the two reasons why Clothar first travels to Britain, is the reason why the Frank stays in Britain, and is the governing, guiding force behind how he lives his life forever after their first meeting, both while on and off the island. Clothar's training with Camulodian swords and tactics, his journeys through Gaul and discovery of distant royal cousins and even his eventual marriage and family all stem

in one way or another from Arthur, from Arthur's needs as king and from his dream for Britain.

Since Arthur is the pivot around which the story revolves, it is impossible to discuss other features of the tale without also discussing him to some degree. As such, many of his traits and important aspects of his life have already been touched on in the preceding sections, such as his conception and birth, the significance of Excalibur for his kingship and his siring of and relationship with Mordred, as well as something of his relationship with both Lancelot and Gwenevere. Other aspects of Arthur, specifically relating to his position as king and knight and how he perceives himself in relation to the world, require further discussion.

In all three versions of the Arthurian story under discussion, Arthur is an exemplary knight, a renowned king and a great leader of men. Exactly how he approaches these roles and how he is prepared for them differs greatly from one work to the next. The Arthur of the *Historia* is raised by his royal father, Uther, and would, therefore have been trained throughout his childhood to one day take over his father's role as king. Although, upon his coronation, Arthur is only a boy of fifteen, one must recognize that in this era under Welsh—and arguably British—law a boy of fifteen was considered a man with full rights to inherit his father's position (Ellis 384) and, combined with the support and advice of the barons, Arthur's childhood education is clearly sufficient to secure him in his grip on throne and country. Described as beloved by the people, with a "courage and generosity beyond compare" (Geoffrey 155), young Arthur is acclaimed as king by his father's barons, and is virtually uncontested in his kingship.

In stark contrast to this, Malory's Arthur has a great deal of trouble securing his claim to the throne, and would seem to be virtually unprepared for his role as king. Aside from the fact that his parentage initially remains secret, not only from the various lords but also from Arthur himself, thus leading to considerable consternation over this unknown stripling boy assuming the throne (Vinaver 17-18), there is no evidence that Arthur was ever taught anything to do with kingship. It is clear that he must have learned at least the basics of being a knight, since he is the adopted son of a knight and acts as squire to his elder foster-brother. Given the complete ignorance of his social status and birthright, though, and the fact that Ector already had a son of his own blood, it seems unlikely that the noble and generous knight would have instructed his young adopted son even in the basic skills and requirements of lordship. Certainly he would not have been as concerned as he would be over the education of his heir. One cannot even ascribe Arthur's tutelage to Merlyn since not only was he apparently absent for all of Arthur's youth, he also seems to have left no instruction for the boy's education. Thus, one can only assume that young Arthur ascends the throne with only the beginnings of a knightly education and little to no knowledge of kingship, and relies entirely upon the advice of Merlyn and those of his royal father's loyal knights whom Merlyn sets around him (15-16).

Whyte's Arthur, although raised in as much secrecy as could be managed in order to protect him from those who would eliminate Uther's heir, is not raised in ignorance. Merlyn, as mentioned previously, takes it upon himself to educate the boy in everything that he thinks will be relevant or helpful to Arthur in the role of king. Thus, between his

martial training and his classical education, garnered from all the knowledge and resources that Merlyn and his companions have at their disposal, Arthur is, quite probably, one of the best educated and best read individuals on the island of Britain by the time he is crowned as king.

These changes in Arthur's background from author to author are very clearly a part of these individual approaches to the tale. Geoffrey describes a very straightforward upbringing for Arthur, which would prepare him for his role as king in the expected traditional manner. Malory, in keeping with his mixture of sources and the chivalric tradition, follows a more romantic and, frankly, unrealistic route. For him, young Arthur's legitimacy depends only on the word and magical sword-in-stone test of a sorcerer, and his legendary skills as king apparently developed with him in the womb or, more realistically, must be ascribed entirely to the talents of Merlyn and the other senior knights, at least for Arthur's early years on the throne. This ignorance on Arthur's part and his collection of advisors work well for Malory if one looks solely at the first tale as a coming of age story for Arthur (Reynolds 41), a pattern repeated with other knights throughout the *Morte*. In a realistic world, though, putting an uneducated and untested king on the throne would mean at best that those advisors were somewhat naïve and hoping for an uneventful first year or two or, at worst, that said advisors were seeking to use the king as a puppet through which to control the country themselves. Fortunately for Malory, his is not a realistic world and anything is possible. Whyte's approach, on the other hand, creates a combination of these two approaches, bridging the gap between the mysterious allure of the hidden childhood and the realistic necessity of the kingly

education and credentials. Whyte respects his readers' intellect and insight, and wants to give them the romance of the traditional tale but also a realistic Arthurian world. His Arthur thus has all the romance and the sudden appearance on the political scene of Malory's, but with the much more realistic addition of actually being a capable leader, and the added bonus of having his father's signet ring to vouch for his claim (Whyte, *The Eagle's Brood* 637).

All three versions of Arthur do agree that he is an exemplary knight and warrior, a trait which is most apparent in the various instances of single combat. In Geoffrey's account, the single combat with Frolo is a prime example, wherein Arthur holds his own against an opponent who is clearly quite talented, and quickly turns any disadvantage to an advantage (Geoffrey 166-7). Rather than allowing injuries to slow him down, Arthur sees them as spurs to even greater prowess, until "his wrath waxed yet more burning hot" and Frolo falls (167). Malory's Arthur is actually fairly well-balanced as far as knightly prowess is concerned, in that he is clearly depicted as a good knight, but he is not as exaggeratedly superior as Lancelot. Malory's Arthur does not always win jousts, since if he did it would take the glory away from the other knights upon whom Malory focuses. Arthur's prowess as a knight is most evident, therefore, in his early days, in the tale that Malory devotes specifically to Arthur and which depicts his coming of age as a man and as a knight in true chivalric fashion. In this tale one finds Arthur's battle with the giant which is discussed earlier (Vinaver 202-4), the single combat wherein he kills the Emperor Lucius (223) and, perhaps most impressively, his single combat with Accolon, also mentioned earlier. While Arthur is nearly killed in this latter fight, and it is only

when he regains Excalibur that he can gain the upper hand, the very fact that Arthur is “so full of knyghthode” that he can hold his own against a skilled knight wielding a magical sword and an enchanted healing scabbard (143-4), while he himself bleeds from many wounds, is a testament to his courage and skill as a knight.

Whyte's Arthur is equally skilled in battle, which he proves early in the tale when he and Clothar deal with a group of Danish scouts (Whyte, *The Eagle* 24-5, 33-4) and, more dramatically, later on, when he leads a troop of men against a group of raiders in the villa, although the latter is an example of his brazenness and concern for his men as much as his skill, since his heroism nearly gets him killed (197). Whyte's Arthur also recognizes that in his upcoming final war he will undoubtedly be called upon to fight—not simply as a commander, but in person (680). In this case, though, Arthur acknowledges that it will be his last battle. Unlike Malory's super-human Arthur, Whyte's is invincible only in the public eye, not in reality. This is the difference between the earlier portrayals and Whyte's. Whyte, in his concern for realism, presents to the reader an Arthur keenly aware of his own mortality, who has been seriously wounded and not miraculously returned to health by a few days stay with a hermit. His Arthur is not perpetually young and strong but, like Merlyn, grows older and must deal with injury and disease. Arthur knows that his weakness will be his undoing in his final battle, but the fact remains that, however weak Arthur may become, his history of heroic strength and his determination as a warrior will remain. Whyte's Arthur is no less a warrior than his medieval predecessors; the only difference is that he is accorded a more realistic mortality.

While this knightly role is important for Arthur's presentation, and is equally recognized by all three authors, it is Arthur's role as king that is most significant for the legend. 'King' Arthur is the figure over which centuries of writers and readers have obsessed and who continues to charm audiences even today. Given his position as king, there are certain aspects of kingship which bear discussion, aspects which, interestingly, have been altered between the three authors either as part of the overall changes to his character, or as a reaction to changing views of kingship over time. The first facet of kingship which must be addressed is the notion of law and order, and Arthur's approach to maintaining decorum in his kingdom. A consideration of this notion sheds an interesting light on Geoffrey's version of Arthur, since the Arthur of the *Historia* does not spend a great deal of time governing his kingdom in peaceful times but, rather, is depicted as holding sumptuous banquets during peacetime and otherwise being constantly at war. As such, Geoffrey's depiction of Arthur is one of military justice, 'justice' being a flexible term. There are several incidents which could be deemed examples of Arthur's approach to justice which Geoffrey documents, and all of them could just as easily be deemed 'vengeance' depending on the stance one chooses to take. Arthur's hanging of the hostages after the Saxons renege on their promise is just, in that it is the punishment that was decreed in response to their betrayal, and thus Arthur appears as the just, if not merciful, lord, caught up in the realities of war. The fact, though, that Geoffrey describes him as "astonied beyond measure" at their actions and having the prisoners hanged "out of hand" conveys a sense of capriciousness on Arthur's part (Geoffrey 158).

This sense of Arthur espousing a course of cruel justice, rather than merciful or fair justice, resurfaces again at other points, as when he sets out to destroy the Scots and Picts in an apparent attempt at genocide (161), as discussed previously. While it undoubtedly falls to Arthur to see to it that the incursion is punished, to discourage further trouble, setting out to wipe out the races involved seems heavy handed to say the least and, rather than showing him as the protective lord dispensing well-deserved justice upon his enemies, depicts him as wantonly cruel. This depiction is reinforced again shortly afterward when Arthur apparently allows his soldiers to lay waste to the entire Norwegian countryside, after he had already won a decisive victory against the king (165). Whether the reader is to believe that Arthur truly is as capricious and violent in his dispensing of justice as Geoffrey indicates, painted in the image of an historical, heavy-handed warrior king, or whether this depiction is coloured by Geoffrey's religious disapproval of Arthur's warfare and conquering is difficult to say. It is likely that the more religious members of Geoffrey's audience would have agreed with his condemnation of Arthur's violent tendencies. Whatever the case, the Arthur presented by Geoffrey is one with blood-stained hands and a will to dominate all those under and around him, rather than to rule and maintain the law.

While Malory's Arthur is also depicted on occasion as being a bloodthirsty ruler, he is more often shown as a benevolent dispenser of justice and upholder of the law, a position more suited to the courtly king of a chivalric tale. Malory's Arthur is a merciful king, who happily accepts the allegiance of hundreds of knights sent to him as prisoners by the members of the Round Table, even though some of those knights were once

violently opposed to him. His mercy may be partly motivated by the knowledge that he is adding to his own resources by accepting these knights and their retainers, but his mercy and chivalry are undeniable. On certain points of law, however, Arthur cannot be too merciful, as with Gwenevere's accused trespass in the incident with the poisoned apple, the charge of infidelity and treason by Mellyagaunce, and the final episode of being caught with Lancelot where Malory always emphasizes that Arthur knows she must "have the law" (Vinaver 1175). Arthur's calm acceptance of her fate in the first two episodes may be due in part, though, to his knowledge that Lancelot can defend her in a trial by combat, and will invariably win such trials. Still, it cannot be denied that Arthur follows the letter of the law in setting the date for trial and potential burning, and handing Gwenevere over to the constable (1055).

When it comes to other incidents of law, though, Arthur is much more reluctant to uphold the law and is, perhaps, too merciful. While the religious overtones of mercy and forgiveness in Malory's text cannot be denied and his Arthur is very clearly a Christian king, Malory's depiction of Arthur makes him seem almost weak. In the case of the murder of Arthur's sister Morgause by her own son Gaheris, Arthur is initially "passynge wrothe" and banishes Gaheris from the court (Vinaver 613). Gaheris eventually returns, though, and by the time of the fall of the Round Table is once again a beloved member of the court and, perhaps more significantly, of Arthur's family. Similarly, when Arthur is warned by Lancelot that his nephews will attempt to murder Lamorak he swears to prevent it (613), but when the murder does occur, there are, apparently, no repercussions for the knights in question. Although everyone at court, and many throughout the

countryside, are aware of what happened, the brothers remain in Arthur's good graces and, in the final days of the kingdom, it is in them that Arthur places his trust—quite mistakenly in the case of Mordred. Forgiveness is a laudable Christian virtue, but forgetting the trespass altogether is a misplaced and dangerous naïveté, however chivalrous it may make Arthur appear. Even Lancelot and Gwenevere, in the final reckoning, are forgiven by Arthur, and Gwenevere is accepted back as his queen. Lancelot does not return only because of Gawain's insistence on revenge for his brothers. Thus, while Malory's Arthur is willing enough—in principle—to submit his queen to justice, when it comes to his nephews or his most reliable and worshipful knight, he apparently would prefer to pretend nothing has happened. Murder, adultery and treason can be overlooked for those whom Arthur values most, and the resulting appearance of weakness and nepotism threatens to undermine his position as a strong king in Malory's text, all in the name of chivalry.

Whyte's Arthur appears, once again, to be a combination of the two above portrayals, a balancing of two poles. Arthur in *The Eagle* is, above all, a fair man. When Clothar and Merlyn present their case against Connlyn, of which there is no evidence but much conjecture, Arthur is cautious, but willing to investigate (Whyte, *The Eagle* 179). In the case of Symmachus, whose treachery Gwenevere suspects immediately (535), Arthur is unwilling to support accusations, since there is no proof, and the circumstantial evidence is too vague (540-41). As with Malory's Arthur in the case of Lancelot and Gwenevere's adultery, Whyte's Arthur requires evidence before he is willing to accuse an ally of treachery. The difference between the two is that in Whyte's text the evidence

provided is more substantial than in Malory and less dependent on interpretation, not to mention that in Whyte's case Arthur's judgment is based on the word of not one man, but many witnesses (597-8). Once the evidence is provided to Whyte's Arthur, he is quite pleased to have both traitors dealt with (600), but proof is necessary first, for both Connlyn and Symmachus, before Arthur will condone any action against them. This fact is made quite clear by Whyte and resonates with his modern audience and his social circumstance as a Canadian. Whyte's Arthur supports a system of law which requires evidence of guilt, where, however suspicious, a person is innocent until proven guilty.

Although Symmachus' continued presence in the north later becomes a problem (675) and it could be argued that Arthur should have meted out harsher punishment than a withdrawal of his support, as Geoffrey's more vengeful Arthur would doubtless have done, it is not only Arthur's sense of justice, but also the reality of his situation which compels Arthur to leave Symmachus to wallow in the troubles of his own creation. For Arthur to make war against Symmachus would be unrealistic and a waste of resources that could otherwise be used in securing his own realm, and Arthur's pragmatism as a ruler is greater than his desire for vengeance against his treacherous former ally.

These different Arthurs and their disparate approaches to law and justice give an indication of the three different versions of kingship, in general, that the authors in question espouse for their works. Geoffrey's Arthur is a strong and self-confident leader, if somewhat violent. His rule is undisputed from the beginning, and although he takes council from those around him (Geoffrey 156-7), his leadership throughout is followed unquestioningly. He responds to threats to his realm and sovereignty quickly and

decisively (156, 173-4) and becomes frustrated and increasingly bloodthirsty if his enemies resist his army (160). The Arthur of the *Historia* is a warlord and a conqueror, and the key descriptors of his campaigns seem to be “subjugated” (164) and “vengeance” (196), since the greater part of Geoffrey’s account puts him at war, provoked or not, and his conquered realm stretches across most of western Europe. As much as Geoffrey might disagree with certain un-Christian and uncharitable actions on Arthur’s part, he makes it clear that Arthur is king undisputed and a strong leader. This notion of a strong leader, and the national sense of security entailed therein, would have held considerable appeal for Geoffrey’s readers, particularly since the throne at the time of his writing, and for some years afterwards, was disputed and the country submerged in civil war. Whatever the un-Christian aspect of a warlike and conquering king, the notion of a secure throne, and war occurring overseas rather than in the English countryside, would have made Geoffrey’s Arthur very attractive for his audience at the time.

Malory’s approach to Arthur’s kingship is quite different from Geoffrey’s. Where Malory’s Arthur still rides to war and conquers much of Western Europe, this is merely a prelude to the lengthy period of jousts, feasts and noble quests which takes up most of Malory’s tale. He wanted his Arthur to be a “chivalric king, whose courage is tempered by self-control,” rather than a warrior or chieftain as he had appeared in some earlier works (Dichmann 888), and he succeeds in creating a king who is predominantly gentle rather than daring (888), courteous instead of warlike, a king whose image coincides with Malory’s religious principles and chivalric ideals. This gentle, chivalrous Arthur fits well with the courtly tradition, and would doubtless have been popular with Malory’s

audience among the gentry. The fact remains that, however chivalrous and noble, his Arthur cannot help but appear weak in comparison to the bold and warlike Arthur of Geoffrey. Although he succeeds in claiming his throne, Malory's Arthur has to fight a war to do so, and even then there are rebellious knights and lords who stand against him throughout his reign and present a threat to the safety of his knights as they traverse the countryside. As well, while Malory's Arthur is as willing to accept council as Geoffrey's Arthur, the Arthur of the *Morte* does not always appear to be in charge of the situation, particularly in his later years. In the final days of Arthur's rule, it is Gawain who controls the flow of events and who dictates the actions, not merely of Arthur, but of all of his knights in the war against Lancelot. Arthur, on numerous occasions, actively hands control over to Gawain, apparently because he is too overcome by emotion to deal with situations himself (1186, 1194, 1213). While this creates an image of an emotionally responsive and courteous king, in keeping with the desire of Malory's readers for writings in the chivalric tradition, it also presents kingship as a duty that can be shirked at will and of Arthur as weak and controllable.

It has been noted that both Geoffrey's and Malory's depictions of Arthur show him referring to those around him for council and, in Malory's case, occasionally ceding authority to a large degree. This reliance, of course, goes further in that any king is so only in name if the people do not follow him. Geoffrey's Arthur maintains a strong rule at all times, and his kingship is undisputed. Malory's Arthur, in half-heartedly handing the decision-making over to Gawain, some of his authority as king—and, arguably, the peoples' trust, given their turning to Mordred's side—although he later regains it by

again, becoming the prime mover in the kingdom. For Whyte, kingship is a slightly different issue. Where Geoffrey and Malory both subscribe to the standard medieval English idea of kingship, Whyte recognizes the different roots of kingship as not necessarily hereditary but rather chosen or elected. Whyte, of course, has more freedom in considering these matters since he writes in a time and social situation where he is not dependent on the good will of a monarch for survival, and where playing with the notions of heredity and election are not treasonous to the crown.

Whyte's depiction of Arthur presents a man who is well aware of his peoples' respective histories and their differing, yet oddly similar, political ways. Reaching back to both his Roman and Celtic roots, Arthur is a king by election and acclaim as much as by the hereditary right which is emphasized by both Geoffrey (155) and Malory (17-18). His position as king of the Pendragon Federation, one of the key components of his status as Riothamus, relies on being acclaimed king by the clans (Whyte, *The Eagle* 123), and also that he "be physically flawless and unimpaired in order to remain in power" (679) a point of law which comes to concern him after he is wounded and because of which he attempts to appear healthy. Arthur's claim to be High King is equally dependent on the beliefs and support of others, since the role was, essentially, created by Merlyn. He is not High King by any *right*, but only because he is "duly proclaimed and crowned with the corona of the Riothamus by the assembled Christian bishops of Britain, and acknowledged by a growing multitude of regional kings and rulers throughout the land" (97). Thus, Whyte's Arthur cannot afford to be capricious and commanding like

Geoffrey's Arthur, nor can he be emotional and overly chivalrous, thus appearing weak, like Malory's Arthur.

Whyte's Arthur, more so than either of the other depictions with their hereditary seats, must work to maintain his position as king. Thus, in *The Eagle*, he relies not on warfare and conquering to maintain his realm, but on negotiation and perception, relying as much on the appearance of strength and the show of force as he does on actual military action (58, 662). While Geoffrey and Malory's Arthurs, had they been real men, would doubtless have spent some time worrying over delicate political matters, they are not depicted as doing so. Whyte's Arthur, though, must weigh the pros and cons of choosing a bride and the effect marriage could have on his relationships with other kings and their loyalty (144-5), and he must negotiate trade agreements and alliances with the leaders of surrounding peoples and countries, large and small (280-1, 631), in order to maintain the safety and prosperity of his realm.

This constant process of negotiation creates a much more realistic image of the deeply political nature of kingship and shows an Arthur who is not simply a warrior or a chivalrous knight, but who is a diplomat. A striking contrast to the two medieval versions, Whyte's Arthur is an Arthur for a modern political age, a fact which is also emphasized by the internal politics of Camulod. Rather than having the autocratic government that one would expect of Geoffrey's Arthur, or even of Malory's, Whyte's Arthur works within a government structure, aspects of which were established long before his birth. The Council of Camulod, discussed earlier, is the governing body of landowners and descendents of original settlers to whom it falls to maintain the daily

affairs of the Colony and manage its resources, whether these are crops, livestock, labour or artisans (Whyte, *The Eagle* 175-6). This council is strictly regulated to prevent any one person from holding too much sway and to ensure that all members have a voice in any final decisions. The Council of Knights, although deferring to Arthur for most final decisions, functions in much the same way, but focuses on the military affairs of the colony. Thus, while Arthur is king, and holds a position of power both in Camulod and in the surrounding area, as far as his military might can reach, he is not the same kind of king as Geoffrey's or Malory's. Whyte's Arthur lives in a world which was built up from Roman Republican values and the local Celtic sense of freedom, so that every man has a voice. While not what one would strictly call a democracy, Arthur's position as king and the decisions that are made in governing the Colony and the greater area as a whole nonetheless rely not simply on his commands, but on the voice of the people. In this shift from autocratic kingship to a more democratic republic-style kingdom, Whyte reflects his Canadian background and appeals to the modern political sensibilities of his audience, who demand to live in a world of democratic decision making and public voice.

What is perhaps most striking about Whyte's Arthur is the concern he constantly voices for his people. Part of the reason this is so apparent is, of course, the fact that there actually are people in his version of the tale, simple, common folk who help make Camulod function, whereas these people are mostly missing from Geoffrey and Malory. There is also the fact, though, that Whyte's Arthur is depicted differently in relation to his people—not his knights or lords, but the common folk. Geoffrey's Arthur is only shown in relation to common people when he is murdering them (Geoffrey 162) or allowing his

men to scatter them and burn their homes (165). The Arthur of the *Historia* is concerned not with his people but with power, and is filled with glee when he hears of foreign kings' fear of him, and sets out to conquer all of Europe (165) without a thought for the consequences this will hold for its people. He wants to be feared and to wield great power.

Malory's Arthur, while not so bloodthirsty, is also out of touch with the common people. He expresses some concern for them, and fulfills his kingly duty of protecting his "trew lyege people" from invading forces in the person of king Royns (Vinaver 62), although whether the "lyege people" in question are the peasants or their lords is left in doubt. During the campaign in Europe, the "marchall of Fraunce" appeals to Arthur on behalf of the people, begging him to stop Lucius' destruction of the countryside (205). While Arthur expresses some concern for Lucius' acts against his people and lands, and sends word for him to halt immediately (205), the destruction which must be accompanying Arthur's massive army on its march is not mentioned. It is quite likely that were the common people asked their opinion, they would prefer that both rulers just go home and leave them alone to till their fields in peace, without having their crops burned or stolen. In times of peace, Malory's Arthur holds tourneys and great feasts for the knights and lords, but the common people, while likely happy enough that there is no war, are not mentioned as part of Arthur's concerns.

What sets Whyte's Arthur apart from these earlier versions is that his primary concern and motivating force is to secure the realm for the people. He wants to unite the petty kings of Britain under the High Kingship, but only so that they will no longer war

with each other. As Clothar explains to Quintus Milo, Arthur “has no dreams of conquest. He dreams of a peaceful realm, where there are no regional warlords or tyrants and ordinary men can live in unthreatened freedom, underpinned by a powerful army that ensures that peace” (Whyte, *The Eagle* 291-2). As king, Arthur continues to pursue the dream which started with his great-grand sires who founded the Colony, a dream not of conquest or power but of maintaining a decent way of life, unmolested by invading forces. Where Geoffrey’s Arthur lives by war and Malory’s Arthur lives the chivalrous courtly life, both far removed from the common weal, Whyte’s Arthur is all too aware of the plight of his people, and of his duty and dream to protect them. He states it most clearly himself, standing amid the burned out ruins of an abandoned villa where a family once lived. “This is what we are fighting for Clothar—places like this, and for the right that people in this land have always had to *build* places like this, and then to live in them in peace” (62). In this, Whyte once again reflects his Canadian background and the history of peacekeeping, and also upholds modern enlightened desires for all people to have a standard of living that allows them to live comfortably and in peace.

Conclusion:

This, then, is how Whyte alters the Arthurian tale for his modern age. Drawing on the influences of both his own society and the lengthy history of preceding Arthurian tales, he creates a story that is at once both similar and very different. Although his *Eagle* could not exist, in its current embodiment, without the influence of the constant and diverse development of the Arthurian saga, his work also alters the story into something unique. Arthur the warlord and Arthur the chivalrous lord become Arthur the humanitarian, whose primary concern is for the continued safety of his people and their way of life. Whyte's characters are ordinary people, first and foremost, living in a realistic world and relying on their skills, intellects, and bonds of allegiance and friendship to survive. Where earlier authors had mystical experiences and magical artefacts, Whyte presents personal and political conflicts for the characters to overcome using only their wits and natural talents. The downfall of Arthur's kingdom is not due to grand betrayals or dramatic internal conflicts, but to the convergence of ill health and the inexorable incursion of new peoples and ways of life. Rather than the mythic hero of the medieval tales, complete with magical accoutrements, Whyte's Arthur is simply a man with a dream, forced to live to the best of his ability in a hard world. It is to his credit that he remains true to his vision and himself, and that his name and exploits live on long after he is gone, even if only in a form distorted by time and constant retellings. Looking back on the hundreds of years of Arthurian development, Whyte gives to his curious modern audience a glimpse not of a mythical legend, but of a believably real man. While the medieval authors offered fantastical tales, Whyte knows that his audience of 'mentally

restless' individuals in a modern world requires something more than the excuse of 'magic' to explain great events:

In a world in which people are being increasingly and remorselessly reduced to statistical numbers and where individuality is becoming more and more archaic and less respectable; where it seems that every hero we can identify is being pulled down, scorned, defiled and degraded, and where all the old and cherished, standard values are being thrown out and replaced with nothing better than lowest common denominator vulgarism, intelligent people are looking for reassurance that they still have within them, within their own souls and persona, what it takes to achieve greatness...or perhaps merely even singularity.

Whyte interview

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