
pendragon

editorial

Vol XXVIII No 2 Winter 1999-2000

Themes
The theme of this issue, like Topsy, just growed. A number of contributions, some of them fiction and poetry, seemed to coalesce around the idea of fantasy, and in portraying different views of Arthurian matter seemed to suggest that the theme of **Visions** would be apt, even if rather nebulous.

The next two issues, however, will I hope be rather more focused. As mentioned before, the projected theme will be **Origins of Arthurian legend**, an end-of-millennium opportunity to review, respond to and re-evaluate all those many and sometimes conflicting theories, and maybe even to come up with a few original hypotheses!

Following on that, and still with an eschatological worm's-eye view, the summer edition is planned as **The future of Arthur**. What does that include? I'll leave it up to you! Together the two issues should have a once and future link, which seems appropriate.

Get-togethers
Pendragon 99, which marked the fortieth anniversary of the Society, took place in Glastonbury. For those who attended, the jollifications were enjoyable, if not exactly as envisioned! Your committee is actively pursuing plans for various venues and opportune occasions for the next couple of Pendragon events; details of these in due course, plus a fuller account of Pendragon 99's main talks. Meanwhile, note details of **address changes** on the Contents page.

Contributors
As it happens, a number of published authors feature in this issue. Tristan Gray Hulse's piece is the concluding part to a series on grail relics, and Eric Fitch visits a site inspired by grail legends. Poet Steve Sneyd looks at a forgotten British saint (ironic when the veracity of the St Alban story is being questioned), while A H W Smith's poems are from his forthcoming *Voices of Camelot*. Another piece from Ray Turley's collection is also reprised here, as well as two pieces of imaginative Arthurian writing and all the regular features.

Prizes
The second **Eddie Tooke** award (consisting of a year's free subscription) goes to Beryl Mercer. Congratulations! Future recipients should equally exhibit a lateral, not literal, approach to the Matter of Britain.

Similarly, the **Jess Foster Prize** will soon be going to Most Promising New Contributor to the magazine, so all you budding authors, artists and reviewers who have yet to put pen to paper or introduce processor to printer, now is the time to get creative and produce that piece you always meant to! Nearly a third of the Society's members are women - dare we hope that future submissions will at least reflect that ratio more faithfully?

Deadlines
Pendragon is published three times a year, and potential copy (particularly that which fits in with the theme, or items of news) should reach the editor at least a month before publication dates. So, the spring issue is due out April-May, with a **1st March** deadline; the summer issue is planned for August-September, with contributions in for **1st July**; lastly, the winter edition comes out December-January, and submissions should be with the editor for **1st November**.

Finally, note that a cross [**X**] in the box above indicates your subscription is due. And now, as Bacbuc rightly urged, *Trinc*!

The Pendragon Society investigates Arthurian history and archaeology, legend, myth and folklore, literature and the arts

PENDRAGON

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PEN-DRAGON

THE LONG AND WINDING ROAD

My usual thanks for another excellent edition of *Pendragon*. Frankly, I think it's the best yet (probably mainly because of the features which gave the story of the Society's history, which I found fascinating; but every single contribution really was superb, from Simon Rouse's truly inspirational cover onwards).

How long did it take Simon to complete such a marvellous and intricate masterpiece? Where did he start? Where did he finish? The ideas of the endless knot and the mythical beasts are so well represented, and the central dragon really does work as a stylisation of a beast which is very believable. There could hardly have been anything more appropriate by which to celebrate both the aims and the longevity of the Pendragon Society: an ambitious yet delicate creation, just like the dreams which began the Society itself.

"Reappraising Gawain..." John Matthews' work, as always, was written in a very interesting and accessible manner. His discussion is level, reasonable and quite believable: it does seem that there was a lot more to Gawain than meets the eye.

One very minor point which I'd like to add. Yes, I agree that Gawain's reputation seemed to suffer with each new generation of writers, but I do feel that Malory, although he did not exactly reverse this trend, nevertheless treated Gawain as a genuinely human character, whose faults were understandable: his tendency to over-react is not abnormal (and, in a way, is quite endearing); his campaign against Lancelot, considering its causes, if filled with a heartfelt pathos; and his obvious loyalty to his uncle the king is shown to transcend even the grave. Actually, if Malory was in prison when he compiled his tales, could it be that he was exorcising his own ghosts through his portrayals of Gawain and Lancelot?

Which brings us neatly to Edward Ford's fascinating feature on Lancelot. What a neat and sensible idea! Of course, I think that most people know that Lancelot changed (or discovered) his name on achieving Joyous Gard: to suggest that he changed his title (his job description), makes a lot of sense. Lancelot' taking on various titles, such as "The Knight of the Cart" and "Le Chevaler mal Fet", add a good deal of weight to the suggestion. There are also other titles for various knights running through the tales, such as "Beaumains", "La Cote Male Taile" (both in Malory's tales), and the idea of "The Fair Unknown". Bearing all this in mind, it seems very reasonable to suggest that Lancelot was known by his title rather than by his proper name.

Ian Brown, Middlesborough, Cleveland

◆ *The responses to the last issue have been informed, varied and detailed, and you will see that I have interlaced all these comments in this issue's letter pages. As for the artwork, Ian's equally superb commemorative page introduced the section on the Society's history, and counterpoints the contributions for this edition.*

HISTORIES

I enjoyed the 40th anniversary edition of *Pendragon*, especially the historical articles about the Society, information I wasn't previously aware of.

Edward Ford's ideas of seeing the Knight's cart/*charette* as a hearse caught my eye ["The Birth of a Literary Character" 13-18], and recalled the supposed linguistic confusion between "bear" and "bier" with regard to the seven bright stars in the constellation Ursa Major, the Great Bear. The Western tradition sees a wagon or chariot here most commonly, while the Arabs (and some Hindi descriptions) have a bier or stretcher in these same stars. As "bear" and "bier" are traced to the same Indo-European wood-root by some authors (*eg* Paul Shepherd and Barry Sanders in *The Sacred Paw*, Viking Penguin 1985), there may be a deeper link. Shepherd and Sanders also connect the "bear" root with "barrow", "bury", "bereave", "birth", "baim", "barn", "barley" and more obviously "bear" (as in "to carry").

As with so much similar word-play, all ultimately hard to prove, but I also recall the early medieval name Arthur's/Charlemagne's Wain for these same seven stars and that Arthur's name can be drawn from *arth* = "bear".

I am further reminded of the ancient Mesopotamian fragment which has the war and agricultural god Ninurta standing in the seatless Elamite chariot, drawn by the death-demon of Anzu, which chariot also carries the corpse of the primeval underworld god Enmesharra. This links the life-death-fertility/vegetation and chariot themes in one, as a group set in the areas of sky now occupied by Perseus, Taurus and Auriga. (I've discussed this at more length in my *Tiamat's Brood*, Dragon's Head Press 1999, 179-181.) Auriga is the Charioteer modernly, most often equated with the serpent-legged Greek figure of Erichthonius, whose name and form hint at a continuing earth-fertility theme in the constellations here.

Alistair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

I enjoyed the 40th Anniversary Edition - it was stimulating and thought-provoking. I expect views on the origins of Arthur will be equally interesting.

Pamela Harvey, Edmonton, London

◆ *Remember, readers, that* ***Origins of Arthur*** *and* ***The Future of Arthur*** *are the themes of the next two issues. Start scribbling!*

DANTE AND ARTHUR: A POSTSCRIPT

The forty-year anniversary issue was another success, with the fascinating historical accounts of the Society, and the interesting observations on Gawain, Lancelot and Jaufré. I should like to add a post-script to my paper on Dante and Arthur.

Since writing the paper, I acquired a very useful book by Edmund G Gardner (the modern editor of Cary's translation of the *Divine Comedy*) - *The Arthurian Legend in Italian Literature* (London: J M Dent 1930). Fortunately for me, there is nothing in the book to conflict with my conclusions. On the contrary, Gardner reinforces my point that by Dante's time there was a very well established Arthurian tradition in Italy. He shows that the proper names Arthur and Merlin were in use in North Italy before 1100, and that Merlin, Uther and Arthur appear in a Latin poem by Godfrey of Viterbo by 1191. He gives much detail about the Arthurian literature in Italy in the thirteenth century, and shows that Dante's early lyrics suggest a knowledge of several French Arthurian romances.

The book also deals with Italian treatments of the legend after Dante, right down to 1927, and contains attractive illustrations, including one from a Boccaccio manuscript showing Arthur driving his lance through Modred.

W M S Russell, Reading, Berks

FAIRY TALES ...

W M S Russell's piece "Dante and Arthur" also attracted my attention [28/1, 32-37]. Anyone interested in the Fata Morgana (literally Morgan the Fairy) mirage should see the description of why it occurs, with photos, in Robert Greenler's *Rainbows, Halos and Glories* [Cambridge University Press 1980, 165-167] and the superb colour photos of the effect seen over the Antarctic ice-fields in Plates 7-4 to 7-7.

Parts of two other of William Corliss's compiled books not mentioned in the article's references are worth seeing as well. These include a reprinted piece from the British Association Report of 1852 on the Fata Morgana of Ireland in *Strange Phenomena: A Sourcebook of Unusual Natural Phenomena, Volume G-2* [Sourcebook Project, Maryland, USA 1974, pp G2-19 to G2-20], which Corliss suggests may connect to the legendary sunken cities and lands of Britain and France, including Lyonesse; and the section of sighting reports and discussion "GEM1 Fata Morganas" in *Rare Halos, Mirages, Anomalous Rainbows and Related Electromagnetic Phenomena: A Catalog of Geophysical Anomalies* [Sourcebook Project 1984, pp 138-143]. Midnight Books in Sidmouth, Devon can order up the Corliss texts, incidentally. As far as I know, they are the only bookseller in the UK who will do so.

Alistair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

I hope I am not the only member to write in pointing out that 'Fada de Gibel' [in Anne Lister's article 28/1 page 29] does not mean 'the fairy of Gibraltar', but rather 'the fairy of Mongibello' (= Mount Etna). Morgana is so styled in the thirteenth-century romance *Floriant et Florete* and also in the fifteenth-century *Le Chevalier du Papegau*.

Arthur was, of course, alleged by the late twelfth-century Gervase of Tilbury and his near-contemporary Caesarius of Hesterbach to be sleeping inside Etna, and the 'Fata Morgana' of the Straits of Messina presumably owes its name to the same (Norman?) relocation of Avalon to Sicily.

A H W Smith, Oxford

◆ *Just why Arthur, Morgan* et al *were relocated to Sicily by Norman or Breton intermediaries is unclear - assimilation with local legendary figures perhaps? It's a bit like transferring, say, Attila the Hun or Brunhilde to Snowdon (oops, I nearly typed Swindon there!) - no obvious connection, really. Or is there?*

... POMP AND CEREMONY IN SICILY ...

With reference to Professor Russell's letter concerning King Arthur's Sword, said to have been presented to Tancred of Sicily by Richard I in 1190/1, I mentioned this briefly in an article on swords in *Pendragon 23/2* (Spring 1993).

I agree that the Angevin exploitation of the Arthurian legend is the most plausible explanation for the miraculous 'survival' of the sword, which was certainly not mentioned in the equally fortuitous discovery of Arthur's grave at Glastonbury, also in 1190/1.

Ugly and mocked as a 'monkey', Tancred had been forced to come to terms with the magnificent Richard who suddenly appeared in Sicily in 1190 on his way to the Crusades. Tancred had cheated the Lionheart's sister of her dowry and withheld her husband's legacy to her

father Henry II, which Richard was now claiming to be his by right.

In early March 1191, at Tancred's castle in Catania, a Treaty was signed in a great exhibition of friendship and mutual admiration. Richard was a wonderful diplomat and knew just how to exploit pomp and ceremony to his own advantage. At the five day occasion Tancred gave him Joanna's dowry, 15 galleys and 4 large transport ships, a very large sum of gold, a silk tent, a 12 foot long gilded table and gold dishes. In return Richard promised to provide Tancred with military aid against any invader and agreed to marry his nephew, three year old Arthur of Brittany, to Tancred's daughter. He also designated Arthur as his heir should he die childless, thus almost certainly ensuring Arthur's death at the hands of his uncle John.

The climax was the presentation of 'the sword of the famous Arthur, once king of the Britons, which the Britons called Excalibur' (*Gesta regis Ricardi*).

This presentation of a great secular relic was surely a symbolic act, understood by the Angevin nobles as such and signifying Richard's protection of Tancred - almost but not quite an act of homage by Tancred. The bearer of 'Arthur's' sword would be contagiously invested with honour, a subtle act in a society that understood such mythological and chivalric symbolism. Richard was seen to be honouring Tancred but at not too much expense to himself!

We do know that three swords in golden scabbards were carried with pomp in Richard's Coronation procession in September 1189 and one of these may have been elevated for this occasion.

My son spent two years in Sicily in 1991-3 and I visited him there but we could not discover any reference to this artefact and it is certainly not exhibited in any collections there. Tancred died in 1194, perhaps it was buried with him; or perhaps it is with Arthur again - he is sleeping in a cave on Mount Etna according to a later Sicilian tradition.

Fred Stedman-Jones, Cheshire

... SNOW WHITE?

Trajan's appearance in Dante's heaven [W M S Russell "Dante and Arthur"] is not unexpected, as apart from reigning over the greatest extent of the Roman Empire ever attained, he became a divine hero for the Dacians and their Scythian and Sarmatian allies at least, after he conquered them in 106 CE, and he continues to feature in Slavic and Romanian myths still told today.

As a noble hero, the Romanian peasants link him in folklore with the royal sky road of the Milky Way, legendary which seems to have persisted for much of the last two millennia as oral tradition until collected and written down for the first time around the turn of the 20th century.

In addition, Trajan was given the Ursa Major and Minor sky chariots for his own in Romanian myth, a link I cannot resist making in view of my earlier remarks. (See "The Dacian Dragon Standard, King Decebal, Emperor Trajan and King Arthur" by Andrei Dorian Gheorghe and myself, *The Dragon Chronicle 12*, April 1998, pp 13-19.) He remains connected with whiteness and purity in the modern Romanian name *troian* for any large snowdrift.

Alistair McBeath, Morpeth, Northumberland

HUMOUR

I think that your idea of running features on Arthurian humour is more of a sleeping swan than a dead duck. It might be worth someone doing an article on the use of humour in developing the Arthurian stories over the years. There seems to be much ribaldry, satire and all kinds of humour bubbling within the cauldron of tales, such as the Badger in the Bag incident in *Pwyll Lord of Dyved* (the Mabinogion) and in Lancelot's disguising himself as a woman during a tournament (Malory: *Le Morte d'Arthur*, Book 10, Chapter 49) - although the latter might not have actually been intended as humour and could even have originally come from the Norse legend of the god Thor disguising himself as a maiden to outwit the frost giant, Thrymr (mere speculation, I know).

As Anne Lister pointed out so well in her article ["Jaufré"], it could well have been that an audience would listen to the stories and wait for their favourite bits to come about, possibly in the nature of political or social satire. Anyway, it might be worth looking into, especially as humour and tragedy are often the two edges that keep stories alive.

Ian Brown, Middlesborough, Cleveland

Three cheers for Anne Lister! Medieval stories have often been dissected in search of hidden meanings and secret codes, or connections with cults such as the Cathars or Templars. But surely they were produced primarily as entertainment. These tales may have been influenced by events of the day but a good adventure or romance was the name of the game.

Charles Evans-Günther, Japan

The recent reissue of the "William" books reminded me of an unpublished observation I made as a 16-year-old schoolboy in 1941. I had just read two books, both published in 1927: Helen Waddell's marvellous *The Wandering Scholars*, and Richmal Crompton's *William in Trouble*. In chapter 8 of Waddell I found a précis

of the medieval fabliau *Le Pauvre Clerc* (full text now available in *Fabliaux*, ed G Rouger, Gallimard, Paris, 1978). I then realised that chapter 6 of the Crompton book, "The Magic Monkey", was a brilliant adaptation of this charming folktale.

The fabliau tells of a poor scholar who ask at a house for food and shelter, and is sent packing by the housewife, but not before he sees her hide a pork joint, a cake, a flagon of wine, and her lover, the parish priest. Going sadly on his way, the scholar meets the returning head of the house, who generously invites him to dinner. He is disappointed when his wife reports she has only bread and water, but asks the scholar to tell a story. He does so, introducing a succession of similes - "like the pork in that pot", "like the cake in that basket", "like the wine in that flagon", and finally "like the eyes of the priest over there" - each of which "miraculously" proves true. The scholar eventually is sent off well fed and wrapped in the warm cloak the priest left behind in his flight.

The Crompton story tells how William's friend Henry is made to carry his small sister's toy monkey around, as a punishment for upsetting her. Meanwhile, the odious Hubert Lane's mother arranges a hockey match between his friends and William's, providing a lavish feast to be enjoyed after the match, and prizes (a penknife and a magnifying glass) for the captain of the winning side. But Hubert and the equally odious Bertie secretly pocket these prizes and hide all the best cakes and ginger-beer, leaving only plain buns and water (even for their own side) unaware that William is watching. After the Outlaws have easily won the match, both teams assemble in the shed, disappointed to find such meagre fare, and the Laneites start mocking Henry for his babyish toy monkey. To prove this, he has the monkey magically fill empty packing cases with sumptuous cakes and ginger beer; finally he has the monkey magic the penknife and magnifying glass into the pockets of Hubert and Bertie, *provided* they hare first ducked in a nearby raintub. Long after the prizes have been found, optimists are still ducking the two, in case the monkey magic works again.

In 1927, the fabliau was only available in a six-volume work by Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Reynaud (vol 5, no 132). I suspect, therefore, Crompton found the story in Waddell's 1927 book. Her use of it seems to me one of the best-ever literary uses of a folktale.

W M S Russell, Reading, Berks

◆ *This letter first appeared in* ***FLS News No 29*** *(June 1999), the newsletter of the Folklore Society, as "Literary adaptation of a fabliau". While this tale is not strictly Arthurian Prof Russell has previously made reference to an Arthurian parody in the William books. I cannot help noting here another example of a literary borrowing with Arthurian resonances.*

The Old Testament apocryphal Book of Esdras has a tale, "probably of Persian origin", embedded in it. Another Russell (no relation?) describes the Story of the Three Youths [I Esdras 3.1 - 5.3] as "one of the finest tales in this literature from the point of view of style and literary eloquence".

Three Persian soldiers had to write down what was the strongest thing in the world and to argue their case before Darius, King of Persia. The first's answer was "Wine is the strongest", the second "The King is the strongest". The third gave "Women are the strongest" but then promptly spoiled the joke by unnecessarily adding "Above all things truth beareth away the victory".

Russell points out that "the survival of the work we call I Esdras was largely due to the popularity which this story had among the Christians who inherited it from the Jews."

Pendragons will have no difficulty recognising this as a possible basis of the riddle in the stories of Gawain and the Loathly Lady. My earlier speculation was that here we might have a genuine female joke of great antiquity - sadly the transmission of this has all too clearly come through male hands, though Chaucer's Wife of Bath has at least cut out the pointless pious gloss in the Esdras version.

Reference

D S Russell (1960) Between the Testaments, *SCM Press*

Beginnings

Chris Lovegrove

Never judge a book by its cover
except if it's a Jeffrey Archer
Traditional country saying

If, when looking for a good read, we have already been attracted by a title or author or blurb, then that first opening sentence is crucial - especially in an age of channel-hopping, soundbites and eight-second attention spans. *Have you switched off yet?*

As with all specialist literature, Arthurian prose literature should predispose the sympathetic reader to read on, not move on. Here, for that reader, is the beginning of the classic example of that literature, from the fifteenth century:

Hit befel in the dayes of Uther Pendragon, when he was kynge of all Englond and so regned, that there was a myghty duke in Cornewaill that helde warre ageynst hym long tyme, and the duke was called the duke of Tyntagil (Vinaver 1954).

How did that grab you? Are you on the edge of your seat? Or are you yawning already? And do 20th century re-tellings of Malory follow that pattern?

In the old days, as it is told, there was a king in Britain named Uther Pendragon (Picard 1955).

This is clearly a literary descendant of Malory, but some concession has been made for a juvenile readership in that it is shorter and punchier without losing its poetic, almost biblical cadences.

Here is another opening:

After wicked King Vortigern had first invited the Saxons to settle in Britain and help him to fight the Picts and Scots, the land was never long at peace (Green 1953)

A lot of information is offered, and assumptions made about prior historical knowledge. For this version, the author's principle is that "the great legends, like the best of the fairy tales, must be retold from age to age: there is always something new to be found in them, and each retelling brings them freshly and more vividly before a new generation" (Green 1953, 13). There are some value judgements here, aren't there? *Malory is not vivid enough for us moderns;* and *Retellings are always fresh.*

In some instances there may be an element of truth in these assumptions. Here now is the beginning of T H White's re-casting of Malory:

On Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays it was Court Hand and Summulae Logicales, while the rest of the week it was the Organon, Repetition and Astrology (White 1958).

There is nothing here initially to suggest an Arthurian setting, but the combination of whimsy and exactitude may be sufficiently intriguing to draw a non-Arthurian further into the book. This is certainly both a vivid and a fresher approach to the Matter. How have other Arthurian authors approached their craft?

This brief review of beginnings in Arthurian fiction will be limited in the main to novels of the last four decades set in the Arthurian period, however that is perceived, pulled randomly off the shelves. There is no attempt at all at completeness; fiction using themes from the Matter but set in the present day will be excluded, though only for the sake of manageability.

Persia Woolley has noted that "during the last half of this century the authors of novels based on the stories of King Arthur have more or less divided into three categories: those who cast the stories as fantasy, those who see them as 'women's romance', and those who give them a realistic treatment" (Woolley 1991, 11). These categories have provided a rough framework for discussion.

In addition I have sometimes borne in mind an observation on the openings of many works of fantasy, namely that "the reader is poised on the very brink of an abyss right at the beginning" (LeFanu 1996, 26), as a criterion to assess the effectiveness of their initial sentences.

Historical realism

Woolley herself claims that her own Guinevere novels belong in the realistic category. In the second volume of her trilogy she notes that "the historical novelist always faces the problem of anachronism and must make the choice between contemporary readability and historical accuracy. In my case I've opted for readability, or occasionally for tradition" (Woolley 1991, 13):

I, Guinevere, wife of King Arthur and High Queen of Britain, dashed around the corner of the chicken coop, arms flying, war-whoop filling my throat (Woolley 1990).

There's certainly readability here, and an arresting image, but anachronisms later abound despite evidence of wide research on Dark Age Britain. Henry Treece tried to avoid anachronism by eschewing all later traditions: "all I know is that Malory and Tennyson were wrong!" he wrote in a preface to *The Great Captains*. This novel begins with an epistle in late classical style:

Letter from Cynon, in Britain, to Gerennius, in Gaul: 477 AD. Honoured Kinsman and Friend, This, in an extremity of grief and danger, my last to be written to you: for tomorrow we leave this broken house, such of my family as are still living (Treece 1956).

His later Arthurian novel, incorporating the primitive aspects of the Hamlet story, uses the same epistolary device:

To the Duke and Honourable Pastoral of Puteoli, Golden Mouth, Lord Manuel Chrysostom in the Hand of God and at the Foot of Mary: from the humblest of his servants, Gilliberht of Fiesole, monk in the House at Arles, in the year of Our Lord 526 (Treece 1966).

The exaggerated tones of these stock formulae decidedly root Treece's fictions in a known world of late antiquity. The content of the epistles make it clear that that we are in a crumbling post-imperial period, and that for the writers this is certainly the "brink of an abyss". However, for the modern reader the literary circumlocutions, though authentic in style, slightly detract from the sense of urgency.

Rosemary Sutcliff also echoes the *fin de siècle* atmosphere in *Sword at Sunset*, but chooses to start near the end, almost with a whimper, with Arthur in the Isle of Apples:

Now that the moon is near to full, the branch of an apple tree casts its night-time shadow in through the high window across the wall beside my bed (Sutcliff 1963).

No stilted memoirs these - instead, we have long brooding, regretful reminiscences about a long life achieving - what?

Gillian Bradshaw also opts to open *Kingdom of Summer* with a sense of place (Somerset again):

Dumnonia is the most civilized kingdom in Britain, but in the northeast, in January, it looks no tamer than the wilds of Caledonia (Bradshaw 1981).

Again, a sense of tragedy overhangs all, a hand-to-mouth existence, with death, like winter, omnipresent. And although preceded by *Hawk of May* you just know that any optimism will be dissipated by *In Winter's Shadow*, the last of her trilogy.

Even in Helen Hollick's first volume in her *Pendragon's Banner* trilogy, the transitory nature of Arthur's life and apparent achievement is implicit in that little phrase, the worm in the bud, "for this short while":

He was ten and five years of age and, for the first time in his life, experiencing the exhilaration of the open sea and, for this short while, the novelty of leisure. (Hollick 1994)

The doom-laden atmosphere re-appears in the first of Fay Sampson's sequence *Daughter of Tintagel*:

It was the worst thing we ever did when we forgot Morgan, that night above all nights. (Sampson 1989)

Most of these historically-based novels (even Woolley's, with its example of *lèse-majesté*) play heavily on a sense of foreboding or continuing misfortune right from the word go. It is part of a long tradition, all the way from Gildas, in which the plucky underdog despite a good fight inevitably loses out to insurmountable odds. It is all deeply depressing, but then that's tragedy for you!

Romance

Despite Persia Woolley's claims, her *Queen of the Summer Stars* lies, I suspect, closer to what she calls 'women's romance' than historical fiction - there are too many pre-echoes of Malory for anyone to believe that hers is a serious reconstruction of sub-Roman Britain.

So what exactly is modern Arthurian romance? I would guess that it is a novel where the outward world of physical action is closely reflected by internal worlds of emotion, and where the final mood is one of optimism. Sharan Newman's *Guinevere* might be so described, and begins thus:

There was a sound in the night (Newman 1981).

The sound is related to voices that she hears and, in time, to a unicorn which tries to save her from harm. Despite the fantasy elements this is a novel where human love and religion are manifestations of a world of emotion, providing an interesting twist to the familiar tale, and where there is an upbeat ending of sorts.

Fantasy

We turned our horses and rode into that terrible dark wood - the Lady Morgan le Fay, myself her fifteen-year-old niece, and the four silent serving-men that followed us (Chapman 1975).

With these words the late Vera Chapman begins her fantasy trilogy *The Three Damosels*. What is fantasy? As Sarah LeFanu has pointed out, "nobody has come up with a hard and fast definition of fantasy", though she does list some of its concerns: the unexplained, the unexplainable; magic and mystery, and sometimes the supernatural; very often a secret is at its heart (LeFanu 1996, 3f). The opening of *The Green Knight* quoted above hints at these concerns, and in due course delivers.

Merlin's Ring on the other hand is set not in one epoch but in many, and in many Never-Never Lands:

Five days out from Streymoy, in the Faroes, having been borne far into unknown seas by a

violent westerly, the little fishing boat came to a new land and a fair day (Munn 1974).

The action is far different from the superficially similar opening of Hollick's novel. Gwalchmai is the protagonist, but not the Gwalchmai we might expect, nor even the Sir Gawain of Gwalchmai's later incarnation. Here we are mostly far away from Camelot, Joyous Gard and the rest, though Arthur's tomb is visited, close by St Michael's Mount in Cornwall, to return Excalibur.

In Monaco's *Parsival*, the story starts innocently enough:

The field was like a lawn (Monaco 1977)

but the action soon outstrips this idyllic scene. Gone are the dreamlike images of knightly quests, here instead are churlish doings in a nightmare landscape. Wolfram's version of the story is the basis for this exploration of grail themes and the meaning of life.

In an even darker mode is *The King's Evil*:

The guards came down from the city at dusk (Middleton 1995).

This is the mainspring for a portrait of Mordred from his own point of view, a horrific dissection of the psyche of a figure part Judas, part Jesus; very nearly a victim in a massacre of the innocents, Mordred is certainly at the brink of the abyss from the start and, indeed, all the way through.

Happily ever after...

After this peremptory glance at some of the fanfare motifs of Arthurian fiction, can any conclusions be drawn?

It is clear that packaging sets the tone that the publisher wishes the consumer to perceive from their product, but most potential readers wish to believe they make their own minds up. In a world where often our leisure is as busy as work itself, and we fear that too much time spent on one thing means we are missing out on something better elsewhere, instant judgements on our purchases are mandatory. We need to recognise the quality we are searching for in a split second.

Like the opening credit sequence of a film an immediate connection has to be made. How this is done in fantasy fiction is varied: "One writer packs information into the opening sentences, another imbues them with atmosphere; ... one shows intellectual conflict, another gives us intensity of emotion ..."

But there is more than mere technique that is required. "In all of them, I think, there is a sense of words chosen so carefully that the resulting mix of images, ideas and rhythms in the very language suggest that if you read on you will enter a world that is well worth exploring ... That is what gives those worlds their reality. Their writers believe in them." (LeFanu 1996, 28).

If this is true of the modern fantasy *genre*, it is equally true of all fiction, and it should apply to Arthurian fiction. And the beginning should draw you in as surely as *Once upon a time* ever did.

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❖ *Chariot of Stars* ❖ Geoff Roberts

"There is no help for it, Ygerna. This you know already. You have always known." The voice of the tall woman in the long grey robe was quiet, gentle even, but contained no hint of relenting.

Ygerna stood still, her long dark hair fallen forward to hide her face as she bent over the sleeping baby in her arms. She said nothing.

"I should be angry with you for even asking. You have been a priestess of the Mother long enough to know that her sacred laws can never be broken. A girl child we welcome. Little Morgain here," - she looked down at the small child, about five years old, who stood silently by Ygerna's side, looking up with strangely watchful dark eyes - "she will grow up to serve the goddess herself." She rested her hand kindly a moment on the child's hair. "But no boy or man can serve the Mother at her shrine, that would be blasphemy."

"Only till he is a little bigger, Mistress, till he can - " Ygerna's faint, almost inaudible tone was swallowed by the High Priestess's voice, tinged now with severity.

"It is the law, my daughter. You have the choice - either the baby can be a sacrifice to the goddess, or he must be exposed, there is no third way. And remember, Ygerna, either way he is in the hand of the Mother, it is she who decides whether he dies or survives. And believe me, child," - her voice was gentler now as she placed a slim, sinewy hand on the young woman's shoulder - "sooner rather than later is best. The longer you have him the more difficult it will be, and if the goddess in her wisdom decrees that he is to die, now while he is only a tiny baby is best - he will suffer less."

Ygerna merely nodded slightly without looking up: Morgain was still staring silently, her great dark eyes unblinking.

The High Priestess softly parted the shawl drawn round the baby's face and gazed at him for a moment. "He is a fine boy, Ygerna. Do not think I cannot understand: I too have known what it is to bear a son and lose him, and I never had a daughter to console me. Go now."

Head still bowed, Ygerna bent her knees slightly in ritual obeisance, turning away without a word and beginning to descend the path from the shrine. Morgain followed her, head still turned to gaze at the High Priestess as she stood, one hand raised in benediction, at the doorway of the low wattle building that crowned the conical hilltop.

"The goddess go with you," she called and, turning, stooped to pass into the dark interior.

Ygerna's mind was numb with misery as she stepped down the straight path that only the nine priestesses might use, concentrating on cradling the baby gently so as not to wake him. He had fed well and should sleep for the next two or three hours, by which time... She seized upon the words of the High Priestess, 'He is in the hand of the Mother, it is she who decides,' and murmered a prayer under her breath. "Great goddess, divine lady, maiden and mother, look we pray thee with grace upon this thy suppliant..."

Reaching the hut at the foot of the tor where she lived with Morgain, Ygerna halted while the girl held back the woven curtain at the doorway and then went into the dim interior, where she gently laid the still sleeping baby on the skins of the bedplace. She knelt a moment to look into his face as he slept, her lips still murmuring the prayer. Rising, she crossed the hut to a bulky object on the far side and, lifting the cloth that covered it, revealed a small wickerwork cradle with rounded end and bottom and a piece of hide stretched round the outside. Placing it on the bed-platform she carefully lifted the baby and laid him within it, snugly wrapped in the shawl and with his head resting on a soft pad of woollen cloth. Above it, the osiers of the cradle rayed out in a semi-circular pattern to form the raised head of the tiny bed.

As she tucked the shawl more firmly round the baby's limbs Ygerna was thinking of his father. A huge man, bronzed, with red-gold hair, a captive Celtic warrior brought as a sacrificial victim to the Mother by the tribe who were her worshippers. Ygerna had lain with him the night before he died, as was the privilege of the priestesses if they wished: they were celibate servants of the Earth Mother but they might sleep with any male suppliant who came to the shrine to make offering or seek divination, or with a male sacrifice; bathing in the holy well afterwards restored their virginity. There were not many human sacrifices now, not even war-captives, but afte a specially great victory sometimes, as a thanksgiving to the Mother, such as this one had been, a great chieftain captured in battled. Ygerna had seen him with his captors, tall, a head taller than the dark-haired warriors, proud, golden like the sun. She had gone to him in the night, he had never seen her, but shen she left at dawn he had given her... Feeling under her robe, she drew a thong from round her neck with a leather bag on the end. Slipping it over her head, she loosened the

drawstring and felt inside. It was a golden arm-ring, made in the shape of a dragon, with two fiery red stones for eyes and a tail that wound round the arm twice. Made to wear on her slim arm, and now she tucked it into the bottom of the cradle among the folds of the shawl and rose, picking up the cradle.

"Stay here, Morgain," she said and ducked quickly out through the doorway.

Peering between the curtain and the doorframe, Morgain watched until her mother had passed out of sight among the huts and then slipped out after her.

Kneeling in the rushes at the edge of the marshy lake that stretched all round the sacred island, Ygema smoothly slid the cradle into the water. Yes, she reflected, she had always known. That was why she had woven the cradle and stitched hide round it to make it watertight. Even before the baby was born she had begun, knowing somehow that it would be a boy and that this moment would come. Surely it would not all be wasted, even if she never... Stooping, she softly kissed the smooth brow, then, parting the rushes, gave the floating cradle a firm push out into the open.

There were currents in the sluggish water of the lake, and further down the shore a lake-village on piles jutted into it. If he floated that far he would not be the first son of the goddess adopted there: they would be kind to him, she knew, for the good luck he would bring. Kneeling on the soggy bank, heedless of the mud staining her robe, she watched as the cradle floated, turning aimlessly this way and that now that the momentum of the push had died.

"Great goddess, divine lady, maiden and mother..."

There was no current, no wind. There would have to be magic to move the water. Her hands made shapes in the air, her lips murmured silently. Still the cradle floated, rocking slightly, on the same spot.

Hidden in the reeds a few yards away, Morgain watched her mother, saw the signs her fingers made gesturing towards the floating cradle. After a moment the girl cautiously stood up, raised both arms and held them extended in the same direction. Her lips gabbled soundlessly.

Ygema's eyes, screwed up against the sun on the water, were fixed on the cradle, her whole posture rigid as she willed it to move. She did not see Morgain behind her among the reeds, fingers imperiously pointing as she mouthed the spell. Suddenly a catspaw of wind scuttled across the surface of the lake, she felt it on her cheek and saw it catch the raised back of the cradle. Dipping slightly, it began to move, bobbing slowly across the surface until, seeming to catch a current, it spun round once or twice and then began to move steadily down the lake. Slumping, Ygema buried her face in her hands and shook with sobs that made her whole body shudder.

Morgain, lowering her arms, quietly slipped through the tall reeds and began to run, silent in her bare feet on the turf, back towards the hut.

* * *

"Cei! Cei! Where are you, you young ruffian?"

The boy crouching on the bank heard his father's voice but neither replied nor looked round. His whole attention was concentrated on something just ahead of him on the lake, a few yards away, out of reach but slowly drifting, dipping a little, spinning in the eddies, nearer to where he was.

Footsteps were crashing through the reeds near him now and the voice was loud. "Cei! Son - are you all right? Answer me! If you're hiding I'll -"

A shadow fell across the boy and the voice broke off. Only now did he half glance up at the tall figure towering over him, blocking the light of the westering sun. "Cei, you young - why didn't you answer me?"

"Hush, father!" the boy pleaded. "Look - there on the water ..."

"By the Head! Quick, boy, I can reach it with my sword before the current takes it past - "

"Father! Let me!"

Quickly unslinging his sword belt, the man thrust the weapon, scabbard and all, into his son's eager hands. "Here, hook the hilt over the edge and draw it towards us - can you? Take my hand and lean out - steady, don't drop the sword or tip the little ark ... you have it!"

Cei was so excited that he tried to let go of his father's hand and would have fallen into the shallows but for a strong arm that scooped him, laughing, to the bank. Stepping quickly into the oozy water the man grasped the wicker cradle firmly by its ends, lifted it, dripping, from among the reeds and laid it gently on firm ground. Two golden heads bent side by side over the bundle that lay wrapped in the bottom.

"See, the babe, he sleeps." Cei was whispering instinctively.

"Yes," his father breathed. "It is a boy child, I believe, a fine boy."

As if struck by some sudden thought, he scrambled to his feet and screwed up his eyes against the brightness of the sun, now sinking towards a bank of low cloud in the west and reddening. He stood gazing, buckling on his sword belt as he did so.

"It is time your mother came, boy," he said, half to himself. "That is why I was calling you. She will be here soon with news from the

priestesses of little Math - we must go to meet her."

"She will be surprised that we've found another baby, Father," Cei cried. "And pleased too."

The tall warrior looked down at his five year-old son with a smile in which pride and sadness, hope and fear seemed equally mingled. "Pray the gods she may, boy," he said gruffly. "Come, let us seek her on the road from the causeway."

Stooping, he lifted the warm bundle from the cradle and gently held it in the crook of his arm. The baby still slept.

"What shall we do with the ark, Father?" Cei asked.

"Leave it - it has served its purpose. Come."

He strode away up the slope without waiting longer for the boy, who seemed reluctant to abandon the boat-like cradle and was still examining it. After a moment he rose and trotted after his father up the gentle incline and just as he caught him up saw him raise a hand to wave a greeting. Coming slowly along the road that led from the causeway to the sacred island the boy saw a single figure, wrapped closely in a brown robe, a fold of it lapped over her dark hair and her head bowed. Her arms were empty.

"Mother!" he called, running ahead down the dusty track, "Mother, look what I have found on the lake!" Suddenly halting a few feet short of her, he asked in an altered tone, "Where is little Math?"

Stooping, she gathered him in her arms and held him close to her. He could feel her cheek wet against his.

"Cei, little Math is - the Mother could do nothing for him, he was too sick. He has gone to join the goddess." She looked up at the tall figure of her husband, standing silently beside them, her face half shadowed by her robe. "Oh, Cynyr, the priestess was kind, but she could do nothing. Math sleeps now among the blessed." Then as he wordlessly held something towards her, "But what is this? I - "

Cynyr placed the child in her arms. "The gods have sent us another son, Blodeuwedd," he murmured. "We found him adrift on the lake."

She gaped, unable to speak, and at that moment the baby's eyes opened and at once he began to cry, screwing up his face and struggling to free his arms from the blanket. ,

"See, he is hungry, wife - feed him."

Handing the child back to Cynyr, she began to undo a round brooch that held the shoulder of her gown. Turning towards the sun, now in its last red-gold blaze in the west, Cynyr lifted the baby before his face at arm's length and held him aloft, struggling and squalling, the light making a halo round his head where already a mist of golden fuzz grew.

"I thank you, gods!" Cynyr cried aloud. "For a son you have taken you give us another. See, Cei, he is a son of the sun! I name him - "

"He has a name already."

Startled, they all glanced round. No one had heard him approach but he stood only a few paces from them, a tall old man, white bearded but with a body as straight and lean as the staff he carried. The long unbleached robe he wore showed that he was a Druid.

Cynyr, inclining his head respectfully, asked, "Is it permitted that the name be known, sir?"

"It is permitted. It is written in the book of years that he shall be called Artos, that he shall ride in the chariot of stars and that his fame shall go abroad throughout this land and far beyond its shores."

"Is it so indeed?"

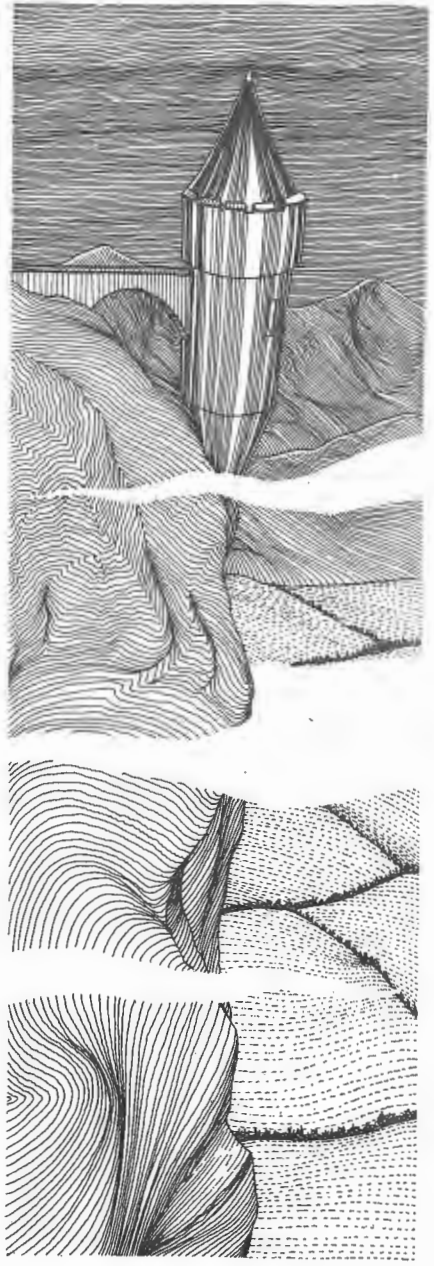
"It is so, Cynyr Fairbeard. I, Myrddin, tell you so."

Before the warrior could comment or ask how the old man knew his name the baby's cries, momentarily silenced, broke out afresh. The Druid gestured towards Blodeuwedd and Cynyr handed the child to his wife, who had squatted by the roadside in readiness; almost instantly the fretful cries were silenced as the tiny mouth fastened on Blodeuwedd's distended nipple. Soon nothing could be heard but contented sucking noises and the gentle crooning of the woman.

Cynyr turned to speak courteously to the Druid but the spot where he had stood was empty. There was no one on the road. The shore of the lake stretched in both directions with no sign of human presence. With a shiver, he made the sign of the horns against evil.

"It is as if little Math had come back to us, husband," Blodeuwedd murmured.

"And see what I found, Mother, in the floating cradle," Cei added eagerly, holding out a golden arm-ring in the shape of a dragon. As he dangled it enticingly before the baby's half-closed eyes a tiny fist reached out and closed on the bauble.



♦ *Extracted from an unpublished novel*

Lament for the Giant Bolster

From over the sea came Saint Agnes,
afire with her faith in the Lord,
And eager to convert the Cornish
to whom she was bringing the Word.
She came to the shore at Trevaunance
(or it may well have been Chapel Porth)
And straight'way began her profession -
preaching for all she was worth.
From his Beacon abode, Giant Bolster
beheld this delectable lass;
Beguiled by her youth and her beauty,
he fell with an almighty crash!
Deserted his home and his missus
to follow the maid acres over,
With vows of his love and devotion,
and pleas that she would be his lover.
This caused Agnes great indignation:
"I'm not a girl like that, " said she,
"Besides, you've got a wife already -
do you think I'd commit big-a-mee?"
"Oh no, you would just be my mistress,"
said Bolster with lecherous grin;
For which deadly insult she kicked him
a couple of times on the shin.

Well, she couldn't reach his face to slap it...

She could not get rid of the monster,
he haunted her days and her dreams,
Until in great exasperation,
she hatched out a desperate scheme.
To the Chapel Porth cliff-top she led him,
and that's where she asked him to prove,
By blood-sacrifice and by courage,
the power and truth of his love.
"Do you see this small hole in the
greensward?
Well, this is my challenge to you:
If you'll fill that hole with your life-blood,
then I'll be your maid, ever true."
He believed her, that poor, silly giant;
he was such a colossal fool
That he gashed his great arm till the blood
welled
and fell, drop by drop, in the hole.
Agnes said, "I'll be back, dear, directly,
when filled is the hole with your blood."
Smiling grimly, she strode to the village -
and left him to die where he stood.
Because that 'little hole', she'd discovered,
ran right through the cliff to the sea;
The giant could never have filled it,
if he'd bled for a whole century.
So he patiently just went on bleeding,
till he started to feel weak and faint,
And he finally toppled and perished;
thus died Bolster for love of a saint.

Ev'ry time I consider this legend,
it's old Bolster I feel sorry for;
Admittedly he was a lecher,
and our Agnes found him a bore.
But young women pestered in that way
can surely dispose of the threat
Without causing death and destruction
by trickery and sly deceit.
The way Agnes dealt with the Giant
was ruthless and pitiless, too;
In fact, Agnes dear, it was really
extremely un-Christian of you!

Beryl Mercer

The Anatomy of Melancholy

"Lovers be war and tak gude heid about
whom that ye lufe, for whom ye suffer paine"
Robert Henryson - *The Testament of Cresseid*

Burton swims in our black bile
coughing up balls of fur
and Elizabeth by the pool
of milk sets an asp to her nipple.
The Director shoos us out.

With rain running off of our faces, barium cloud on the X-Ray
we drink our morning draught of whey
and wander the dockland streets
that still smell of coriander.
Wearing winchester jackets and periwigs
we mould a hundred Spensers out of clay.

And in a limestone gouge due south of Pembroke
Gawain waits with a stillness way beyond patience
fed by the ravens
on eggs they stole from the kittiwakes
and rotting rock-flopped fish
he takes the stinging rain full in his face
and the vast swell breaks, wave after wave
against his blunt blue knees.

He spies each day the gannets fold their wings
turn vertical - Lucifer's arrows - and flung
the Evil Eyes that hold him
in his prison of salted lace.
He hands us a black stone disc -
He says he's given up hope.

We catch sight of ourselves in the dark mirror
and Prince Madoc and Billy the Kid
galloping out on the western plains
singing "Misguided Angel" as we go.
With Richey James wrapped in a fishnet
and a white-crowned penguin in tow
we cheat death with sly smiles
on the hilltop at Palo Alto.

Geoff Sawers

The innkeeper at Camelot's gate

I have seen them ride past, the knights of the Table,
The righters of distant wrongs, from Balin to Bagdemagus.
Invariably they ride past. Not one of them enters.

If any had entered, I should have lost my custom.
Here come the thieves, the cheats, the buyers of orphan goods,
The men who kill for pay: to each his unchivalrous trade.

Thus Camelot prospers. Camelot's wealth
Is made by close and underboard dealing.
Prey comes from far. Eyes dazzled with knighthood,
They sell all they have for illusion, laughing the while.

Fleeced fools in cold harbourages cry out on the king:
'If Arthur cared for justice, he would turn his gaze to Camelot.'
But his eyes are on far-off grails, he hears nothing of rumours,
Not even of footfalls on his chamber stair.

Oh distance-regarding knights, enarmed in you high confidence,
You think your deeds will endure by merit alone
And thus shall your worship spread to the ends of the earth.

Dismount and enter this once. If endurance is merit,
I will show you a thing worth more than all Camelot.
It is played with three cups and a pea.

A H W Smith

The Passing of the King

Arthur, aboard of the barque, sleeps now in surcease of his aching.
  Holding his head in her lap, Morgaine searches his hurt.
White waves wap at the prow as the cold winds press to the westward.
  Shorewards the ravens descend, seeking the eyes of the slain.
Broken in battle they lie, they who erst were the boast of the Island;
  Ended the king's high court, ended the chivalrous dream.
O may he never return to ruin his realm for a vision:
  Cold Avalonian shores, hold him for ever away!

A H W Smith

Questions

a flash of azure, a rush of russet
feathered vestments - brief - reflected
  this lake - like Galilee -
    yields fish, yet all I lack
      is one for that flat dish

a splash, some silver scales
a stranger as I row to shore
  hoc est enim
    corpus meum
will he ask what all this means
will I go through this once more

Chris Lovegrove

The Horned King

& she told me then, go and ask the deer -

A shy skipping trot, startled from the woods: said the Roe, I
have not seen him.

Stately, spotted & grazing in bands, clustered on a Deer Park
vista: said the Fallow, we have not seen him.

And the shaggy necked, big tan hoofers - gormless, emblematic:
said the Reds, we have not seen him.

But lastly the tiny humpback, lolloping interloper: the Muntjac
said, look to your feet. And then keep on looking down.

You cannot ask the big stags, clambering into another pasture
count their tines like the branches of trees,
bone genealogy -

But look as we look, always past and through the ground.

Geoff Sawers

Song of Songs

For Guinevere

May I come now to Camelot?
Now, while your feet are soft and bare;
no jewelled crown to wear upon your head.
Your body clothed in nothing but an untied gown,
untried by questions on the scented air
    which folds away for you.
And will your hair be free to light my cheek;
the only heart upon your breast,
the heart I give again to keep
to claim an instant of your fragile name;
and heal the pain of kings and queens
    and courtly marriages,
where slept those unkept promises
- and truth, lost in a golden glory, wept.

Will you wait ungarlanded
An ageless loveliness to fate my ageless soul.
And will there be no sound inside your room,
or music caught upon your resting thought,
except the music which I bring to sing you with
from every woodland glade and mist-enchanted lake;
    and in the music take your hand awhile.

For where else may such music be and how,
unless with me in your enchantment now.

And shall we privately accept,
beneath these gilded turrets where we kept
    our distanced innocence;
that times and places in our outer worlds may sleep,
while we, un-noticed in my song of songs, must keep
an hour or so of harmony to flow - to be believed - let go,
then in the pain of memory, retrieved
    to grace whatever time we make it so.

Shall I steal Merlin's potion for a body balm,
to feel and touch and calm
and heal the knotted regal bond
    from every part of you.
And will you bring no food for me,
except the feeding of my soul upon your borrowed flesh;
the pulsing, living form which gives itself afresh;
    and in its giving, so lives on for me.

And will you call us back into belief
of such brief burnings out of time - and out of care,
    with only bright white wine to share.
And will my rain-soft kiss upon your breasts
    make sweet red berries grow;
and will you meet the flow which tests my fingertips,
arrests the dancing butterflies who pause
and feel for nectar where the flower's cause is spun.
And will you be a flower for me
    which opens to an unforgetful sun.

Will there be no light except the candles which I bring;
no place beyond the hearth, no bells to ring
    across the town.
No quizzing eye or frown to take to task
and not one promise raised to give or ask.
Nor yet one red-bitch tongue upon a village street,
where names of you and names of me may meet.
No sword to take from saddened kings
and not one tear to cry out of a dragon's eye.

But only where our shadows twine and dance upon the wall;
only in my song of songs to raise and fall
this tight-wound pendulum where ticks
    an endless hour or two.
A time beyond your world where magic touches you
    and nowhere else exists.

Ray Turley

From *In Search of Camelot* [£3.99 plus postage: 01633 422877]

The Swan King and the Grail Castle

Eric L Fitch

I was lucky enough to spend a short spell in Bavaria in June 1999 and there discovered a place steeped in the Arthurian legends, specifically the Holy Grail. This was the castle of Neuschwanstein built by "mad" King Ludwig II of Bavaria in 1880s, photographs of which have appeared on many a jigsaw and which has been a backdrop for a number of films. This is not surprising, since its appearance has a romantic, almost fairy-tale quality, but what is of interest to *Pendragon* readers is the fact that this building turned out to be a Grail Castle, as we shall see.

King Ludwig II was born at the Nymphenburg Palace, Munich in 1845 and became king at the early age of 18 after the death of his father Maximilian II. He was brought up in a castle situated in the Bavarian Alps named Hohenschwangau, which was decorated inside with scenes from Lohengrin, and he was thus introduced to this legend from his boyhood. The story was told by Wolfram von Eschenbach in his *Parzival* of *c*1210, which featured Lohengrin the Swan Knight, son of Parzival and Condwiramurs. Although Lohengrin appears only briefly in this work, a later romance from the 1280s by an unknown author tells a rather fuller story.

The Swan Knight

The title of Swan Knight stems from the fact that Lohengrin arrives on the scene in a boat drawn by a swan in order to deliver Princess Elsa of Brabant from the evil Tetramund and the sorceress Ortrud. Having saved her, Lohengrin marries her on condition that she must not ask him his name or his ancestry. However, on their wedding night she asks the question and, held by his vows to the Grail, discloses his identity and promptly disappears, taken back to the Grail Kingdom by the swan who has returned for him.

At the age of 12 Ludwig was introduced to Wagner's music after hearing a report by his governess of a performance of Lohengrin which she had attended in Munich. Apparently her vivid descriptions of the opera fired an enthusiasm to see the work himself, a wish which did not come true until he was 15, having harangued his father for three years. The performance captured his imagination almost like a religious fervour, not only for the Grail legends but also for the music of Wagner, whom he later befriended. In fact, but for Ludwig, it is doubtful whether the impecunious composer would have achieved all he did, for the king financed his projects and enabled them to come to fruition.

Ludwig's idea of art was its potential for it to raise the audience onto a higher plane and in Wagner he saw the ultimate perfection of this ideal. Thus it was that Ludwig's interest in the Swan Knight became an obsession and he came to identify himself with the character of Lohengrin, part knight in shining armour and part swan, with its associations of majesty and piety. Later on in life Ludwig used to dress up as Lohengrin and sail round the lake at his other residence Linderhof in a boat shaped like a cockleshell. Indeed, after his death, a costume of the Swan Knight was discovered amongst his possessions.

In the eyes of Wagner, however, Ludwig had become Parzival, the hero of his last opera *Parsifal*, by which name he referred to his friend. He was apparently struck by the similarities between the two characters - both were strong, brave and handsome, but this was accompanied by a strange innocence and naivity. Perhaps most important, though, was their destiny. Parzival was destined at birth to succeed to the Grail kingship and his story leads him to Amfortas, the keeper of the Grail, of whom he asks the correct question about the Fisher King's wound. This act immediately cures Amfortas and frees his kingdom from the curse of being a waste land, and thus Parzival lays claim to the Grail. And so when Wagner described Ludwig as Parzival, he saw in him the role that Parzival had acted out, someone whom he hoped would be able to regenerate the waste land of Germany through art. Indeed, Ludwig saw himself in this role, as is evidenced by several letters he wrote to Wagner referring to himself as Parzival.

Grail Castle

Enthusiastic as he was about the Arthurian legends it was inevitable that he would embrace the Grail romances as well and it was this theme which brought about the building of his fantasy castle called Neuschwanstein. In 1868 he wrote to Wagner: "I intend to rebuild the old castle ruins of Hohenschwangau by the Pollat Falls, in the genuine style of the old German knights' castles ... There will be reminders of Tannhauser and of Lohengrin".

The castle became his Grail Castle, stemming as it did from the fact that he saw himself as a Grail King and these themes, along with others from Arthurian and Wagnerian narratives, were the foundation of this fantastic, romantic structure. The decoration within the castle has to be seen to be believed and the Singers' Hall and the Throne Room stand out as the most splendid rooms of all. The Singers' Hall includes Romanesque arches, a marvellous panelled roof in red and gold and the walls are covered either with pictures or intricate patterns. The majority of the paintings are from the Grail legends, taken from Eschenbach's *Parzival*, but it would be a long list to describe them all. However, examples such as "Parzival's first encounter with knighthood" and "Parzival meets Amfortas" give an idea of the scenes which adorn the walls.

The Living Room is devoted to the Lohengrin legend and the paintings here describe the whole story. Examples include "The miracle of the Grail", "Lohengrin's departure from the Castle of the Grail" and "Elsa asking the Question". The King's Bedroom is dedicated to Tristan and Isolde and features paintings inspired by a poem by Gottfried of Strasbourg and above the exit are wooden figures of King Mark, Tristan and Isolde. Other rooms contain murals about Tannhauser, the Gudrun saga and other German legends. With all these stories, however, Ludwig insisted on using the original sagas as a base for the paintings, not Wagner's interpretation of them.

The whole castle is lavishly decorated throughout, but the Throne Room, the centre of attraction, is of special note. Designed in Byzantine style its two storey arcades are supported by columns of plaster scagiola which are painted to resemble porphyry and lapis lazuli. The floor mosaic, featuring depictions of forest animals, is composed of more than two million coloured tiles. No expenses were spared in the king's fantasy of building a fairy-tale castle. However, he did not occupy his new abode for long. He first settled into his apartments on May 27th 1884, but by June 13th 1886 he was dead.

The king's end was unfortunate and mysterious. The last few years of his life saw him enter a period of decline, one servant commenting that he was in "a swamp of unfathomable darkness", which led him to being declared insane by the Bavarian government. His cousin Empress Elizabeth stated that "He is not mad enough to be locked up, but too abnormal to manage comfortably in the world with reasonable people." There was a history of eccentric behaviour in the family, his brother Otto succumbing to mental illness, but succeeding him after Ludwig's death, although he ruled Bavaria in name only until his own death in 1916. The cause of Ludwig's demise, however, has never been satisfactorily explained.

Mystery

The events leading up to his death began with Prince Luitpold announcing that, owing to the state of both Ludwig and Otto, a regency was to be inaugurated and on June 10th 1886 this became official. On June 12th a government commission took him from Neuschwanstein to Castle Berg outside Munich, along with his physician Dr Gudden. The following afternoon the two went for a walk around Lake Starnberg, despite protestations from Dr Gudden. By eight o'clock that evening they had not returned and a search was immediately instigated. The bodies of the two men were found floating in the lake but, despite attempts to revive them, at midnight they were pronounced dead.

As to what happened to Ludwig and Dr Gudden, we may never know, but murder does seem the most likely explanation. At Ludwig's lying in state, thousands of Bavarians visited Munich to pay their last respects. Thus ended the life of the Swan-King, Lohengrin, Parzival or the Grail King.

The guided tour around the castle was, unfortunately, rather rapid and it was difficult to take in all that there was to see. But nevertheless if Pendragon members get a chance to visit this remarkable building, I recommend that they do and they will at least be prepared to look out for all the Arthurian associations which I was unaware of before I arrived.

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The St Lucius Enigma:

a speculative assessment

Steve Sneyd

The puzzling figure of St Lucius, the "first British saint" (saint's day December 3), would seem at first sight to be irrelevant to the Arthurian period. After all, the sixth century traditions which are our earliest sources of information ascribe him to the second century AD, far too early to be connected to the Matter.

Yet both he and the Pope with whom he is said to have communicated, Eleutherius, have names which do have resonances in the Arthurian period, and this causes me to speculate as to whether a "time-slip" has occurred, and whether a plausible explanation can be provided, at least speculatively, for so odd a coincidence of uncommon names.

The essence of the story is recorded by the *Liber Pontificalis* (*c* 530 AD), and later taken up by Bede and others, including Geoffrey of Monmouth, is that a British king, Lucius, desirous of being converted to Christianity, wrote to Pope Eleutherius requesting that missionaries be sent. Once converted, and having founded bishoprics in London and Llandaff, he in his turn became a missionary on the Continent, to the Grisons in eastern Switzerland, as it later became, although then still known as Rhaetia, in particular the area around the city of Chur.

Saints

There appears to be no doubt about the existence of Eleutherius, Pope from around 175 to 189, since he appears on a list drawn up by Irenaeus in 180, in succession to Pope Soter, as the twelfth (or thirteenth if Peter is counted) pontiff. He was of Greek origin, from Nicopolis in Epirus, and later achieved sainthood. (He was not the first saint of this name in the lists, although the earlier St Eleutherius, a first century martyr in Illyria, is now regarded as historically doubtful.)

There had been earlier instances of saints named Lucius, beginning with one "from amongst the disciples of Christ", the "Lucius, my kinsman" of St Paul (*Romans XVI* 10, 21), and later in the same century the Lucius who was first bishop of Cyrene in North Africa. Pope Lucius, who died in 254, also became a saint.

Confusion

There seem to be two predominant views as to the British Lucius among the compilers of hagiographies - either that the whole story is a picturesque pious fiction, or that confusion arose because a king in northern Mesopotamia around this time, Agbar(us) IX of Edessa (now Urfa in SE Turkey) took the name of Lucius on his conversion to Christianity, which may well have been preceded by enquiries to the Pope, and additionally had in his territory a town called Britium or Birtha, which could have been confused with Britain. (This last has a strong air of "folk etymology" to it, to my mind!)

However, as a variety of stories cluster around the conversion of various Edessene kings, all named Abgar (including stories that Abgar V, possibly a leper, sent a letter to Jesus, and that St Thomas carried out the conversion), and as the kinglists would seem to indicate both that Abgar IX, although he visited Rome, did not himself become a Christian, and that Abgar VIII was in fact the ruler at the time of Pope Eleutherius, it seems somewhat unlikely from a common sense point of view that Papal scholars would have confused a line of Eastern monarchs of whom they were well aware with a king from the opposite end of the Empire.

Time-slip

Although never, it seems, a particularly popular saint in England, occasional dedications of churches can be found to the British St Lucius. In fact, my own curiosity was first aroused by the dedication of the church to him at Farnley Tyas, a village east of Huddersfield.

But the story attached to him clearly has great implausibilities. At that time, there were no client kings remaining within Roman Britannia, so at best he could have been, if living within the province, an official (it would be too early for him to be the king of a settled band of German *foederati*). It would be not impossible for him to have been a kinglet or chieftain of a tribe beyond the Wall, perhaps in treaty relation with Rome, but then what standing could he have had in London or Llandaff, both deep in the Roman province?

But is it possible that a time-slip in the story recounted by the *Liber Pontificalis* could have taken place? As *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* notes, Geoffrey of Monmouth describes Lucius as the son of Coilus. Coilus, in turn, could plausibly be Coel Hen, a name which heads many Dark Age genealogies in Northern Britain, and regarded by Morris as in effect the

last *Dux Britanniarum*, *ie* military commander of the region south of the Wall.

The name Lucius has elsewhere been suggested as a Romanisation of Lugh / Llaw, and representing a Christianisation of a Celtic divinity name, but if for the purposes of argument we consider the question of a genuine British kinglet, perhaps taking "son of" as "descendant of", he could well have been a contemporary of a historical Eleutherius in Britain, the king of York, his name in Celtic form Eliffer of the Armies, father of Peredur, according to Morris last British king of York, and himself claiming descent from Coel Hen (the frequent formulation for Peredur of "son of Evrauc" in fact being simply "son of York" in the Shakespearean sense, Evrauc a garbling of *Eboracum*, not the father's actual name).

It is also intriguing to note that the name of the Roman emperor who fights against Arthur is, according to Wace, Lucius (Layamon in the *Brut* has Luce).

Although it is hard to make the dates tie neatly, nevertheless the mid-late 5th century saw sub-Roman kinglets with Roman names Aegidius and Syagrius controlling areas of northern Gaul around Arthurian times. Do we, then, have in the 2nd century mythical king-saint Lucius, and in the wicked "emperor" Lucius active in northern France in the Matter of Arthur, two manifestations of the same figure?

Speculation

To offer a purely speculative scenario, but one which does at least appear to not violate credibility drastically, could Lucius have been a member of a Dark Age royal house in the North who, displaced for whatever reason, did as so many Britons of the time did, and sought a home in Little Britain (Brittany)? There, he could have obtained some sort of military command, communicated with a kinsman, Eleutherius in York, for whatever reason (in search of assistance, or in some Christian interest - Arthur is often presented as inimical to the Church, and it to him), and come into conflict with the rulers of southern Britain in the process. (Arthur's expedition into France, in both Wace and Layamon, begins in north-east Brittany, with the conflict with the Mont St Michel giant.)

Nothing in this is provable - but it would seem to me to make some sense of the appearances of the name Lucius in the two discrete stories, and does not demand, as the hagiographical explanation does, that we believe papal scholars did not know their East from their West, merely that in the course of taking account of a story which perhaps reached them fairly swiftly (the *Liber* is late 6th century) but possibly in confused form as from areas in turmoil and confusion, they tried to make sense of it by assuming the Eleutherius concerned must be the Pope of whom they already had records, and thus inevitably backdating it several centuries in the process, and resulting in the splitting of one individual into two - a king-saint of the misty past in their annals, an overbearing emperor in the folk tales which became bundled into the Matter as it was written down and shaped to art.

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The Historia Meriadoci and St Meiriadog

A H W Smith

In his piece on St Meiriadog in *Pendragon XXVII* No.4, Tristan Gray Hulse makes use of the Latin prose romance *Historia Meriadoci* to construct an account of the saint's life.

It is far from clear, however, that Meriadocus the hero of the romance and Meiriadog the saint are in any way connected.

In effect, the reasons Mr Hulse adduces are threefold: the coincidence of the hero's name; the supposed resemblance of the place where Meriadocus is raised in secret to a place on the banks of the Elwy; and the name of Meriadocus's father's huntsman, Ivorius, which Hulse takes to be the same as that of the Celtic saint Ivy, associated with Meiriadog in the distribution of parish dedications. Let us take these in order.

Myriads of Meriadocs

To begin with the hero's name. It may well be that the name Meiriadog is sufficiently rare in 'Celtic tradition' for it to be justifiable to take all occurrences of it in place-names as referring to one individual. When it comes to French romance literature, however, (a field which the author of *Historia Meriadoci* clearly knows) we find a different story. Marie de France's *lai* of *Guigemar* features a Meriaduc, lord of a castle in 'Bretaine', who seeks to keep Guigemar from his love and is slain in consequence. Thomas's *Tristran* evidently contained a Meriadoc, knight of the Cornish court, who sought to inculpate Tristan (he survives in Gottfried's *Tristan* as Marjodoc, in Brother Robert's saga version as Mariadokk, and in the Scottish *Sir Tristrem* as Meriadok). On the notorious Modena archivolt there appears a knight named 'Mardoc', which seems to reflect an original 'Mariadoc' (the spellings of the inscription indicates that the origin of the names — whatever their date — is French). In addition, the hero of the thirteenth-century prose romance *Li Chevaliers as Deus Espees*, which may well antedate *Historia Meriadoci*, is named Meriadeus. Add to this that Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* has a character named Conanus Meriadocus, and there seems ample precedent for the composer of a thirteenth-century prose romance to name a secular knightly character Meriadocus without St Meiriadog being in any way implicated.

A long way from Llanelwy

What then of the supposed resemblance between the place where Meriadocus is raised and Cefn Caves on the banks of the Elwy? Here we must look at the text of the romance. Ivorius has rescued Meriadocus and his sister Orwen from being hanged by agents of his wicked uncle Griffinus in the forest of 'Arglud', and, fearing Griffinus's anger, has fled with them to the Fleventan forest (*ad silvam Fleventanam*) which lies outside the kingdom of 'Cambria'. Within that forest there is a place called the Rock of the Eagles (*Rupes Aquilarum*), named from four eagles' continually nesting on its summit, each facing one of the four winds. Within the rock are artificially carved cavems, once thought to be the haunt of giants (*Cyclopes*), and it is here that Ivorius raises the children in secret (Day 1988, 38-40).

It may be possible to locate this Eagles' Rock more precisely. The 'Flevent-' element in the name of the forest may represent some form of the name *Llwyfenydd*, a region mentioned in some of the more historical poems in the Book of Taliesin as under the sway of Urien of Rheged. The extent of Llwyfenydd may perhaps be gathered from the name of the Lyvennet Beck (earlier forms: Leveneth, Lyvened, Levennyd) near Crosby Ravensworth, and Leeming Lane, the name of the Roman road running south from Catterick (*Llwyfenydd* derives from the Indo-European stem **Leimanio-*). The name suits a forest, *llwyf* being Welsh for 'elm' (to which it is etymologically related). The similar place-name *Argoed Llwyfein* (also from the Book of Taliesin) indicates the presence of a wood (*coed*: *Argoed* = 'by the wood') — assuming, not unreasonably, that Llwyfenydd and Llwyfein are not far apart.

If 'Flevent-', then, represents 'Llwyfenydd', is there a place in the area roughly indicated by Lyvennet Beck and Leeming Lane that would answer to the Rock of Eagles? A glance at the map reveals an obvious candidate in Eggleston, or — since after all we are dealing with a product of Latin scholarship, written by someone with evident access to texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth and Gregory of Tours — more precisely, in Egglestone Abbey, north-west of Richmond, just to the south of the Tees across from Barnards Castle.

Moreover, according to Leland, 'hard under the clif by Egleston is found on eche side of Tese very fair marble, wont to be taken up booth by marbelers of Barnardes Castelle and of Egleston, and partly to have be wrought by them, and partely sold onwrought to other' (Toulmin Smith 1904-10, I, 77). Elsewhere, he refers to 'a faire quarre of blak marble spotted with white, in the very ripe of Tese' about a quarter of a mile below Eggleston (Toulmin Smith 1904-10, IV, 29). Whatever the actual etymon of 'Egglestone', the suggestive form 'Egleston' (as if 'Eagle-stone') is attested as early as 1157. Can 'Rupes Aquilarum', with its chambers cut into the rock, be Egglestone and its marble quarry viewed through the distorting glass of romance, in much the same way as Chrétien de Troyes in *Yvain* transformed the plain slab at the storm-raising spring of Barenton into an emerald resting on four ruby columns?

If 'Flevent-' doesn't represent 'Llwyfenydd', however, one is left with a wider field in which to look for possible identifications: Amcliffe, to the north of Skipton, being one such for 'Rupes Aquilarum' (there are caves in the vicinity at least). The only place in which it is not legitimate to look for possible sites for 'Flevent-' or for 'Rupes Aquilarum' is, of course, Wales, since our author specifies that they lie outside the boundaries of 'Cambria'. Cefn Caves are automatically ruled out.

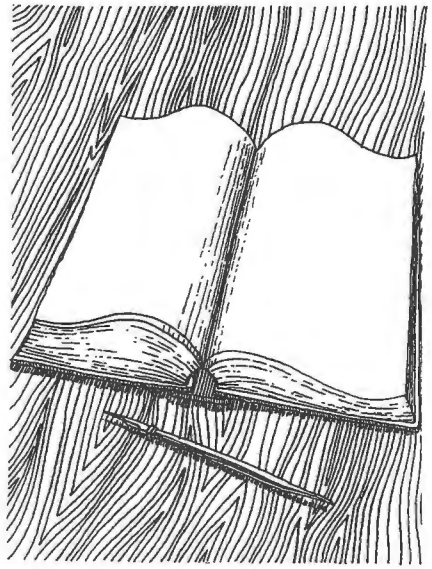
Ivorius and Ivy

There remains then only the resemblance between the names Ivy and Ivorius. Ivor is a common enough Welsh name, and there are two characters who bear it in Geoffrey's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which the author of *Historia Meriadoci* uses extensively: there thus seems no compelling reason to implicate St Ivy (who, on Hulse's own showing, is in any case known as 'Efa' in Wales).

A North Wales Connexion?

Hulse is right in pointing to a disjunction within *Historia Meriadoci* between the story of Meriadocus's childhood and what follows (there is another between the hero's Arthurian and Continental adventures), but this is merely the way our author structures his romances: similar disjunctions occur in his other work, *De Ortu Walwanii*. There is no need to suppose that this part of the *Historia* represents an otherwise unattested North Welsh account of its hero's childhood. With Cefn Caves out of the reckoning, the alleged 'detailed knowledge of the topography of North Wales' consists of the single name 'Snawdown' (which our author twice asserts is Welsh for *nivalem montem* — 'snowy hill' — thus showing his first language to have been neither Welsh nor English). It is with Snowdon, not Caernarfon, that *Historia Meriadoci* associates Meriadocus's family. Possibly this is because, as R S Loomis suggested (Loomis 1959, 473-4), Arthur's victorious campaign against Griffinus there is intended to echo Edward I's successful siege of Prince Llewelyn on Snowdon in 1277. If so, then Meriadocus's association with the place would be entirely factitious.

In short, Tristan Gray Hulse's deployment of *Historia Meriadoci* to illuminate the history of St Meiriadog, which he himself acknowledges as problematic, is on closer inspection insupportable. The only reason to link St Meiriadog to North Wales at all remains the place-name Meiriadog near Llanelwy (use of 'Meiriadog' as a personal name in the vicinity may be prompted by the existence of the place-name, and cannot be counted as separate testimony). Any attempt to milk the *Historia Meriadoci* for supporting evidence must be discountenanced.



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NB: The texts and editions cited above are those used, and not necessarily the best available. It should be noted in particular that Mildred Leake Day's editorial policy is suspect, and her translations on occasion downright incompetent. Volume III of Boydell & Brewer's new *Arthurian Archives* series contains a new edition and translation of *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, which I have not yet seen.

A dark and stormy knight (Ian Brown)

The Chalice and the Grail

Tristan Gray Hulse

Part 3 of *Relics of the Grail*

It seems that the history of the relics of the cup of the Last Supper - and in particular, perhaps, the Arculf/Adamnán narrative (Hulse 1997, 13ff) - might have played a part in the development of the Grail tradition.

A saying traditionally attributed to St Gall (d *c* 630), and recorded in Walafrid Strabo's *vita* of that saint, notes that

> *My blessed teacher Columbanus is accustomed to offer the sacrifice of the Mass in vessels of iron, because it is said that our Saviour was nailed to the cross with iron nails* (Joynt 1927, 91);

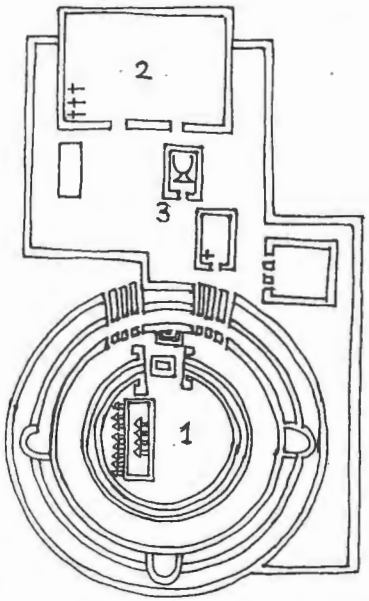
which suggests an early Celtic symbolic assimilation of the eucharistic vessels with relics of the final few days of Christ's earthly life.

Ireland is fortunate in the survival of several eucharistic vessels of the early Irish Church. The most famous of these is the Ardagh Chalice, discovered in the last century, an exquisite silver cup ornamented with enamelled mounts of golden filigree (*cf Treasures* 1977, pls 33, and *p*138 - the chalice was used as the basis of the cover illustration of *Pendragon XXV 2*). In 1980 a hoard of Christian vessels was found in a bog at Derrynavlan, the major items being a silver chalice and a large paten. The chalice bears a marked similarity to the Ardagh example, and both are dated to the eighth century.

Early chalices are basically of two types, and of two basic sizes. Both are derived from Classical prototypes. The larger chalices (known as ministerial chalices, as they were used to communicate the general congregation at Mass) had two large handles, and derived ultimately from the Classical *cantharus*. Smaller vessels, for the use of the priest celebrating the Mass, were handleless, and were the originals of the modern chalice-type (just such a small cup, of bronze, was found with the Ardagh chalice). A silver *cantharus* was found with the hoard of fourth century Christian silver at Water Newton, near Peterborough, in 1975, and may well have been used as a chalice by the local late Romano-British community.

Handled cup, Water Newton near Peterborough (Chris Lovegrove)

Silver chalice from Derrynaflan, Co Tipperary (Chris Lovegrove)



Arculf's plan from MS Vindobonensis 458 showing (1) Anastasis with sepulchre (2) Constantinian Martyrium and (3) exedra cum calice Domini "with the Lord's chalice" (Tristan Gray Hulse)

The use of handled chalices survived until the thirteenth century, by which time the handles were purely residual. (For all of this, *cf eg* Richardson 1980.) But all the known early examples had large handles, with only two exceptions: the silver chalices of Ardagh and Derrynavlan both have large bowls but tiny handles. It seems reasonable to seek an explanation for such a deviation from the norm; and a plausible explanation is near to hand.

The wide popularity of the seventh century *De locis sanctis* ("Concerning Holy Places") has already been noted, with its description of a large-bowled silver cup having "two little handles placed on it, one on each side" - a description which could equally well serve to designate the chalices of Derrynavlan and Ardagh. Remembering the example of St Columban's chalice, it seems reasonable to suggest that the anomalously-handled Irish chalices were deliberately designed in imitation of the cup of the Last Supper venerated by Arculf in Jerusalem. And given the contribution of Celtic traditionary strata to the developing Grail legend, it seems not impossible that such vessels, ever-present and visible on the altars of Celtic churches, and associated, *via* Adamnán's popular narrative, with the very first Mass, celebrated by Christ himself, may have given a definite "shape" to the Grail as it emerged into European consciousness.

It could even be - though, so far as I am aware, nothing is available to substantiate this - that such Celtic chalices had already begun to absorb certain elements of the pre-Christian traditions of the life-bestowing cauldron of regeneration - after all, the contents of the chalice, the eucharistic Species, the transubstantiated Body and Blood of Christ, had been experienced as the "nectar" or "medicine of immortality" in Christian theological speculation since the time of St Irenaeus (*c* 130-200).

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❖ *Walking with Merlin* ❖ Pamela Harvey

Leanne gazed out of the classroom window. Outside it was warm and sunny. True, the Summer had passed, and the tints of Autumn were in the leaves that rustled and whispered in the trees nearby.

The teacher's voice droned on. "The Sun is a quite remarkable star, and of course, the Earth is a quite ordinary planet - except that it has abundant life, and is the only world that we know for sure possesses this ..."

* * *

"My Lord, the prospects for this expedition are poor - we might be seen as invaders ..."

"I agree with the member for Poseidonis. This planet Earth is notorious for its wars and general imbalance. Years ago, on the continent of Seven Great Islands, which we both once inhabited, scientific experiments began the disturbance of Nature which Earth people continue to this day. They are an immature species. I urge caution."

"Might I suggest something - but I feel at present it must not be for open discussion." A hint of amusement gleamed in the wide slant eyes of the next speaker. Right now the Galactic Conference did not think it had much to laugh about.

The first speaker protested: "My lords Arthur and Merlin have had many covert discussions lately - we all need to know the details of their proposals; it is the right of every member of this group of nations; I, Lancelot, your servant, know much of this strange world, Earth."

He paused, and in his dark brown eyes a passion glowed, which was not lost on the convenor of the meeting. Arturius turned to him: "We have tarried so long out here in our stellar communities, in the worlds which grow in light and prosperity - we know the cries that reach us across the Void. We have encircled Earth with a girdle of protection, but beneath it the fires of disintegration have begun."

* * *

Leanne yawned. A cloud passed across the Sun. The deep blue sky etched it white like mountain snow at the edges, but the centre was dark, growing ever more black. It hung in the air as if waiting for someone to notice it. Her eyes were drawn to the blackness, to an intensity that reminded her once more of her dream. Or, perhaps the dimming sky reminded her of the eclipse, and the clouds that had prevented her viewing it. Disappointing, but the eerie atmosphere had been there, as now. Why now?

It was just an ordinary day. Not the weakening of the Sun in the face of a giant shadow. Not the feeling of the emptiness in all life, in her own body ... But now it was like that again ... Then she remembered the dream that night - how the disappointment and depression had been dispelled by a strange cloud, from which stepped a figure clothed in soft light. His arms reached out to embrace her and she was caught up in a warmth she had never before known ...

A sarcastic voice interrupted her reverie. "Leanne, if you paid more attention to me instead of gazing out of that window you might have a remote chance of getting your 'A' levels."

A knock sounded at the door. The teacher called out, exasperated: "Come in. We are in the middle of a Science lesson, but don't let that bother you!"

The man entered rather sheepishly. He was thirty or possibly a little more, blond with darker streaks, and his slant eyes suggested both humour and a touch of mystery. Leanne noticed all this in a glance, but she was quite close to him as he crossed the room with a slight swagger and said: "I'm the supply teacher - I thought I was expected."

The irritable reply confirmed his mistake, but he grinned, and said he would just listen. The lesson continued: "The Universe still has mysteries we cannot fathom, but we are the first people to reach out and discover anything about it ..."

"Atlantis, Gondwana, Lemuria, Mu, Lyonnesse, Arthur." Leanne was lost in the dream once more - the voice, the face of the speaker which had seemed veiled in Sun-gold, the waving hair which was both light and dark, the eyes which glowed amber as Autumn leaves, but spoke of the fire of Spring - "Who are you?" she whispered, then came back from her dream memory and realized the question also applied to the young man standing not far from her. He looked at her suddenly. In his eyes she could not make out that much - for some reason she blushed. He turned away with a smile.

Leanne heard his voice. It, too, haunted her. As if it was quite familiar. "I am actually here to teach mythology - er, history and its relation to mythology - there does seem to have been a mix-up. I believe I came to the wrong place. I do apologize." He turned to leave the classroom.

* * *

Leanne was walking home. She looked up as she heard her named spoken. And recognized the voice. She gazed once more into the wide

slant eyes. She recalled what he had told the class about the various myths of Britain, in particular, and knew she was still in love with Arthur, the hero of her vision. The world was full of legends, many, no doubt, based on fact. She had already fancied herself in love with several characters in these stories of men nobler and stronger than most, more beautiful, more - understanding. Yes, that was the word ...

But I don't believe in true love, she thought, even as her eyes rested on the form of the man who had just caught up with her. And I certainly don't believe in love for two at once.

"Arthur is just a dream to you, isn't he?" the man ventured. His tone implied: 'I am reality'.

Leanne felt awkward. She had grown up in an age when people did not talk about the birds and bees any more, when life was explained, and girls with any sense were realistic. She avoided most 'come on' lines. Her only previous boyfriend had been chosen with care. This stranger was older, and fancied himself. But why this haunted feeling? And why, when the dream of Arthur kept fading and coming back again, like the Sun behind a cloud ... Why was <u>now</u> so reminiscent of a memory that had never been...?

The Autumn sky was dimming; in the West the Sun glared red. Or was it the Sun? The fireball came on only gradually, then with a breath-snatching speed it cleaved the atmosphere, streaking overhead as the wind screamed. Leanne clung to the man. She could not take in the shock. As she felt his heartbeat, unlike hers, not wild with panic, but calm, she wondered what damage the meteorite could do, where it would land?

But she eventually looked up. Everything was tranquil. The man's deep eyes gazed down at her.

"There is no danger - you only saw what you feared. But I can show you the truth. I am Merlin, and my magic is for all time, every season. I am part of every world that seeks wisdom; I have been part of your life forever. Arthur is the Sun in its Essence, not the scientific explanations but the Heart - a star that reflects the Great Sun of the Beginning that never was - for it is beyond Time."

Leanne sobbed: "I loved Arthur once - in fantasies, as a man - I wished he would come back to this island of Britain. What is happening? Why are you here? You can't be who you say. These things don't happen. Not even with all this Millennium nonsense."

The man smiled. "People make out they know everything. They speak of the Laws of Nature, but spend a lifetime discovering their true selves - *perhaps*."

"What did I see? Was it a UFO?" Leanne shivered at how scared she was a few minutes ago.

"Possibly. Perhaps not. I wanted you to see that I am not just an ordinary person - you need me. You are so alone because you see below the surface of life. I will show you the borders of Avalon ... I will ..."

Leanne retreated a little. "N-no. Not yet. Perhaps later." She tripped, half fell over a grassy knoll. As she put out her hands to save herself, she noticed... oh...! The grass was wet and spongy to her touch. She landed with a bump, but it was not too bad. She looked around. 'Merlin' had vanished. This time it was a totally convincing trick.

She dusted herself off. Then she picked up the dragon-shaped ornament that fell out of her pocket. She remembered the time in the Isles of Scilly. The woman who sold it to her, and her words: "It is like one found by the shore of Lyonnesse - these islands were once part of that land. Where Arthur had his Court." Among so many other places, Leanne thought. And Lyonesse was part of Atlantis, the northernmost part - Atlantis, where the Sun-Lords reigned, whose lost Science reached out to the stars ...

Leanne did not believe it, but neither did she credit the claims of modern sceptics. Who peered into the Void, and saw - just the stars.

She felt a hand grasping her own. She turned, and saw - Merlin. No, not the young man who had told her that. The figure was of an elderly man, dressed in a long cloak, flowing in the slight breeze, its magic symbols half hidden, tantalisingly evasive to her eyes. He was still attractive, with the blend of white among his wavy locks of fair hair, the mystery that held hers was young; suddenly the lines of age smoothed out. The face also. The hair was once again clear light gold, streaked with dark. The cloak was real, too.

"You are clever," Leanne said, truly awed.

He smiled. "Science is clever - I, Merlin, am wise. Arthur will come again - see, the sky lightens from Avalon." The sunset's afterglow, seen only rarely, suffused the sky. The figure was quite clear-cut; it strode across the landscape, and Leanne did not care it was just a vision granted to her by Merlin. He clasped her hand again. His touch was warm - warm as the Sun that glowed forever in her heart.

THE MISSES OF AVALON

Visions of Empowerment

Fred Stedman-Jones

News reached us rather late that Marion Zimmer Bradley has died and that her ashes were to be scattered at Glastonbury some time in November. Her names will be remembered as the author of *The Mists of Avalon* (1982), a trail-blazing novel which focuses powerfully on the concerns of women in the Arthurian legend. The book cover announced, boldly, 'here is the magical legend of King Arthur, vividly retold through the eyes and lives of the women who wielded power from behind the throne.' This novel was an early and brave attempt to challenge the 'otherness' of femininity in the Arthurian legends.

Most pre-20th century Arthurian fiction is composed by men and the stories revolve around men and their deeds. Good women support their men, obey and are chaste; they value themselves through men's eyes and compete with each other for men's favours. They are allowed to stand on pedestals as long as they behave themselves. There is tension underlying this order, however, the male fear of female sexuality is expressed in elusive temptresses, lascivious seducers and magic-working women who threaten male potency.

But in Bradley's novel it is the men who become the Other, we see mainly through the eyes of the women, primarily Morgaine's but also those of Nimue, Viviane, Morgause, Ninian and Raven. Each woman is developed as a character while representing an aspect of female wholeness. The novel is set in 5th century Romano-Celtic Britain, in a world of magic and pagan beliefs to which the women belong with the exception of Gwenhwyfar. They form a sorority, part of the older pagan religion of Druids and worshippers of Ceridwen the Great Mother and their symbol is the moon. The success of the novel lies in these strong, vibrant women whose power is linked to their sexuality. Bradley denies female sexual 'otherness', these women value themselves and own their sexuality as part of themselves and under their own control.

A primary conflict in the kingdom is that between the old religion and the new repressive form of Christianity that is taking over. Gwenhwyvar is the mouthpiece for this narrow faith which is set in opposition to the life-affirming paganism of the other women. She uses Arthur's love for her to manipulate him in order that he will deny freedom of worship in the land. In contrast, Morgause craves political power for herself and will condone any means to achieve her ambition. It is significant that she loses her political power as her sexual allure fades.

This personal psychological depth in the characters is achieved powerfully in Nimue. She is a feminist model, a strong committed woman who is descended from a line of such women. Raised in a matriarchy, that of the priestesses of Avalon, she is chosen to actively counter the growing Christian influence. Like a man she plans and enjoys her seduction of Kevin, the Merlin figure of the novel, and by it gains power and knowledge. She uses her sexual power consciously to avenge the man's treachery, to achieve justice for the cause she believes in but in doing so she loses herself, she denies her own sexuality for a cause, an ideal. She denies her own happiness and in losing her lover she loses herself and commits suicide.

Bradley follows the traditional Arthurian story faithfully and in doing so traps her women in the men's world. Patriarchal power structures are the only models available to these women. They imitate these structures based on struggle and conflict and so fail to achieve the power they seek and to reverse the polarity of their world. The same imbalance of power remains at the end, the author has not solved the problems of gender and power-sharing. 'It may be that feminists cannot rework society's myths but rather may have to create new myths, new structured plots ... yet the character of Nimue allows some hope that these texts may some day break free, and may learn to do so without having to die.' (1)

Much more contemporary Arthurian fiction is now woman-centred, with the emergence of female authors who depict strong women characters and explore feminist ideas and values for a largely female readership. To do this some writers choose to escape from the traditional stories which uphold and reinforce patriarchal values by rewriting the Arthurian legend, creating new myths, and we can see this freedom being exploited in the latest offering in this genre, *Guenevere: The Queen of the Summer Country* by Rosalind Miles.

In this version Arthur is seeking to become High King and claim his birthright in the Middle Kingdom, whilst proud and beautiful Guenevere takes over the throne of the summer Country on her mother's death ... 'From the mystical centre of goddess worship she surveys the heroic exploits of the new High King, before summoning him to her side.'

Whether such manipulation of the Arthurian stories succeeds as literature depends on whether the author transcends mere feminist

Howard Pyle's *The Demoiselle Blanchefleur*

polemic. Myths normally grow out of the life experiences of the people they belong to; Bradley's 'failure' achieves real tragic intensity in parts but sword and sorcery female dominance may remain rooted at mere wish-fulfilment. (2)

Perhaps we may offer our own empowered women members the opportunity to write an obituary for Ms Bradley. An article on feminist Arthurian novels would be very welcome or a short story perhaps. You might win the Jess Foster prize - a year's free subscription!

Notes

1. Karen Fuog 'Imprisoned in the Phallic Oak: Marion Zimmer Bradley and Merlin's Seductress' *Quondam et Futurus* Vol 1 No 1 Memphis, Spring 1991
2. It can be done, see member Helen Hollick's trilogy *Pendragon's Banner* [Heinemann 1994, 1995, 1997]. Helen presents us with a fully realized Gwenhwyfar that anyone's Arthur would give his kingdom to make his life's companion.
3. On 7th March 1993, Ken Livingstone was interviewed by Sue Lawley on *Desert Island Discs*. He chose *The Mists of Avalon* as the book he would take with him to his island. He said he was particularly interested in the struggle between two belief systems and the concentration on the female point of view. I invited him to write us an article but he said he was busy in the House with the Maastricht Debate. I expect he's even busier with other problems now!

Reviews

Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack
King Arthur in America
Arthurian Studies 41
D S Brewer 1999 £45.00 / $75.00
0 85991 543 3 hb 394pp

This publication badly needs a subtitle since the cover does not give a clear indication of what it is about, and without reading the blurb within you may well think it concerns Arthur sailing from Britain and to the Americas. Well, it isn't anything to do with that, thankfully! (Heaves a sigh of relief!)

King Arthur in America is about the development of American literature through the medium of the Arthurian genre. Delving into this field of study I entered a whole new world. Of course, I was aware of a good number of recent American novels with Arthurian connections and Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (plus the movie of the same name) but less so with the large number of stories, plays and poetry related to the Arthurian legends coming from the United States.

Alan Lupack and Barbara Tepa Lupack have explored the Arthurian scene from the very beginnings of the United States to the future with the continuing Star Wars saga. There is such a vast amount of information in this publication that it would be impossible for me to truly do it justice. However, I will attempt to give a little of the flavour of *King Arthur in America* by listing its chapters and then pointing out a few snippets that interested me.

The authors begin with Arthurian Literature in America before Twain; then Reaction to Tennyson (Parody, and Visions of Courageous Achievement); From Twain to the Twenties; Beyond The Waste Land (Fitzgerald, Hemingway and Faulkner); Steinbeck; Contemporary Novelists; and The Arthurian Tradition and American Popular Culture.

We owe the United States a certain amount of gratitude for some very interesting retellings of the Arthurian tales, though I don't like some of the more recent attempts to tell the historical story. When it comes to the classical tales America approached the scene in a rather different way. Though writers may have admired their counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic, because Americans fought to separate themselves from the monarchical rule of England, King Arthur posed a bit of a problem!

American authors followed the same tales but gave them a relationship to the Declaration of Independence. Malory's version of the tales became more useful because King Arthur was only in the sidelights and the knights played the main parts. Their attitudes were changed to have an American slant on Medieval life, a process which the authors call Americanizing or democratizing the Arthurian legend.

This version of Arthurian chivalry appears right from the start, and even the retelling of Merlin's predictions, by the Welsh-born American Joseph Leigh in 1807, makes the Revolution part of the prophecies. Leigh tones down the glorification of the monarchy and sets a pattern that is to continue through American Arthurian literature. This democratization theme links the past with the 'present' when Mark Twain sent Hank Morgan back to King Arthur's Court. Though this is the adventure that most of us will know, there was another similar story before this by one Max Adeler (the pseudonym of Charles Heber Clark) who wrote *The Fortunate Island*. This story tells of Professor Baffin and his daughter Matilda being shipwrecked on an island which had separated from Europe in the Arthurian period and still lives in the Middle Ages. Adeler has Baffin using his modern know-how in the same way that later Hank frustrates the knights at King Arthur's court. The difference between the two works is, according to the authors, the level of satire.

In general most Arthurian literature is a retelling of the Malory version and two of the best known are those of Sidney Lanier, with his *The Boy's King Arthur*, and Howard Pyle's series of Arthurian books. I remember some years ago helping out at the Mold Library HQ when a group of Americans visited the Arthurian Collection, and was impressed by the amount of interest they showed in the Collection's copies of Pyle's books. These publications - *The Story of King Arthur and his Knights*, *The Story of Launcelot and his Companions*, *The Story of the Champions of the Round Table*, and *The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur* generated considerable nostalgia amongst those American visitors. Pyle was more than an excellent adapter of the tales, he also illustrated all his books, both in colour and black and white.

One fascinating spin-off from the American version of the legends were the boys' and girls' clubs set up by a minister named William Bryan Forbush. Influenced by the ideals of chivalry and his love of the Arthurian tales, Forbush, at the turn of the century, organised clubs, which he called Castles, to solve a growing problem of juvenile delinquency. These were at first for boys, who progressed from page to esquire and then knight under the guidance of adult leaders called Merlins. Later, he established, for girls, the Queens of Avalon led by Ladies of the Lake. Clubs sprang up all over the United States and at one point the membership numbered over 130,000 young people.

The majority of American Arthurian literature is about the Medieval King Arthur rather than the Dark Age historical character. However, a number of novels have been written on the period. What is quite unusual is that they seem to appear in waves - in intervals of around thirty years. The earliest was *Cian of the Chariots* by William H Babcock, published in 1898. This concerned the warrior-poet Cian and his part in Arthur's battles against the Saxons. Then it was not until 1926, when Farnham Bishop and Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur wrote *The Altar of the Legions*, that another historical novel was published. This one was about Owain and his daughter Gwenliuan in the years following the death of Arthur: *Dux Bellorum*. Another thirty years passed, then came *The Pagan King* by Edison Marshall. This book has Arthur giving up the kingship to become a wandering bard, which is intriguing because the oldest Triads talk of Arthur as a poet. Strangely enough, another thirty or so years went by before a spate of historical (or near historical) novels appeared. These included Parke Goodwin's *The Firelord*, Gillian Bradshaw's *Hawk of May*, followed soon by *Kingdom of Summer* and *In Winter's Shadow*, and Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*. The authors devote considerable space to the latter which employed some controversial ideas.

Another interesting aspect of American Arthurian literature is the way the legends were used in contemporary novels. The one that comes to mind is Bernard Malamud's *The Natural*, featuring the Arthur-like Roy Hobbs as the oldest baseball rookie playing for the New York Knights and using this almost magical bat - Wonderboy. But it is surprising to find out that the legends influenced and were used by F Scott Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemmingway in *The Sun Also Rises*, in *Soldier's Pay* by William Faulkner, by Ken Kersey in his *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and in *Sophie's Choice* by William Styron. Also considerable use of the legends was made in *Last Go Round: A Real Western* by Ken Kersey and Ken Babbs: this takes the Knights of the Round Table into the last years of the Wild West and has three unlikely Grail questers in the form of a black cowboy, a Native American cowboy and a young 'greenhorn' from Tennessee. Other authors making good use of the legends include Walker Percy, Jersey Kosinski, Bobbie Ann Mason, John Updike and Thomas Berger. The latter also wrote an Arthurian novel entitled

Arthur Rex, but is more famous for his exploration of Wild West mythology with *Little Big Man*.

Alan and Barbara finish off this fascinating adventure into the world of American Arthurian literature with a look at the popular culture of America. Here they discuss such topics as movies, the fine arts, comics, board and computer games, adult and children's novels and the use of the legends in everything from street names to product titles. How about Merlin Magic Doughnut Mix, Excalibur dessert pies, Round Table Pizza and King Arthur Flour! They also briefly touch on the Arthurian theme in the New Orleans Mardi Gras, a Camp Camelot for over-weight teenagers and the famous (infamous?!) Kennedy Camelot.

Of course, as I mentioned earlier, it is not possible to do justice to a book of this size. I have hardly mentioned some of the more famous writers and wish I had the space to investigate further attitudes that make American different from British, French or German Arthurian literature. There can be no doubt that this is a fascinating book. So, I would suggest that you read *King Arthur in America*, and if you think the price is beyond your means (and I must admit it is beyond mine), ask your local library to obtain a copy for you.

Charles Evans-Günther

Robert Holdstock
Gate of Ivory
Voyager (HarperCollins) 1998 £6.99
0 00 648002 0 pb 348pp

At the heart of this fantasy is the Arthurian tale of *Culhwch and Olwen*, but there are echoes of other Celtic tales including *The Spoils of Annwn*, motifs from classical mythology and references to more recent fiction such as Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. The hero, like his father before him, ventures into an ancient woodland peopled by figures from myth and legend and emanations from dreams and imaginations, following a personal quest born in tragic circumstances.

The story draws you in and along, despite apparent inconsistencies, with a rare sense of urgency. I read Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* some time ago but though I missed the intervening volumes was just as enchanted with this, the most recent addition to a related sequence of titles. An original but sympathetic approach to the Matter of Britain, then, but don't mistake it for Rachel Levy's classic (if outdated) 1948 study *The Gate of Horn*, even if it shares similar material. And don't be put off by his idiosyncratic transliteration of Celtic names and occasional mistakes (*eg* "Trwch" for Twrch Trwyth).

Chris Lovegrove

Joy Wilson
Tristan and Iseult: a Cornish love story
Bossiney Books, Launceston 1999 £3.99
1 899383 20 4 pb 48pp illus

Covering similar ground to Forrester Roberts' booklet recently reviewed in these pages, Joy Wilson's quest for the origins of the Tristan legend centre mainly around Cornwall and Béroul's version of the story.

First published in 1989 as *Cornwall: Land of Legend*, this concise study includes the revised views on the secular status of Tintagel, as developed in the 80s, and the researches of Swiss professor André de Mandach on an additional line to the Tristan Stone which may or may not include a version of Iseult's name (which we featured in past issues of *Pendragon*). Well illustrated with monochrome and colour photos as well as a location map, this is a knowledgeable yet no-nonsense guide for the interested reader.

Chris Lovegrove

Mary Caine
Celtic Saints and the Glastonbury Zodiac
Capall Bann Publishing 1998 £9.95
186 163022 0 pb 150pp illus

This is very much a book for the believer in the Glastonbury and all that entails. For my part I must begin by informing the reader that I do not believe in the Glastonbury Zodiac. I see this, and other Zodiacs believed to be 'carved' on the landscape, as being oversized Herman Rorschach ink-blot tests!

There is little reason to believe that the Celtic peoples of the pre-Roman period saw the same images in the sky as those in the Zodiac. Living in Japan I have noticed that a completely different tradition has grown up, mainly influenced by China. Their Zodiac consists of twelve animals both real and imaginary. The Celtic people, who originated in Eastern Europe, were likely to have had more in common with Siberia than the Middle East. Of course, by the Middle Ages, the people of Britain had been influenced by the Romans, who in turn had been influenced by Middle Eastern people, and so it isn't surprising to find that some manuscripts may show connections between the Zodiac and the Knights of the Round Table. Having said that I still wanted to give this publication a fair reading, so tried hard to put aside my own bias.

However, aside from constant attempts to fit things into a set pattern of belief, *Celtic Saints* utilizes sources that are at best vague and at worst fabrications. Ms Caine makes extensive use of the works of Edward Williams and Morien Morgan. (The latter considered himself the spiritual descendant of the former, and the former created a fantasy world in which he was

the last in a long line of secret bards and druids. The works of Mr Williams, better known as Iolo Morganwg, should be avoided like the plague!) She also uses material by Lewis Spence, another dubious author!

In recent years Iolo Morganwg has been used over and over again to prove numerous theories. But, dear old Ned lived in another world inspired by opium and an inferiority complex. When Ned was writing, precise research methods were only just coming into use and few questioned his publications. Years later scholars took it on themselves to look into Ned's sources and discovered a web of fantasy mixed with material gleaned from genuine manuscripts. A good example is to compare the Triads as published by Dr Rachel Bromwich with those of Iolo Morganwg.

The author seems to think that Medieval writers were keeping something from us. She talks of William of Malmesbury "speaking in code" and that "Robert de Borron possessed a Secret ..." as if these texts were deliberately written to hide a kind of profound philosophy. Cathars and Templars are also mentioned. Serious studies of them show far less mystery than some authors would like.

There are a good few mistakes in *Celtic Saints*. Take for example her explanation of the name Pwyll. She claims it is "Powell to you and me," meaning a pool and "originally Ap Hwyl, son of the sun". Powell is actually from *ap Howell* or *Hywel* and does not mean either a pool or the son of the sun. It is *Hywel* not *hwyl*, and *pwyll* may mean "discretion"! She talks of Howell the Good (presumably Hywel Dda) as being a "king of South Wales *c* 500 AD," which is four hundred and fifty years astray since he died in 950. She also mentions a Walter Mapp being the archdeacon of Oxford who loaned Geoffrey of Monmouth the famous "ancient book". (Sighs heavily!)

To those who already believe in these theories this review is irrelevant. To those sitting on the fence I would suggest they read this publication with an open mind but consult other material before coming down on one side or the other. The cover is nice and the illustrations well done.

Charles Evans-Günther

Anthony Rhys
Celtic Legends of Pembrokeshire
Llanerch Publishers 1999 £7.95
1 86143 073 6 pb 139pp

In 1995 Anthony was a student at Lampeter University College when he wrote to me as editor to say he was researching Cuchulain, the Irish legendary hero, with a view to writing a book. I advised him to leave that to the Irish and use his Welsh background and ability to speak his mother tongue to create a book on the legends and folklore of Glamorgan, his and my home county.

In 1996 the book appeared, *Celtic Legends of Glamorgan* (Llanerch, reviewed 26/2, Spring 1997) and Anthony wrote to tell me he was embarking on a book for each of the Welsh counties. This is the second, and the advances in his use of sources, breadth of material, soundness of judgement and improved literary style are most impressive. The saints, Arthur, giants, standing stones, the fairy folk, they are all there and the bibliography shows clearly that Anthony is well on the way to establishing himself as an expert in this field while still in his mid-twenties. Do let me know when you embark on Cardiganshire and Flintshire, Anthony, we have friends in the Society ready to open their collections for your perusal.

Fred Stedman-Jones

Alistair Moffat
Arthur and the Lost Kingdoms
Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1999 £20.00
0 297 64324 X hb 282pp illus

Thank goodness these "lost" kingdoms are not "holy" kingdoms! At least we don't have to suffer a rant about secret histories suppressed by the ignorant English and the arrogant establishment so familiar from similar histories, "true" stories and "final" discoveries. Instead, the major part of this book is given over to a study of the area between the Walls, both Antonine and Hadrianic, before, during and after the Roman period. Moffat, a native of the Scottish Border country, sympathetically evokes the Celtic tribes - the Damnonii, Novantae, Selgovae and Votadini - who, squeezed between Gaelic, Pictish and Anglian peoples, forged successor kingdoms in the Dark Ages. He is clearly trying to restore a sense of forgotten history to the Lowland Scots and, several quibbles aside (such as projecting back late and post-medieval lore onto the Iron Age and early medieval period, and lack of caution over placename evidence), I think he is largely successful.

It is, however, when we come to the association of Arthur with this area that the real problems start. Much is made of the reference to Arthur in the northern poem of *The Gododdin*, but the critical apparatus expected is largely missing. Gildas, Nennius and the Welsh Annals are taken largely on trust, with no sense that there are major textual and contextual problems. Unexplained liberties are taken with the translations of these texts - for example, we are offered a version of the Badon Hill reference ("in which Arthur destroyed 960 men in a single charge on one day, and no one rode down as

many as he did by himself") without being told this is not a strict translation but an interpretation. Further liberties are taken with the traditional chronology (Arthur's death occurs "in AD 517"), again without discussion.

There are curious omissions, too. Moffat talks a lot about Trimontium, the Roman site near the three Eildon Hills, but never appears to mention Sir Walter Scott's account of the legend of Arthur's sleeping knights. There is much discussion about Roxburgh, but nowhere is there mention of Guillaume le Clerc's early 13th century parody *Fergus of Galloway, Knight of King Arthur*, much of which is set in this precise region and which might in part be accounted for by local traditions.

I remain to be convinced that an early medieval warrior called Arthur was exclusively located in lowland Scotland, let alone Wales, Cornwall or any other area. If I was to take a position on the origin of the legends it would be as a pluralist, and, despite the author's undoubted passion, this book in no way shakes that viewpoint.

Chris Lovegrove

K R Dark
Civitas to Kingdom:
British Political Continuity 300-800
Leicester University Press / Cassell 1999 £19.99
0 7185 0206 X pb 322pp illus

Continuity used to be a dirty word for certain old-style archaeologists, wedded to the concept of "waves" of invaders to these isles and keen to stave off latter-day druid mystics and leyline enthusiasts. Now the balance has righted a bit, it is good to see attempts to address the likely dynamics of social, cultural, political and religious change in the post-Roman period.

Dark's study first appeared in hardback in 1994, and apart from minor corrections remains essentially unchanged. He looks at how nearly four centuries of Roman rule may not have entirely obliterated the pre-Roman Iron Age polities of England and Wales, and discusses the meagre evidence for continuity into successor Celtic kingdoms. He of necessity takes a cautious, even minimalist, view of that evidence, questioning assumptions (such as the value of the Llandaff charters for the history this period) but also speculating on the possible survival of artefacts (such as the Late Antique illuminated manuscript *Vergilius Romanus*, which he argues was produced in sub-Roman Britain).

The text is reference-driven, which doesn't make for smooth and easy reading. That aside, the overall thrust of his argument is fairly clear. This volume is one of Leicester University Press' Studies in the Early History of Britain, which includes Elisabeth Okasha's *Corpus of Early Christian Inscribed Stones of South-West Britain*, Wendy Davies' *Wales in the Early Middle Ages* and Barbara Yorke's *Wessex in the Early Middle Ages*. While pricey (especially the hardback editions) this series deserves to be better known.

Chris Lovegrove

BookWorm

ARTHUR IN FLINTSHIRE

At the International Congress of Arthurian Studies at Cardiff, 1969, Professor Melville Richard asserted that the origin of the Arthurian legend was to be found in Wales or in traditions which 'found their home in Wales and are bound up with the history and geography of the area called Wales.' 'Consequently,' he argued, 'the primary sources for Arthurian studies are those written in Welsh or the Latin of early Welsh writers, Arthurian scholars need to know Celtic languages and literature at first hand.'

In recent years a number of books have appeared written by Arthurian 'detectives' who obviously do not qualify as Arthurian 'scholars' by Dr Richard's definition. One of their hallmarks is that they refer to 'rare manuscripts' that they have obviously not read in the original and which are mainly to be found in the Bodleian and British Museum libraries. One work has repeated the title *Didcot* (sic) *Perceval* even in its reprinted editions.

Steve Blake and Scott Lloyd of Flintshire, both good friends of Pendragon, have taken this lesson to heart and their book - due to be published next April - is based on a lengthy study programme at the celebrated Arthurian Collection at Library HQ Mold, supplemented by other collections in Wales. Their approach has been a methodical trawl through John Gwenogvryn Evans's seminal orthographical volumes, the *Myvyrian Archaiology*, the *Brut Dingestow* (Geoffrey) and the *Trioedd Ynys Prydain* (Triads) - in order to read the earliest texts in their original format wherever possible. They have also combed the works of Flintshire antiquarians such as Angharad Llwyd of Caerwys and John Jones of Ysgeifiog, employing onomastic studies to find further evidence in place names and personal names.

The authors tell us that their publishers have insisted at aiming the book at the 'High Street' reader, but the integrity of their approach should lead to an interesting and valuable study - a picture of a Welsh Arthur in a Welsh context, written by Welshmen.

Fred Stedman-Jones

MYSTERIES

Geoffrey Ashe has a new title out entitled ***The Book of Prophecy***, published by Blandford at £18.99. According to a West Country magazine ["Tor Stories" *Folio 58* November 1999], he considers his new book to be his most important. "People tend to think either that all prophecies are true ... or that none are. What I do think is that there are a very small number of prophecies which can't be explained by reason."

Lionel Fanthorpe the Fortean Father has also been busy recently: with his wife Patricia the vicar has produced three volumes which include Arthurian-related matter, though to what degree of accuracy is anyone's guess. ***The World's Most Mysterious People*** {Hounslow pb 240pp £11.99] mentions both Arthur and Merlin, while ***The World's Most Mysterious Places*** [287pp £11.99] features Glastonbury. Finally, ***The World's Greatest Unsolved Mysteries*** [211pp £10.99] includes the Grail. From past experience I would expect a lot of hype and little enlightenment. But I may be wrong.

The Grail of course is a magnet for conspiracy theorists and lost secrets buffs. Stephen Sora's ***The Lost Treasure of the Knights Templar*** [Destiny pb 293pp £13.99] revisits the Templars-in-America hypothesis, with references to the Oak Island Money Pit, the Holy Blood and the Holy Grail, the Sinclairs and Rosslyn Chapel. Grierson and Munro-Hay however travel in the opposite direction to return to Ethiopian origin theories in ***The Ark of the Covenant*** [Weidenfeld and Nicolson hb 372pp £20.00]. In the wake of Graham Hancock's identification of the Ark as the Grail, they find that various nutters have turned up there each claiming to be the rightful keeper and demanding the relic as theirs.

The Grail is also examined in ***The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*** [Floris Books pb 288pp £14.99]. Edited by Ralph White, with input from John Matthews among others, there may perhaps be less here on the grail as physical object and more on arcane traditions.

Finally, Christine Poulson's ***The quest for the Grail*** [Manchester University Press £17.99 pb 0 7190 5537 7] may not be what it seems; subtitled *Arthurian legend in British art 1840-1920* it looks a sumptuous and authoritative publication.

HISTORIES

Moving to more distant times, Anne Ross' new book, simply titled ***Druids*** [Tempus £19.99 hb 0 7524 1433 X], is a study based mainly on Irish Gaelic texts but covering the usual range of evidence to reconstruct the religious life associated with these figures. **Tempus Books** continue to bring out other new titles of potential interest to *aficionados* of Arthurian history and archaeology. Richard Reece's ***The Later Roman Empire: an archaeology AD 150-600*** [0 7524 1449 6 hb £19.99] looks particularly at the surviving material culture, while Guy de la Bédoyère's ***The Golden Age of Roman Britain*** [0 7524 1417 8 hb £25.00] concentrates on the fourth century, which saw Britain increase in prosperity at a time of decline elsewhere in the Empire. Finally, Jeremy Knight's ***The End of Antiquity*** [0 7524 1448 8 hb £19.99] is subtitled *Archaeology, Society and Religion AD 235-700* and examines the transition between the late Roman and post-Roman periods, mostly in Western Europe. Other details from

http://www.tempus-publishing.com

Lloyd and Jenny Laing's ***The Picts and the Scots*** [Sutton hb 1998] was originally £16.99, and is now available £10.00 cheaper from Oxbow Books (plus £3.00 postage) at Park End Place, Oxford OX1 1HN, together with other bargains - their website is at

http://www.oxbowbooks.com

The Picts are associated with curious carved symbols and animals. Courtney Davis' ***Celtic Beasts: animal motifs and zoomorphic design in Celtic Art*** [£16.99] is co-authored by Dennis O'Neill and may well include many of the beasties of Pictland (including what may be versions of the Loch Ness monster).

Chris Lovegrove

the board

MIDSUMMER DAZE

A millennium monument is due to be installed at **Cadbury Castle** hillfort in 2000 by South Cadbury Parish Council. According to an article in *The Western Gazette* the plan is to build a **round stone table** on the hill "the size of a normal dining table" which will point to other local historical sites. It is intended to unveil the monument on June 24th to commemorate King Arthur who, local tradition has it, appears on the site every year at midsummer.

Meanwhile, during the heady days of summer 1999 when eclipses were all the rage (remember? See how it all comes flooding back) **Ken Kesey** and the **Merry Pranksters** prepared to summon Merlin in Cornwall [*The Guardian* Thursday August 12]. The first performance of their ***Where's Merlin?*** pageant was at the Minack Theatre, and the production ended on August 28 at Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh. The Pranksters played the Fairy Folk, Mordred's severed head was returned to its owner, and Puck intoned "Spirits of the sun, arise!" on the day the dragon ate (and regurgitated) the sun. Obviously the magic worked... (Thanks to Steve Sneyd for this item.)

Sculptor Edd Harrison, from Pont-siân in West Wales, has been adding to **Caerleon**'s collection of carvings in the Ffwrwm arts centre off the High Street. According to *The Western Daily Press* [August 11, 1999] he has created a "beautiful and erotic" statue depicting **Tristan and Isolde** "captured in a sensual embrace" as part of a two-week long project. "I had an idea before I started but this has turned out different," he said. "I like to feel the wood and the over-all balance of it as I am working," he is quoted in the article 'Carving a legend: Arthurian myths inspire erotic work of art' by Matt Holmes, sent in by Kevin Byrne.

MERLIN'S MART

As we have seen before, it's not always clear when the name of Merlin is purloined for a product whether Arthur's wizard or the bird of prey is intended. BBC2's aviation magazine *The Air Show* [Thursday 16th September 1999] featured not one but two Merlin products, both possibly drawing on the spell of these twin associations.

The largest gathering of P51 Mustangs since the Korean War took place recently in Florida. Their original American engines were soon replaced by the superior Rolls Royce **Merlin** engines which continue to demonstrate their power and reliability.

Later in the programme the Royal Navy's newest helicopter was featured being tested by 700 Squadron. The **Merlin** follows in the wake of the Nimrod, SeaKing and Lynx helicopters and may well surpass them all. Despite its size we were told than it has the manoeuvrability of the Lynx, due in part to its use of composite materials lighter than alloy metals.

Needing a crew of only three, as opposed to twelve on the Nimrod, the Merlin's onboard computer systems mean that datalinks can be maintained with the mother ship. It can carry either cargo or twenty troops and can comfortably manage a speed of 130 knots, with up to four hours endurance. I don't however know if it can foretell the future as well.

The Observer Magazine for 21 November featured a Christmas gift gadget called the **Excalibur Night Navigator**, available for £129.00 from Brainwaves. The catalogue no is MR2690, and you can telephone 0870 908 7019 or order from www.brainwaves.co.uk

In 24/2 (May 1994) we mentioned *Puzzle-Plex, the amazing 3-D Jigsaw of Camelot Castle ... Over 600 pieces ... Only £32.00 ...* Well now, A H W Smith points out that WHSmith (no relation) are offering (on page 22 of their *Christmas at WHSmith* brochure) the **Puzz 3D Camelot Puzzle** which "recreates the fabled home of the legendary King Arthur". If this is the same as the Puzzle-Plex - though WHSmith claim it as an exclusive - then it is good value at only £19.99.

The latest hand-painted porcelain collector doll from Franklin Mint was **Morgan Le Fay**. I can't do better than quote the promotional literature passed on by Ade Dimmick:

She was the most famous enchantress in all of Camelot. The unforgettable Morgan Le Fay. Now this legendary seductress from Arthurian legend is brought to life ... clothed in fantastic robes of shimmering chiffon, with a flowing cloak of gleaming silver lamé. On her cascading curls, a hand-made beaded headpiece. In one hand, she holds her brass chalice, from which she spins her spells...

Elsewhere we are told that she "firmly grasps her *golden* chalice" - now, that's real alchemy! The doll, at nearly 17 inches (over 42 cm) was available until June for £145.00. For further details of this and other Arthurian collectibles

write to Franklin Mint Limited, 1 South Quay Plaza, London E14 9WS.

Andrew H W Smith tells us that there is a cosmetics company called **Avalon** who produce two body sprays called *Pink Mist* and *Purple Mist*, and suggests that this enables would-be Ladies of the Lake to appear beclouded in the 'Mists' of Avalon... The firm's address is PO Box 46, St Alban's, Herts AL2 2AQ. (See also the note on Marion Zimmer Bradley in *BookWorm*.)

It won't come as a surprise to learn that the Wessex Hotel in Street, near Glastonbury, has a conference facility called the **Avalon Suite**, or a **King Arthur Restaurant**. Their logo features a Saxon warrior with an oddly familiar **wyvern** emblem... High Street, Street, Somerset BA16 0EF, tel 01458 443383.

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

In line 3, column 2, page 33 of the last issue, nine words of W M S Russell's "Dante and Arthur" piece have disappeared into the infernal regions ("enter the second circle of Hell, where illicit lovers") and, to the editor's chagrin, "as a result the two poets have been blown away!"

The label to the woodcut of Arthur in the same article in fact reads ***le roi Artus***, the common Breton or French variant of his name.

Member Simon Rouse, who provided the splendid cover for the last issue, and who is available for Celtic art commissions, has moved. Write to *The Light of Celtia*, 7 Verlon Close, Montgomery, Powys SY15 6SH.

ALFRED OF WESSEX

On Tuesday 26th October the formation of the **Wessex Society** was announced. This was on the 1100th anniversary of the death of Alfred the Great, and was featured on BBC West's local TV news programmes. Lord Bath talked of regional identities in the European scheme of things, and Don Bryan, an early Pendragon member from the Winchester days, had a few unattributed words to say to camera.

The dig in the Winchester car park [*The Board*, last issue] sadly did not reveal the bones of Alfred. This summer the eastern end of Hyde Abbey was excavated, including the apse and the choir. This was where Alfred's remains (plus his wife Ealhswith and their son Edward) were transferred in 1110 and where they stayed until the Dissolution. Only a filled hole marked the spot where the Victorians may have done some desultory digging of their own.

Featured on the TV programme was the Wessex flag, depicting a golden **wyvern** on a red field. This device will not, of course, be unfamiliar to students of early Pendragon history (or current readers of *The Board*). Add to that the curious parallels between the stories of Arthur and Alfred, the mysteries of their graves, plus the fact that the two are often confused in folk memory, and the whole thing becomes rather spooky, doesn't it. Doesn't it?

Meanwhile, *Alfred the Great, 849-899: London's Forgotten King* is the current exhibition at the Museum of London, and continues till 9th January 2000.

ALL ABOARD

Newport Museum has been displaying an early 4th century **Romano-Celtic boat** found in 1993 at Barland's Farm, Magor (east of Newport in South Wales). According to a feature in *The Western Daily Press* [August 1999, via Steve Sneyd] the oldest vessel to be found in Wales may have been used for trading around the Bristol Channel, visiting villas on both sides of the estuary. Capable of carrying over four tonnes of goods (such as salt, wine and coal) it is hoped to create a permanent space to display the find.

The area also yielded a mid-13th century wreck in 1994, used to transport iron ore in the Severn Estuary, details of which are in Nigel Nayling's *The Magor Pill Medieval Wreck* [Council for British Archaeology Research Report 115, 1998]. Due to rich alluvial deposits there is probably much more to be found on the Gwent Levels from the historical period.

SAINT ALBAN

Excavations in St Albans, on the site of Roman Verulamium, have apparently revealed little or no evidence for Christianity there in the Roman period. However, it has been suggested that the British locals revived a pagan head-cult when they killed a young man with a blow to the head, then decapitated and scalped him. This may well have been the origin of the story of the martyrdom of St Alban. [*The Times*, July 19, quoted in *Widowinde 119* Autumn 1999.]

SAINT GAWAIN

Articles in the *Dark Age Saints* issue looked at the legend of the medieval Italian saint **Galgano**, and speculated on links between the sword-in-the-stone motif and the Arthurian knights Gawain and Galahad.

Following a recent Italian visit, W M S Russell writes that the identification of the names Gawain and Galgano is supported by a

recent book on Siena where, indeed, "the author seems to take it for granted".

The cathedral treasury contains the **Reliquary of the Head of St Gawain** "that originally came from the great Cistercian Abbey of San Galgano (St Gawain)". According to Piero Torriti, a former Superintendent of Artistic and Historical Assets,

"this precious octagonal, cusped, shrine-shaped object chiseled in a style that is already Gothic, was made of gilded, embossed and filigree silver in the XIII century, almost certainly by French craftsmen."

Also illustrated in *Siena: new practical guide* [Bonechi Edizioni Il Turismo, Florence 1999] are the so-called **crown of St Gawain**, made by a Sienese artist in the early 14th century, and the **staff of St Gawain**, made around 1320 by a local goldsmith. As Galgano died in 1181, these were probably named after the abbey rather than owned by the saint. The crown includes another variation on St Gawain's name - what seems to be *HALGANO* appears in Lombardic characters around the octagonal perimeter, surmounted by eight ornate *fleurette* crosses.

TRIVIA From a glossary of cricketing jargon by John Houlihan comes a selection of synonyms for one's bat - the *Willow Wand*, also known as *Smiter*, *My Sword of Power* or ***Excalibur*** (and probably a range of other unprintable terms). Try the CricInfo website on www-uk.cricket.org/ (quoted in The Editor supplement of *The Guardian*, November 7 1998, from Steve Sneyd).

Exchange journals

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